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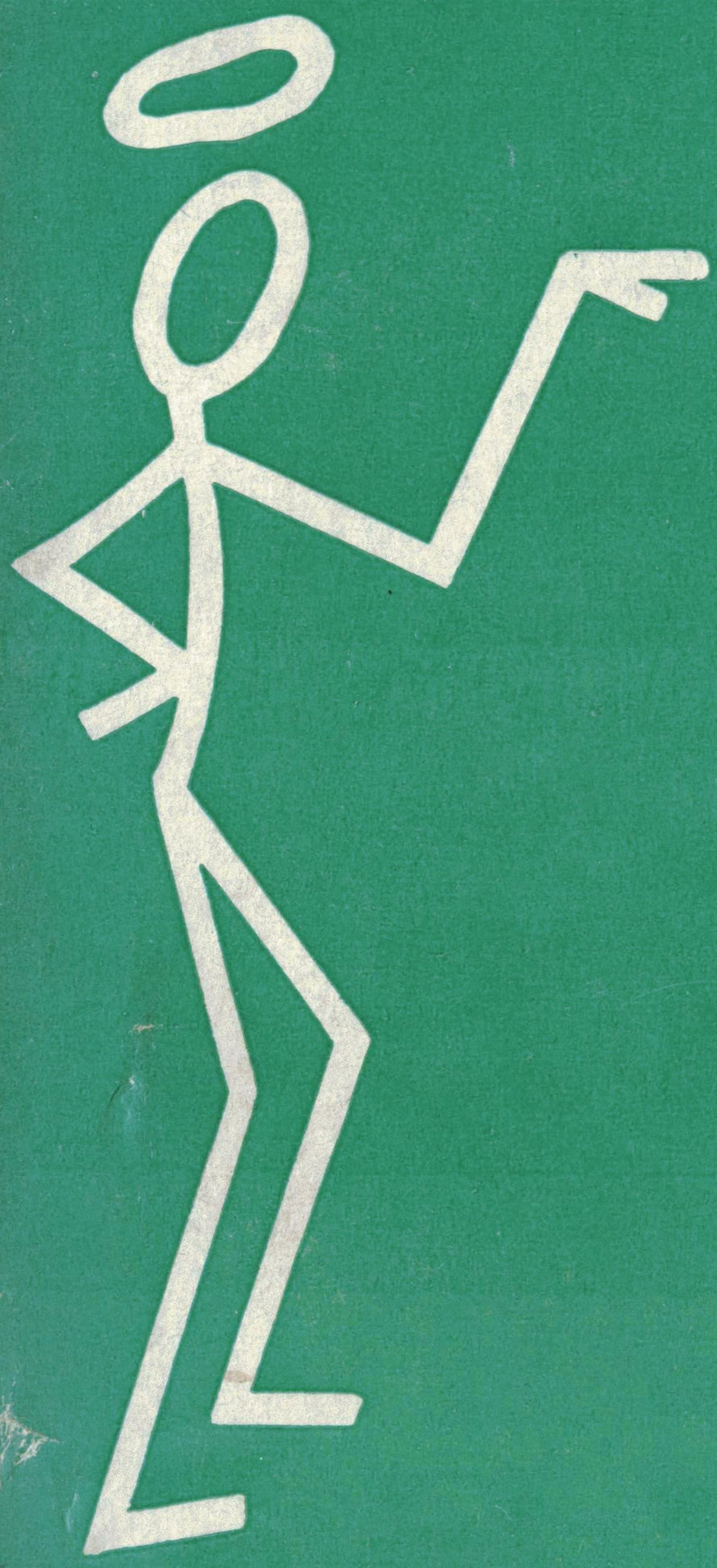
THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



Bulldog Drummond Steps In
by H. C. McNEILE

The Club of One-Eyed Men
by ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

Murder Is My Business
by RAOUL WHITFIELD

The Case of the Calico Cat
by MIGNON G. EBERHART

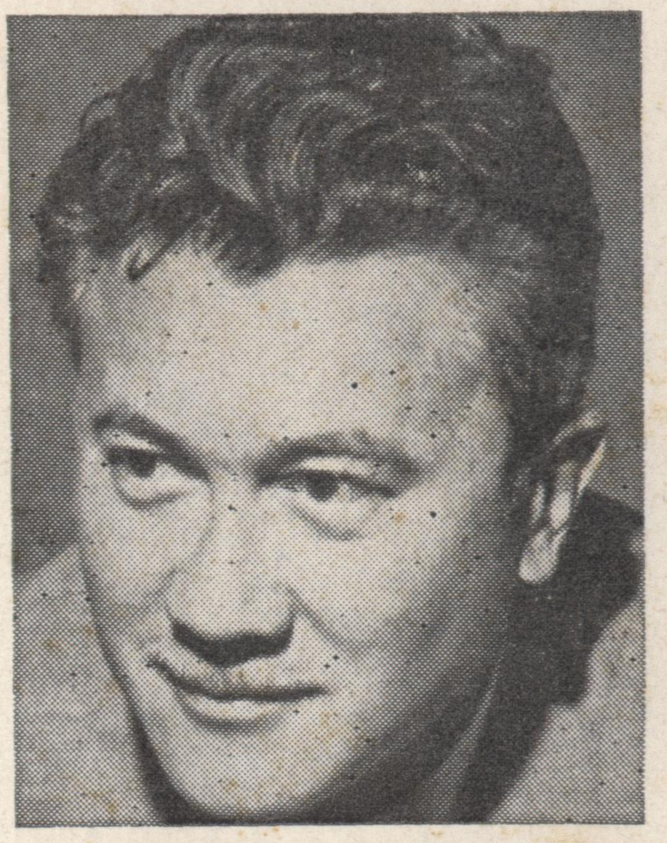
The Half-Way Tree Murder
by THEODORE STURGEON

THE PATIENT PLAYBOY

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



TO THE EVER-LENGTHENING ROSTER of writers from other fields who have insisted on climbing over the fence into our pasture must now be added the name of Theodore Sturgeon. No virgin to the writing game, this Sturgeon needs no introduction to those of you who also read our companion monthly, FANTASTIC UNIVERSE; but to the ignorant others I suppose I must explain that he is one of the top science-fiction specialists of our day, and in fact recently won the International Science Fiction and Fantasy Award for the best novel of the year. Now he turns up with a first for the SAINT, THE HALF-WAY TREE MURDER, which matches a C. I. D. man with a villainess of memorable malignity, and proves that Mr. Sturgeon can deal just as deftly with crime as with spaceships or banshees.

A couple of old-favorite characters are also with us. On the very male side, a certain Hugh Drummond has a secure niche among the immortal adventurers: in BULLDOG DRUMMOND STEPS IN, H. C. McNeile relates another chapter from his career, with all the devious ingenuity and London atmosphere you would expect. And for thoroughly feminine contrast, the most famous of the very small circle of skirted sleuths, Susan Dare tackles a dark enigma of death on swift wings and missing pearls beyond price—as chronicled by Mignon G. Eberhart in THE CASE OF THE CALICO CAT.

For some reason, although many murder stories have been written in the first person as by the murderer, hardly any tales of larceny have been told as if by the crook. (I haven't forgotten the Raffles stories; but even in them the teller is only a junior member of the partnership, not the leading man.) So THE CLUB OF ONE-EYED MEN, by Arthur Somers Roche, is an unusually interesting story.

In previous issues we have had several samples of the tough-fibered old Black Mask school, but here for the first time we have a specimen of the man who has perhaps the strongest claim to be the man who led the other iron-jawed men whose hobnailed boots the synthetic tea-room toughies of today are still trying to fill: Raoul Whitfield. In MURDER IS MY BUSINESS, complete with the luscious blonde who has since become standard equipment in this vehicle, he displays one of the original models which everyone else is still copying.

Last year, among other places, I went to Bermuda; so that's why THE PATIENT PLAYBOY is laid there. I have to pay for these trips somehow.

Cleve Cartmill

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The ROSICRUCIANS
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SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

the patient playboy

by . . . Leslie Charteris

A blonde in distress and a tropic holiday shadowed by the darkest of crimes would dismay Lancelot perhaps. But not Simon Templar!

"I SUPPOSE YOU wouldn't be interested in helping me find my husband," said the blonde.

"Frankly, I've heard a lot more exciting propositions," Simon Templar admitted. "If he doesn't have enough sense to appreciate you, why don't we just let him stay lost, and have a ball?"

"But I really want him back," she said. "You see, we've only been married a week, so I haven't had time to get tired of him."

Simon sipped his Dry Sack. "All right," he said. "Give me a clue. What was it about this bridegroom that impressed you so much, darling?"

"The name," she said, "is Lona Dayne."

"Well, that's unusual, anyway. He must have to listen to a lot of funny cracks about it."

"Lona Dayne is my name, idiot. Not 'darling'."

"Oh."

He regarded her with pleasantly augmented interest. It had been an entirely shallow and stereotyped reaction, he realized, to identify and pigeonhole her so summarily as "the blonde." Certainly she had the hair, of a

IN SUNNY BERMUDA A JOLLY ROGER AND A MISSING PERSON PLUNGE THE SAINT INTO A TURBULENT NEW CRIME DRAMA.

tint much paler than straw, which his worldly eye inevitably measured against her light brown eyes and traced back from there to the alchemy of some beauty parlor. But wasn't it a mere cliché of fiction that expensively rinsed blondes were by contrary definition cheap, while the only good ones owed their coloring solely to a lucky combination of chromosomes? The pretty face and approximately 35-23-35 vital statistics which convention also attributes to blondes appeared to be hers without any important debt to artifice. And she could get away with calling him Idiot, when she smiled in that provocatively intimate way while she said it.

"To me, you'll still be darling," he said. "At least, until your husband turns up. I suppose his name is Dayne too."

"Naturally."

"You can never be sure, these days."

"Havelock Dayne."

"It has rather a corny sound, but I guess his parents loved it."

"I love your dialogue," she said dispassionately. "But I wasn't kidding. You *are* the Saint, aren't you?"

Simon sighed. He had heard that question so often, by this time, that he seemed to have used up all the possible smooth, shocking, modest, impudent, evasive, chilling, misleading, or witty answers. Now he could only wish, belatedly, that he had had the forethought to insist on an alias. But while that might have let him enjoy one cocktail party as an anonymous guest, it wouldn't have fitted in with the project that had brought him to Bermuda.

It had been a good party, until then. The Saint had thought it a happy coincidence, for him, that a friend from many years back in Hollywood, Dick Van Hessen, was currently managing a miniature movie studio which had been improbably yet astutely set up in Bermuda to take advantage of tax privileges and lower costs to compete for the American television market.

At the Van Hessens' hillside house was therefore gathered, almost automatically, a useful cross-section of island personalities: the local bankers and bigwigs, the grim and the gay social sets, the press and the professions, the merchants and the dilettantes, and a leavening of working actors and visiting firemen on whom all the others could prove how easily they could mix with celebrities.

The Saint's cool blue eyes drifted down the long verandah that overlooked Hamilton harbor, but failed to make any pertinent identification among the convivial mob.

"I've met so many people tonight, I couldn't possibly remember half their names," he

confessed disarmingly, and with an unblushing lack of truth. "Does your husband have anything conspicuous about him—like a green mustache, for instance?"

"You haven't met him tonight. He isn't here."

"When did you lose him, then?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And only married five days at the time, according to what you said. It must have been a hell of a wedding. Did you have any inkling that Havelock was such a dizzy type when you agreed to let him love, honor, and pay the bills?"

"He isn't at all. He's lots of fun, of course, but he's terribly ambitious and earnest too. He's a lawyer."

"I'm looking for a lawyer myself," said the Saint. "Only I want one who's already embezzled at least five million dollars. Have you known Havelock long enough to notice him flashing a lot of green stuff around?"

"I'm sorry," she said stiffly. "I suppose I was asking for it. I should have known better. But I don't think your dialogue is so excruciatingly funny, after all—"

A quiver of her lips spoiled the trenchant ring that her last sentence was phrased for, and she turned away quickly, but not quickly enough for him to miss the blurring of her eyes. He moved even more swiftly to place himself beside her again where she leaned over the verandah railing with her back turned squarely to the incurious crowd.

"Pardon my two left feet," he said reasonably. "I'm afraid the atmosphere of the place got me. I thought you were playing it strictly chin-up and British, so I was going along with the gag. Let's start over, if you're serious."

She looked at him, blinking hard. "I am!"

"All right. I know how you're feeling. I wish I could help. But just plain wandering husbands are a bit out of my line. I expect if you asked a few discreet friends and bartenders—or even the police—"

"But I can't. I've had to cover up—tell everyone he's laid up with a terrible cold. You're the first person I've told, and I shouldn't even have done that."

"Then stop being silly. If he's lost, he's lost, and false pride won't help you find him. Think yourself lucky he isn't really a case up my alley, for which he'd he'd have to be at least kidnapped or even murdered."

"That," she said steadily, "is exactly what I'm afraid of. Or I wouldn't have talked to you."

Without any change of expression, the Saint's bronzed face seemed to become opaque, like a mask from behind which his

eyes probed with a sort of rueful cynicism.

"Now I'll begin to think you're suffering from too much lurid literature."

"You'd be wrong," she said flatly. "Unless I suffered from writing it. Until a week ago, my name was Lona Shaw. Well, that doesn't mean anything to you. But it would if you'd lived in England lately. I've worked for the London *Daily Record* since I was nineteen; and for the last four years I've been their star sob-sister. Do you have any idea how hardboiled and unhysterical a girl has to be to hold that job on a newspaper like the *Record?*"

Simon nodded. Suddenly, as if a cloud had passed, the mask of his face was translucent again. It was the only outward sign that he had felt and recognized the icy caress of Destiny's fingers along his spine.

"Okay," he said soberly. "I'm sold."

His gaze flickered over the crowded balcony again, warily conscious of the beginning of one of those unanimous reshufflings that surge intermittently through the human molecules of every cocktail party, and even more sharply perceptive of the covetous glances of certain males within striking distance who had transparently settled on Lona Dayne as the most intriguing target for tonight and were getting set to cut in at the first opening.

Simon huddled strategically closer to her along the rail. "I gather you came alone," he said.

"Yes."

"Me too. No plans for dinner?"

"No. Fay Van Hessen said I could—"

"She won't mind. You just made a date with me, darling."

He put down his glass, took her by the arm, and steered her firmly and skillfully into an eddy that was flowing towards the exit. The frustrated wolf pack was still standing on its heels as they jostled into the line that was babbling thanks and goodbyes.

"Oh, don't go yet," Fay protested. "We're going to have some food presently."

"But Lona's husband might get better tomorrow, and I'd never get her all to myself again," Simon said with a leer.

"Well, behave yourselves."

"There should be a taxi waiting below," Dick Van Hessen said helpfully. "Send him back from wherever you're going, for the next customers."

Then they were down the stairs, and the steep narrow driveway, and a taxi was waiting as predicted at the foot of the steep slope where the house perched. Simon put her in and said: "The Caravelle."

"I ought to go home, really,"

she said, "and see if there's any message."

"Which I suppose you've been doing for the last two days. If you're out, he could leave a message, couldn't he?"

"Yes—the caretaker promised he'd be around and listen for the phone."

"Then you can call in and ask for news later. Meanwhile, you've got at least as much right to be out as he has."

"But—"

A Bermuda taxi is not a vehicle in which to discuss anything confidential. Being derived from any miniature English car by the sole process of attaching a taximeter to the dashboard, the driver and passengers are huddled together as cozily as olives in a jar. The Saint nudged Lona Dayne gently, and pointed expressively at the back of the driver's head, which he was trying not to bump with his knees.

"What's this about a caretaker?" he said innocuously. "Aren't you staying at a hotel?"

"We started in a hotel, of course, but we moved into this house just the day before Hav disappeared. You see, we were talking to the caretaker, and he happened to mention that his boss had just written and told him to try to rent it. The owner lives up in Canada and only comes down here in the winter; then Bob—that's the caretaker—goes to Canada and takes care of his house there. Usually the house here just stands empty, but it seems as if the owner suddenly decided he might as well make a few dollars out of it.

"It's absurdly reasonable, really, and Bob didn't see why he couldn't let us have it just for a month, while he's waiting for someone who wants to take a longer lease. After we saw it, we simply couldn't turn it down. It's on a little island all of its own, the sort of thing you dream of. Only if we'd stayed in the hotel, perhaps we'd have been safer . . . But it's the most romantic spot—"

Simon let her go on chattering trivialities, preferring to have her overdo it rather than go on with the important subject until they were safe from any uninvited audience, or at least until he knew how seriously they should be thinking of safety. He kept her headed off from any reference to her husband until they were settled at a table in a corner of the terrace overhanging the water, and had ordered a chicken in white wine and a bottle of Bollinger to go with it.

"What am I supposed to be celebrating?" she objected half-heartedly.

"I'm prescribing it to give you a lift, which I think you could use."

He lighted their cigarettes, and settled his elbows squarely on the table, looking at her with sympathetic but disconcertingly penetrating detachment.

"Now," he said with sudden bluntness. "What is this all about?"

"Have you heard of Roger Ivalot?"

He winced slightly. "No," he said. "And if I had, I wouldn't believe it."

"Why?"

"The name sounds even more improbable than your husband's."

"If you'd been in England lately—"

"I'm sorry. It's already established that I've been spending my time in the wrong places. Just enlighten my ignorance."

There was, however, some excuse for regarding anyone who had not heard of Roger Ivalot as benighted, as he soon learned.

In a country which is not by tradition or temperament adapted to the breeding of spectacular playboys, Mr. Ivalot had succeeded in racking up a number of probable records. One of these could certainly be claimed for the rocket-like trajectory of his ascent from obscurity. Nobody, in fact, seemed to have known of his existence before the day less than two years ago when he had sent engraved invitations to the entire casts of the three most popular musicals then playing in London, bidding them to a champagne supper and dance in the Dorchester's biggest private ballroom, for which he also hired the most popular orchestra available.

While some of the stars were snooty or suspicious enough to ignore the offer, almost six hundred guests (including several uninvited escorts) showed up to sample the hospitality; and when a somewhat notorious soubrette, professing indignation because no one had been asked to take a champagne bath, peeled off her clothes and had herself showered from bottles held by a flock of eager volunteers, nothing less than the simultaneous outbreak of World War III could have prevented Mr. Ivalot becoming a celebrity overnight.

"I just wanted to meet a lot of people who liked to have fun," he said to the newspapers, which (of course with the exception of the *Times*) could hardly fail to note such goings on, "and throwing a big party seemed the quickest way to do it."

Perhaps because he happened at a time when England, reacting from the longest hangover of post-war austerity that any European country had had to endure, and flexing the muscles of a new self-confidence, was ripe for any hero who struck a dizzy enough contrast with the drab years behind, Mr. Ivalot was

just what the circulation managers ordered. Although he threw no more parties of such indiscriminate grandiosity as the one which launched him into London's café society, from then on he never lacked a convivial entourage, about three-quarters of it feminine, for his almost nightly forays into the gayest cabarets and bottle clubs; and in an otherwise dull season the more uninhibited journals were delighted to adopt him as a gratifyingly reliable source of copy.

The news value of his extravagances was enhanced by an occasional quixotic touch. The celebration of Guy Fawkes Day in London that year was materially enlivened by Roger Ivalot, who drove through the East End in a large truck loaded to the toppling point with fireworks, which he distributed to incredulous urchins on a succession of street corners. Nothing like the resultant bedlam of fire and explosion had been seen in that area since the last visit of the Luftwaffe.

And at Christmas he rode through the slums again, this time on a stage coach which he had resurrected from somewhere, accompanied by three music-hall beauties, all of them in Dickensian costumes, tossing bags of candy from a seemingly inexhaustible supply to all the children who turned out to stare.

"All it took was money," he told the reporters. "And I've a lot of that."

He liked making corny jokes of that kind about his improbable cognomen. "I've a lot of living to do yet," was another. But the nickname that stuck, with his enthusiastic endorsement, was "Jolly Roger." His acceptance was made official by the huge skull-and-crossbones flag which draped his box at the Arts Ball on New Year's Eve, where he and his whole party appeared in some version of a pirate costume, even though some of the female members had startlingly little material to work with between their top boots and cocked hats. He even tried to adopt the same pattern for his racing colors, to put on a horse he bought which was entered in the Grand National; but here the stewards of the Jockey Club drew the line.

Within six months of his debut, he had become practically an institution; and when he announced that he was leaving to have a fling in Paris and continue from there on a trip around the world, a noticeable gloom overspread the bistros.

"But I'll be back again in the autumn," he told his friends consolingly.

He had always paid cash for everything, even for his biggest parties, so that there had never been an occasion for anyone to

inquire into his credit or bank references; but he claimed to be the British Empire's first uranium millionaire. According to him, he had foreseen the coming boom before the dust had settled on Hiroshima, and had invested in a skillfully selected list of mining enterprises in Africa and Australia. While he was shrewdly secretive about the precise location of his holdings, the soundness of his judgment appeared to be adequately evidenced by the amount of money he had to spend.

It was in answer to the obvious question of how even a uranium millionaire's income could survive modern taxation with so little visible injury, that he had explained that he made his legal home in Bermuda, where there was no income tax.

True to his promise, he had returned in November, and the pattern of his first season had been more or less repeated, with the difference that this time he was already a well-known character with a large if not exactly elite circle of friends. Before the advent of another spring, only the most strong-minded comedians could get through a monologue of any length without hanging some gag on Jolly Roger Ivalot.

This year, however, Mr. Ivalot's departure was not signalized by a mammoth 36-hour farewell party, as it had been the previous time. In fact, it was first confirmed, after several days of unwonted quiescence, by a solicitor who had been trying to serve him with a summons to appear and defend himself in court. Mr. Ivalot, it transpired, had got wind of this project and had strategically taken himself out of jurisdiction, without saying good-bye to anyone.

"And how many people were discovered holding the bag?" Simon asked, with anticipative relish.

"Only one that we know of," Lona Dayne said. "He'd just had one of the usual slip-ups with his Jolly Rogering. One of his girls was going to have a baby —twins, as a matter of fact."

"Ah," said the Saint. "A bag holding people."

She let that wilt in an interregnum of withering silence.

"He didn't owe anybody—I told you he always paid cash," she said after the pause. "He hadn't sold any shares or promoted anything. His furnished flat was paid up to the end of the month. He'd just packed up and gone."

The expectant mother, a nominal actress whose gifts sounded more thoracic than thespian, alleged that Mr. Ivalot had been promising to marry her for more than a year. But although she had found herself pregnant almost immediately after his re-

turn, he had persistently evaded or postponed setting a wedding date; and when he finally proposed a cash settlement of some five thousand pounds as an alternative, it began to dawn upon the poor girl that his love might not be as passionate and deathless as he had proclaimed.

By then she was on the verge of her fifth month, and an X-ray had shown that she was preparing to endow the world with not one but two little Ivalots. This was the last straw that drove her to issue an ultimatum to the effect that unless Mr. Ivalot came through with a wedding ring within a week she would continue their romance through a lawyer. It was not, she explained later to the former Lona Shaw, who interviewed her, that she thought that money could heal a broken heart, but that she felt it her maternal duty to see that her imminent offspring were not left to face a lifetime of illegitimacy with a lousy £2500 capital apiece, instead of their rightful inheritance of millions.

This fair and sporting warning was her gravest mistake, for Mr. Ivalot had promptly elected to vanish rather than contest the suit.

A lawyer with a fat contingency fee in prospect was not to be so easily discouraged. He promptly forwarded the papers to an attorney in Bermuda, with the request that they be served on Mr. Ivalot there. And that was when the blow fell that punctured a fabulous legend and at the same time paradoxically inflated an otherwise routine scandal into the sensation of the year. For according to the advice that came back to London, nobody in Bermuda—no attorney, bank, real estate agency, newspaper, or any individual who had been questioned—had ever seen or heard of Mr. Roger Ivalot, nor was he listed in any official registry or directory.

"In fact, he never had been here," said the Saint.

"That's what I couldn't quite swallow," Lona Dayne said. "I thought it out this way. The Bermuda thing came out when somebody asked him about taxes. It seemed to me that that question might really have taken him by surprise. He had to have an answer quickly, and a good one, without having too much time to think about it or what it might lead to.

"But what he suddenly realized was that it might occur to the authorities to start investigating anyone who was throwing money around as lavishly as he was, in the hope of catching a tax dodger, and from what's come out since he obviously couldn't risk being investigated. He had to head that inquiry off right away. But how likely would he be to come up with Bermuda unless he knew a lot

about it? I kept on thinking about that."

Simon nodded appreciatively. "That's pretty sharp thinking. Most people wouldn't have known about that tax angle. But if he'd run into someone who really lived here—"

"There wasn't too much risk of that. You wouldn't find many people with a home in Bermuda visiting England in the winter. But he might very easily have run into someone who'd visited here, so he had to be ready to talk about the place like a native. Which still made it look as if he must have spent a lot of time here, at least."

The mystery of Mr. Ivalot had all the earmarks of a monumental swindle, but it became even more baffling as weeks went by without anyone turning up who claimed to have been swindled. That is, with the exception of the pregnant starlet, whose loss was debatable; and her plight and the cruelly clouded future of the still unborn Ivalot progeny became a matter of popular concern and the grist of many columns of tear-squeezing prose for Lona Shaw.

"And you came here to go on milking it?" Simon asked.

"Well, not quite. You see, I met Havvie"—the Saint managed to suppress a shudder—"when he was in England last year on his holiday, and he'd been after me with letters and telephone calls to marry him ever since, and we really did get on awfully well together, so eventually I said yes. Then I had to get leave from the *Record*, and I've always been a thrifty type, so I sold them the idea that I ought to stay on salary if I came here and went on trying to dig up something about Ivalot. Then I only had to tell Havvie that I'd set my heart on a honeymoon in Bermuda, and everything was fine."

"You've given me a new concept of romance," murmured the Saint.

Her recital of the saga of Jolly Roger Ivalot, somewhat less succinct than it has been recapitulated here, had taken them all the way through dinner and dessert, and now they were sitting over Benedictine and coffee. Once again he lighted cigarettes for them.

"What was your plan of campaign when you got here?"

"We gave out a story to the local papers that the *Record* had unearthed a terrific clue which was expected to flush Ivalot from his cover within two or three days. I suppose that was before you got here, or you'd have read it."

"I guess it was. But if I'd read it, I'd have thought it was rather an old wheeze."

"It might still have scared Ivalot, if he *was* here," she said. "I hoped it might tempt

him to try to make a deal, or—"

"Or something more violent?"

"That's what Havvie was afraid of."

"He should have been. The rivers and ponds are full of amateurs who've had that kind of brilliant idea—anchored in concrete blocks."

"That's why he's in trouble now," she said bitterly. "He's taking my place."

"How?"

"He wouldn't let me take the risk. He insisted that if there were going to be any games like that, he was going to play the reporter and draw the fire. He said that nobody here would know Havelock Dayne as an attorney from Philadelphia, and nobody would associate Mrs. Dayne with Lona Shaw, and if there was going to be any rough stuff he could take care of himself better than I could, and if there was any real detecting to do I might find out a lot more if nobody knew I was more than an ordinary dizzy bride. He was terribly intense about it, and in some ways he made a bit of sense too, and I didn't want to start off our married life with a quarrel, so I let him have his way. And that's why this has happened to him."

"I still don't know just what has happened," said the Saint.

She took a gulp from her glass. "The day before yesterday, I went into Hamilton after lunch, to do some shopping. Havvie decided he'd rather stay home and fish. When I got back, about five, he'd left a note. Here it is."

She produced it from her purse. It was crumpled and smeared from many readings.

Fantastic break on Jolly Roger. This is It! Must get after it at once or he'll get away. Don't worry even if I don't get home tonight. Love and XX.

H.

"You're sure he wrote this?" Simon asked automatically.

"Unless it's an absolutely perfect forgery. And it would've had to be done by someone who knew that he always signed his letters to me with just an H."

Simon handed the note back, and for perhaps the first time that evening his face was completely grave, without even a give-away trace of mockery in his eyes.

"And since then you haven't heard another word?"

"Nothing." The task and distraction of drawing the complete background for him had sustained her so far, but now he could see her straining again to keep emotion from getting the upper hand. "That is, unless . . . I've *got* to call home now."

"Go ahead."

He finished his liqueur, his

coffee, and his cigarette, with epicurean attention to each, holding his mind in complete detachment until she came back; and presently she was at the table again, but not sitting down, her face pale in the subdued lamplight and her hands twisting one over the other.

"We've got to go to the house at once," she said, in a low shaky voice. "Or I must. There's been a message. Not Havvie. Someone who said he'll call again, until he gets me. And he said I mustn't talk to anyone, if I want my husband back."

II

The island lay less than a hundred yards off shore, out in the Sound. Simon judged that they were somewhere in the middle of the deep horseshoe curve that is the approximate profile of the southwestern end of Bermuda, where the segmented chain of land curls all the way back over itself like a scorpion's tail. From the tiny landing-stage just below the road, where a taxi had dropped them off, he could clearly see the outlines of the white rain-catcher roof of the house that crowned a hillock which might have been an acre overall. Overhead electric wires bridged the distance to the island by means of two intermediate poles standing in the water, and below the place where the wires took off from the little landing stage was an ordinary bell-push which Lona Dayne pressed with her finger.

Almost at once a floodlight went on over a dock on the island opposite them, and a man came down and got into one of the skiffs that was tied up there and began to row over to them.

"Usually we'd leave the dinghy we came ashore in tied up here," she said. "But since I've been alone, Bob insists on ferrying me back and forth. I'm sure he doesn't believe I can row a boat."

"How much does he know about all this?" Simon asked.

"About as much as I've told you. Except that he still thinks my husband is really the reporter, like everyone else here. But obviously I couldn't tell him the story I've been telling everyone else, about Havvie being in bed with a cold."

"Why—is he still caretaking, even though you've rented the house?"

"There are servants' quarters where he sleeps, and he still does the gardening. He sort of goes with the place."

"And you mean to say he hasn't spread this juicy bit of gossip all over Bermuda?"

"Wait till you meet him!"

That was only a matter of moments. The man shipped his oars as the skiff glided in, and stood up to catch and hold on

to a ring bolt set in the concrete of the landing stage.

"Has there been another call?" Lona Dayne demanded frantically, while he was still steadying the boat alongside.

"No, ma'am."

"Did you tell me *everything* they said, on the phone?"

The caretaker looked up at the Saint, through his plain gold-rimmed spectacles which combined with a bony severity of jaw and the total hairlessness of his shiny black cranium to give him the air of some kind of African archdeacon.

"That was the message, ma'am," he answered. "Not to talk to *anyone*."

"Simon, this is Bob Inchpenny," Lona said. "Bob, this is Mr. Templar. I'd already told Mr. Templar everything, before you gave me that message."

"Oh, yes, ma'am."

The caretaker regarded Simon with even more critical reserve; and the Saint realized how ridiculous the suggestion that this man might be a wellspring of idle gossip must have sounded to anyone who knew him. Simon had seldom encountered a Negro who bore himself with such an austere and almost overpowering dignity.

They got into the dinghy, and the caretaker picked up the oars and began to row stolidly back to the island.

"What did he sound like, this person who telephoned?" Lona asked.

"Sort of muffled, like he was disguising his voice."

"Couldn't you guess anything about him?" Simon persisted. "For instance, what nationality would you say he was?"

The colored man pondered this for several strokes, with portentous concentration.

"I'd say he might be an American, sir."

The Saint turned to Lona. "You must have heard almost everything about Jolly Roger. Did you ever hear what he sounded like?"

"Not exactly. It must have been pretty ordinary English. If he'd sounded like an American, I'm sure it would've been mentioned."

Simon was still thinking that over when they reached the island dock. He stepped out and gave her a hand, and let her lead him up the alternations of steps and meandering path that wound up the slope to the house.

The living room that she took him into was very large, but so cunningly broken up that it seemed to consist entirely of inviting corners. The formal center was an enormous fireplace flanked by a pair of huge but cozy couches; on one side of them was a spacious alcove that contained a sideboard and a modest dining table, and on the other side a bay that was almost

completely walled with bookshelves encircling a built-in desk, while yet a third wing suggested relaxed entertainment with a door-sized bar niche and the cabinets and speaker fronts of a hi-fi sound system and the slotted shelves of an impressive library of records.

And between all those mural features there was still room for several stretches of full-length drapes, now drawn out in neatly extended folds but promising windows for unlimited sunlight and air in the daytime. It was a room which, in far more than adequate justification of its name, asked to be lived in, offering every adjunct to a kind of timeless tranquility that could make calendars superfluous.

"Now do you get an idea why we couldn't resist it?" Lona Dayne said.

He nodded, conscious of the associations that must have heightened the strain that she was fighting.

"You'll both be enjoying it again before long," he said quietly, "if I'm still any good at these games."

She turned and walked briskly over to the bar. "How about a whiskey and soda?"

"Thanks. But make mine with water."

"Going back to your last question," she said, making herself busy with her back turned, and speaking in a resolutely clear and businesslike voice, "I'm certain now that Ivalot always passed as British. You see, one of the things that's made him so hopelessly hard to trace is that there's so little real information about him. In the hotels where he stayed, for instance, the only record was the name, Roger Ivalot—address, Bermuda.

"Only a British subject could have registered like that. If he'd been taken for a foreigner, he would have had to fill out a form with a lot more questions than that, and give a passport number as well. And then we'd either have had more facts to go on, or the police would've been leading the hunt for him, for making false declarations."

"Whereas right now there's no official interest?"

"I've told you, there's nothing against him except a paternity suit, and that sort of thing doesn't concern Scotland Yard."

With a discreet knock, the caretaker entered.

"Will it be all right if I wait in my quarters, ma'm," he asked respectfully, "until you want me to row Mr. Templar ashore?"

Lona Dayne turned with the Saint's drink in her hand, nonplussed for an instant; and then Simon took it and said calmly: "That won't be necessary. I'd much rather take you ashore, Lona, to a hotel, where I think

you'd be safer than out here."

"But this is almost like a castle with a moat around it!"

"And anybody who can row, or even swim, can cross a moat. Unless it's guarded. So if you're determined to stay here, which you probably are, to be around for any more messages that come in, I'm going to stay and join the garrison."

She hesitated barely an instant. "That would be quite wonderful," she said frankly, and he admired her for not making any half-hearted protests. "Bob, would you make sure that everything's ship-shape in the spare room before you go to bed? And thank you for waiting up."

"Yes, ma'am."

The caretaker withdrew, looking more than ever like an Ethiopian pontiff with a troublesome congregation.

"I'm afraid this shocks him even more than your husband's disappearing act," Simon remarked.

"I can't help that. I'll be perfectly honest now and admit that I've been scared for myself too. But I'd have tried not to tell you if you hadn't mentioned it first." She picked up her drink and brought it over to join him. "It's true, isn't it, that a man in Ivalot's position might do anything?"

The Saint selected a corner of one of the big settees and let himself down into it.

"That depends on how desperate he is—which means, what he has to feel desperate about. You say nobody's filed any criminal charge against him. So that would mean that he chose to pull up stakes and vanish completely, leaving all the fleshpots that he seems to have thought were fun, just to duck a common paternity suit. But half of those suits are plain ordinary blackmail, anyway—which Jolly Roger seems to have suspected, since he offered a fairly handsome settlement."

Simon frowned thoughtfully.

"From the rest of your account, he doesn't sound like a guy who'd be unduly concerned about his reputation, at any rate with the blue-nosed set. So if the little mother's price was too high, why didn't he just get himself a tough lawyer and fight it?"

"You tell me," she said. "I've been going around it all by myself until my head's swimming."

"Well, I'd say it suggests that he had something pretty big to hide. I don't see him being so scared of the lawsuit; but the lawyers would certainly start investigating his means before they got into court, in order to prove how much he could afford to pay, and I'm inclined to think that's what scared him. Did anyone ever check on these uran-

ium mines he was supposed to have an interest in?"

"Yes, we did. We contacted every Australian and South African mining company that has anything to do with uranium. None of them had ever heard of him, and his name wasn't on any of their lists of shareholders. But of course, his shares wouldn't necessarily have to be in his own name."

"No. But it's usually only millionaires and big operators who are concerned about keeping their holdings hidden. According to Ivalot's story, as you told it, he wasn't in either category when he bet his shirt on the atomic future. So why would he have bought stocks then under a phony name?"

"Perhaps even in those days he didn't want to be investigated."

"Perhaps. But another thing. He must have done something to earn a living and save up a stake before he invested in uranium. While you were doing your research on him, didn't you ever turn up anything on that background?"

"I tried to, naturally. But I didn't find out anything. If anyone asked him, he must have managed to dodge the question."

"So what this all boils down to," said the Saint, "is that we don't have one single solid fact about him before he exploded on London like a bomb, and everything you've told me except what he actually did in London before witnesses is probably pure fiction."

"Except that he did have a lot of money."

"He spent a good deal of money. But not millions. We don't know how much he had left when he checked out."

"And he *is* in Bermuda."

"Apparently. Which only leads to another question: Why? When things got too hot in London, he took a powder. Nothing happened to the gal who was giving him trouble. But here, it's your husband who disappears. Why?"

She put her clenched fists to her temples. "What are you driving at?" she pleaded. "You are only making it seem more hopeless!"

"I have to do this, Lona," he said steadily. "It's the dull part of playing detective. First I have to prune off everything that we don't actually know at all. It isn't till we've trimmed off all the camouflage and confusion that we'll get a good look at what's really left. And raising more questions sometimes leads to more answers.

"For instance, that last one. The two most likely reasons why our boy hasn't left Bermuda are either *a*) that he feels better able to cope with things here, or *b*) that it's harder for him

to leave. I wouldn't call those sensational clues, but they might come in handy before we're through."

She recovered herself again, with a toss of her blonde head something like a dog shaking off water.

"I'm sorry," she said, smiling very hard. "I must remember, I told you I was tough. What next?"

"Something very important. Do you have a picture of this character?"

"No. That's what makes it even more impossible."

"A playboy like that never got his picture taken?"

"Photographers don't go popping flash bulbs all over the place in England like they do in America, or at least in American films. They'd have to ask his permission, and if he didn't want any pictures he could get out of it."

Simon scowled thoughtfully. "And yet he didn't care how many people saw him making an exhibition of himself—he did everything to attract attention. Damn it, it doesn't make sense . . . Wait a minute, though. Maybe it does. It means he wasn't afraid of anyone in England recognizing him; but a news photo might go anywhere in the world."

"Another clue?"

"Could be. But you must have a description of him."

She screwed up her eyes a little, concentrating. "Ordinary height—about five-feet-ten. Medium build, but quite muscular. The girl with the twins said he was in very fine shape for his age—and please don't say whatever that vulgar expression is getting ready for, Simon. I think I've already heard every possible joke on that subject. He told her he was fifty-three. But a lot of people thought he looked older, because he was half bald, and the fringe of hair that he had left was very gray, and so was his beard—"

"Oh, no," groaned the Saint. "Not a beaver, too?"

"Not a royal growth. The kind that just carries the sideburns on down around the jawbone until they meet and make a tuft on the chin."

"Which can be grown in two weeks and change the outline of a face completely. And I was just going to ask you what type of face he had."

He shrugged resignedly.

"And I was going to tell you it was round. But I see what you mean. Everyone says he was always smiling—the Jolly Roger business, of course—and that would help his face to look round, too."

"Mouth?"

"Biggish—the smile would help that, I know, don't tell me. And of course he had a mustache."

"Of course. He would. Teeth?"

"Good."

"Nose?"

She moved her hands helplessly. "Did you ever try to make the average person describe a nose? It wasn't a great beak and it wasn't an Irish pug and it wasn't broken. It was just a nose."

"Eyes?"

"Brown. Two."

Simon Templar unrolled and came up on his feet in an ultimate surge of exasperation.

"God burn and blast it," he erupted, "do you realize that that adds up to practically nothing at all? A middling-sized guy with strictly conventional features — the greatest physical assets any crook could start with. Everything else could be grown or glued on and shaped and/or dyed or worn as an expression, on this foundation you still haven't described. We don't even have a clear picture of his age, except that I'll bet that it's less than fifty-three.

"If you want to do a good job of faking, it's a lot easier to pretend to be older than younger—as I shouldn't have to tell a woman. But as for all the spinach on this act I could very easily—"

He groped around for an illustration, and his gaze lit on a framed photograph on the mantelpiece. He targeted it with a dynamically outthrust forefinger.

"Why," he said, "I could pin the same shrubbery on that guy, and he'd fit your description."

"That guy," she said, out of an icy stillness, "happens to be my husband."

The Saint stood transfixed, his eyes almost glazed with the fascination of the frabjous idea that his runaway train of thought had gone hurtling into. But she never noticed that teetering instant of thunderstruck rigidity, for within the small full second the telephone began to ring.

She started towards it with a tensely even step, but reached it in a rush.

Simon was beside her as she picked it up. With an arm lightly around her, he pressed his ear to the other side of the receiver.

"Hullo," she said.

He was inappropriately aware of her hair brushing his cheek and her faint perfume in his nostrils, while he listened to the voice which he could hear thinly but quite clearly through the plastic. It had a forced and unmistakably artificial timbre, with a strong nasal twang.

"Mrs. Dayne," it said, "I'll let you talk to your husband as soon as Mr. Templar has left Bermuda. But if he isn't on a plane tomorrow, you can consider yourself a widow."

There was a soft click, and that was all.

III

The Saint awoke early in the morning, for there had been no further reason to stay up late the night before.

He had made the only possible offer directly their eyes met after she hung up the dead telephone: "I'll leave tomorrow, of course."

Her face was a tortured battleground of uncertainty. "Thank you for making it easy for me," she said. "Even if you were the best hope I had . . . But you do understand, don't you?"

"I do indeed. I know why the parents of kidnapped kids pay ransom. You couldn't force me to go; but I can't take advantage of that. However,"—his smile was a thing of coldly dazzling deadliness—"I'll still be working until the last plane leaves."

He had found out that she had some sleeping pills, and had persuaded her to take one.

"We're talked out for tonight," he said. "At least you can be fairly sure that your husband's alive, and that you'll hear from him tomorrow. This is your chance to get some rest. Let me do the worrying."

He had not worried at all, for that was a sterile indulgence of which he was constitutionally incapable. But he had been happy to find that the guest room which had been prepared for him was directly opposite the master bedroom: she had gratefully accepted the suggestion that both doors should be left ajar, and thereafter he had slept with the tranquil self-confidence of a cat. But nothing had disturbed the night; and when he opened his eyes and saw daylight, many things had sorted themselves out in his mind, and he knew that for that period there had been no real danger.

He found his way out of the house and down to the water in the dressing-gown she had lent him. It was so obviously part of a bridegroom's going-away outfit that the loan seemed like an embarrassing kind of compliment, but he had to take it. It was easy to slip into the almost lukewarm water in a tiny cove on the seaward side of the island without benefit of swimming trunks. He churned back and forth for a while, drifted along the shore to watch the questings of a school of yellow-striped fish, and finally hoisted himself out on to a rock where the sun quickly dried him.

In front of him was only the blue Sound, embraced by the main chain of islands and dotted with smaller satellite islands. Local folklore claims that the Bermudas are made up of 365

islands, one for every day in the year, but the actual number is much less than half that, and a large number of those have a somewhat slender claim to be counted, being mere outcroppings of coral which have barely managed to raise their heads above high water. Small sailboats, launches, and a couple of the busy ferries that bustle endlessly to and fro to link a dozen landings spaced around the harbor and the Sound, made the view look absurdly like an animated travel-folder picture.

No one is ever quite prepared for the fact that Bermuda, more than almost any other highly advertised place, looks so instantly and exactly like its postcards. But after his first appreciative survey, the Saint turned his back on the panorama and concentrated on the humped contours of the island that he was on, trying speculatively to fit them with another geological item which he recalled from a guide-book he had been reading with a great deal of absorption.

After a few minutes he put on the borrowed robe again and walked back up over the close-cropped grass. Near a corner of the formal garden that surrounded the house he came upon the colored caretaker planting an oleander hedge, making a neat row of eighteen-inch cuttings bent over in interlocking arcs with both ends set in the ground, but characteristically looking more like a gravedigger than a gardener.

"Good morning, sir," he said, with studiously impersonal politeness.

"Good morning."

Simon paused to light a cigarette. His gaze swept around the panorama again, and from that vantage point he could see more than two-thirds of the private island.

"There's something I've been meaning to ask," he said. "Exactly how did Mr. Dayne leave here when he disappeared? Did he get a phone call first? Or did someone come and see him? Did he say anything when he left?"

"I'm afraid I have no idea, sir. I'd gone into Somerset to do some shopping, and when I came back Mr. Dayne was gone."

"Well, when you came back, was another of the boats from here over at the landing, besides the one you'd taken?"

"No, sir. Just the one I'd used."

"Then someone must have come and picked him up in a boat."

"That must be right, sir."

The Saint rubbed his chin for a moment. "By the way," he said, "I noticed a small Chris-Craft tied up at the dock last night. Is that working?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think we might use it to

run into Hamilton this morning."

"Yes, sir, of course—to get your ticket."

Simon's eyes flickered infinitesimally. "How did you know I was going anywhere?"

"Mrs. Dayne just told me what happened last night, sir. She's in the kitchen, fixing breakfast. I'm sorry, sir," the caretaker said stiffly.

"So am I," said the Saint briefly, and went on into the house.

He put his head in the kitchen door and asked: "How soon are you serving?"

"In about five minutes, or whenever you're ready," she answered, and added: "You'll find an electric razor in our bathroom."

"Thanks."

In well under ten minutes he had shaved, rinsed himself under a shower, dressed, and was sitting down to a platter of perfectly cooked eggs and bacon.

"I see you were brought up right," he said. "Frying an egg sounds like the easiest job in the world, but I'm always amazed how seldom it's done properly, without making bubbles in the white and a leathery brown crust underneath. Even in France, the land of the great chefs, nobody has the faintest notion of how to fry an egg."

"You don't have to cover up," she said steadily. "I know how the idea of running away must be hurting you. So I've decided that if you think it's the wrong thing to do, you mustn't do it—even if I beg you to."

"I have to make a plane reservation anyhow," he said. "Has it dawned on you that you're being watched? I'd never met you till yesterday evening; and yet I was the main thing our pal had on his mind when he phoned you last night."

Her eyes widened a little. "You mean Ivalot himself could have been at the Van Hessens' —or at the restaurant where we had dinner—"

"Not necessarily. He may have an accomplice, or even a gang—we don't know. But he's pretty sure to find out whether I've booked myself out of here as ordered. Then if his phone call meant anything at all, he'll be practically forced to wait and see whether I do leave. And maybe I'll wait and see, too."

He stared out of the window of the dining alcove with such a preoccupied air that she would have sworn that his thoughts were on anything but the view which it framed, so that it surprised her when he said presently: "This is an even dreamier spot in the daytime. I wonder why the owner doesn't live here all year round?"

"Perhaps his home in Canada is even nicer."

"D'you know anything about him?"

"Only that his name is Stanley Parker. And I believe he's quite elderly. Why do you ask?"

"I'm practicing—I've got a lot of questions to ask in a hurry today. As soon as we're finished, I'm going to Hamilton and start in earnest. I guess you'd better come with me so I won't have to worry about you. We'll take the speedboat, because it's quicker than a taxi, and it'll make it tougher for anyone who's thinking of tailing us."

He had already observed with approval that, doubtless because of her professional background, she breakfasted with hair and clothes and make-up in shape to face the world as soon as she stood up from the table, and she joined him at the dock with a minimum of delay after their second cups of coffee. The caretaker had the Chris-Craft waiting alongside and was wiping off the seats.

"Do you know the way, sir, or do you wish me to take you?" he inquired disinterestedly.

"I can find it, thanks," said the Saint. "And you'd better be here in case there are any more messages."

He pushed the clutch forward and opened the throttle until the light hull was planing. For less than a mile he drove the boat northeast across the Sound, and then he began to veer more to the east, towards Burgess Point and the coastline of Warwick Parish. Dona Dayne twitched his shirtsleeve and pointed.

"Stay as you were, to the left of that island. It's the shortest way through to Hamilton."

"I've got a call to make on the way," he explained.

He swung still further to starboard, to miss another larger island that emerged ahead. As they ran along its shore the façade of a Florida Keys fishing village came into view, with the functionally arched roof of an enormous hangar rising above the picturesquely weatherbeaten fronts. Simon cut the engine and laid the speedboat skillfully in beside a pier that projected from the strikingly un-Bermudian waterfront.

"This is Darrell's Island, where our host of last night operates," he said. "I just want to ask him something—and we haven't got time to show you how they make TV pictures. I'll be right back."

He left her sitting in the boat and disappeared through an opening in the scenery. Having been given the tour once before, on his arrival, he found his way with the faultless recall of a homing pigeon through the partitioned alleys which had miraculously created a modern television picture studio within the

shell of an abandoned airport that dated back to those pessimistic days when only seaplanes and flying boats were thought suitable for air travel over water; and Dick Van Hessen looked up defensively as he crashed into the office, and then recognized him with a grin.

"Well! What can we do for you today?"

"You're busy and I'm in a hurry," said the Saint, "so I'll leapfrog the trimmings. All I want is a good lawyer."

"*What?* Did she hook you already?"

"Let's try to build it into a half-hour show—some other time."

"The one I like best is a fellow named Fred Thearnley," Van Hessen said. "He's done a few things for me, and he's a lot more on the ball than some of 'em."

"Would you phone him and use your influence to see if he can squeeze a few minutes for me about as soon as I can get there?"

"Sure."

Simon returned to Lona with an appointment for eleven o'clock. He started up the boat again and sent it skimming through the channel to the left of Hinson's Island, and then threading between other smaller islands towards the north shore of the gradually narrowing bay, now sheltered between the hills of Pembroke and Paget on either side with the white-sugar roofs and pink-icing walls of fairy-tale candy houses studding their green slopes.

He slowed up past the Princess Hotel, a birthday cake moulded in the same style, and stopped and tied up at the Yacht Club dock farther on. He looked at his watch.

"We've got plenty of time to do my airline errand first," he said.

They cut through by the Bank of Bermuda and walked eastwards past the open wharf where the cruise boats berth in the very heart of the city, and up Front Street to the BOAC office. Their last plane left for New York at 4 P.M., and he was able to get a seat on it.

The lawyer's office turned out to be back in the direction they had come from, a few doors from Triminghams', which is the biggest department store that the highly conservative proportions of Hamilton have to offer. Simon escorted Lona to its entrance.

"You'll be as safe here as you could be anywhere; and with all this merchandise to look at, unless you're a female impersonator you won't even miss me. Just stay away from the doors, and I'll find you in about half an hour," he said, and left her.

Mr. Thearnley was a large man put together of ellipsoid

shapes, with a florid complexion, very bright baggy eyes, sparse sandy hair, and a mustache of such luxuriant dimensions that it would have provided a more than adequate graft to replace what was lacking from the top of his head. The upper part of him was very correctly dressed in a black alpaca coat, white shirt with starched collar, and dark pin-striped tie. But when he rose from behind his desk to shake hands he revealed that, in conformity with local custom, his lower section was clad only in knee-length shorts and long socks. The effect was inevitably reminiscent of the time-honored farce routine in which the comedian bursts into public view fully dressed except for having forgotten to put on his trousers; but Mr. Thearnley was just as unaware of anything hilarious about it.

"Well, Mr. Templar," he said affably, "what can I do for you?"

"Answer some silly questions," said the Saint, and sat down. "I'm sure you haven't a lot of time to waste, so I'll fire them as fast as I can, and I hope you won't think I'm too blunt . . . One: do you know another attorney in this town by the name of—"

He gave the name of the attorney to whom the solicitors for Mr. Ivalot's concubine had referred their case, which he had found out from Lona Dayne on the way over from Darrell's Island.

"Only for about thirty years," Mr. Thearnley said with a smile.

"Would you vouch for him without any qualification?"

"Now I'm beginning to think you were serious about asking silly questions."

"I'll be more specific. If he were asked to serve papers on somebody in Bermuda who accidentally happened to be a friend of his, would anything induce him to report that he couldn't find any trace of this defendant?"

Mr. Thearnley's eyes had visibly congealed.

"If the person concerned were a friend of his, he would simply decline the case and give his reason. He would not tell a lie. He is the most ethical man I have the good fortune to know."

"I'm sorry," said the Saint. "I don't know him, and I had to ask that to confirm that a certain person is definitely untraceable here by any ordinary means . . . Let me try something less delicate: How would anyone here go about getting a passport?"

"A British subject?"

"Yes, of course."

"He fills out an application, and submits it with a couple of photographs."

"And a birth certificate?"

"No, that isn't required. But the form has to be attested by

someone who's known him for a certain number of years. Not just anyone; it has to be someone with a recognized professional standing. A bank manager, a doctor, or a minister, are the usual ones. Or a lawyer."

Simon lighted a cigarette. It was an effort to subdue a flood tide of excitement that rose higher as one joint after another of the framework that he had put together in his mind was tested and the whole structure still remained solid.

"The last one may be the hardest," he said. "There's a Canadian by the name of Stanley Parker, who owns a house on a small island way out towards the other end of Southampton. Do you happen to know anyone who knows him?"

"This is quite a small place," Thearnley said. "As a matter of fact, I know a little about him myself."

"How old would you say he was?"

"That's hard to guess. He's certainly quite senile."

The Saint raised his eyebrows. "As bad as that?"

"Well, he gives that impression. It may be partly because he's had a stroke and can't even speak. As it happens, the agent who made the sale is a client of mine. I don't know how Parker heard about it, but he wrote from Canada and said he'd take it and he'd be here with the cash as soon as the deed could be drawn up. The asking price was a bit steep, as usual, because people always expect to do some bargaining, but Parker didn't haggle at all."

"How long ago was this?"

"About six years ago. I prepared the conveyance myself, and that's how I met him, when he came in to sign it. He just grunted and nodded to whatever was said to him, didn't even read the papers, and scratched his name on the dotted line. Then he handed over a huge envelope full of twenty-dollar bills and waited for us to count them. The agent and myself had to count almost two thousand each. We gave him a receipt, and the keys, and he grunted again and tottered out.

"My friend's conscience gave him a bit of trouble after he'd seen the man, because he hadn't really expected to get the full price, and he wondered if he could be accused of taking advantage of an imbecile. I had to tell him that we had no evidence that Parker was *non compos mentis*, and that a man who carried about twenty thousand pounds in an old envelope might be so rich that he just couldn't be bothered to argue about the price of anything."

"Have you ever seen him since?"

"I ran into him once in my dentist's waiting room when I

was coming out, and once at the airport when I was meeting a plane. I think he must have played hermit out on his island most of the time. In fact, I'm sure of it."

The Saint stood up. "I'm very much obliged to you," he said. "I may be leaving here rather soon, so would you be shocked if I offered to pay cash for this consultation?"

"Tell Dick I'll stick it on his next bill." The lawyer also rose, again oblivious of what his naked knees did to his dignity. He seemed to be wavering between two tormenting inward doubts, one as to whether he might have indiscreetly answered too much, the other as to how discreetly he could indulge some curiosity of his own. He said, taking a plunge: "Or we'll call it all square if you'll tell me what this is all about."

"If everything works out, and I'm still here tomorrow, I'll come back and tell you—that's a promise."

"You know," Thearnley went on, "from the trend of some of your inquiries, I'm rather surprised at one question you haven't asked."

"What was that?"

"About Mr. Parker's background."

"What was it?"

"My friend the estate agent tried to find out something about him, naturally, but all he could find out was that Mr. Parker had once been a lawyer, too."

"These woods seem to be full of them," said the Saint gravely, and made an exit before Mr. Thearnley could decide how to respond to that.

Lona Dayne was dispiritedly trying on shoes when Simon tracked her down in the store, and he had never seen a woman so relieved to be rescued from a bewildered salesman.

"I can't get used to being dragged around like a doll," she said edgily, as he marched her back towards the boat. "Where are you taking me now?"

"Back to the island. But I have to make a slight detour, by way of Cambridge Beaches, which is the place where I was staying before I met you."

Even at that moment, he couldn't help being amused by the suddenness with which her pique became crestfallen.

"I forgot," she said in an empty voice. "You've got to pack, haven't you?"

"I want to pick up a gun," said the Saint. "We're going to meet Jolly Roger."

IV

Lona Dayne maintained a taut and stubborn silence all the way out to the secluded cottage colony at Mangrove Bay, waited in the boat while he went ashore, and succeeded in prolonging

that superhuman self-discipline until they had passed under Watford Bridge again on the way back.

Then at last she said resentfully: "Why do you have to be so mysterious? I think you're deliberately trying to force me into the part of a stupid ingénue."

"Darling," he said, "haven't you ever read any whodunits? Don't you know that the detective always acts very mysterious and keeps the big surprise up his sleeve till the last few pages?"

"This isn't a whodunit."

"Oh, yes, it is. And I'm not a very experienced detective. So I've had to take advantage of my privilege because I haven't had the nerve to come right out with my theory—in case it turned out to be really as crazy as it sounds, and I ended up not only with egg on my face but with ham too."

"Don't get coy with me," she said. "I'm Lona Shaw—remember?"

Simon smiled with his lips closed, his blue eyes narrowed against the brilliant blue of the sea and sky as he turned the speedboat southward and tried to get an exact bearing on the island they had to return to.

"You wouldn't dare to send your editor a story based on my kind of deductions," he said. "Nearly all my thinking seems to be negative—a process of clearing away the undergrowth so you can find out where the solid ground is. I've seldom heard a story that was so fogged up with false clues. For instance, the accent of the guy who talked to you on the phone last night."

"It sounded very American to me."

"And to me. In fact, exaggeratedly American. But what we have to remember is that an accent can be faked. Roger Ivalot sounded English. So an American accent cropping up here sounds like an attempt to confuse things—perhaps to suggest that he has accomplices which he hasn't got at all. But a man who would play those tricks of dialect might very well have done it before. Therefore Ivalot's English was probably the first fake. A man who'd lived here for several years should be able to do a very passable imitation—even if he was raised in America."

"Or Canada."

"I'm glad you brought that up," he said. "Did you ever notice how in the stories you quoted, Jolly Roger had his uranium interests in South Africa and Australia—but not a word was said about Canada, where some of the biggest uranium strikes of all have been made? That was an omission that stood out like a flat chest at a beauty contest, if I may scramble a metaphor in midstream. Almost from the moment I heard it, I would

have liked to bet that Canada was the one place that our boy would turn out to have his deepest roots."

"You're still keeping the riddles going," she said sulkily. "That's all very plausible and clever, but you must have a lot more up your sleeve."

"But the next step takes me out on a limb. I also say that our boy is a lawyer."

The frown darkened on her brow. "Last night you were starting to say something—"

"This script is full of lawyers," he interrupted quickly. "That's another confusing feature of it. But it set me thinking about human characteristics. Lawyers are cautious. Lawyers make a technique of procrastination. What does any smart lawyer do when he knows he's got a very shaky case? He uses every dodge and device in the book to keep getting it postponed and continued and adjourned—because until it actually comes to a court and a verdict, he still hasn't lost it.

"Your husband disappeared because our boy thought he had to do something fast and drastic; but after that, he didn't know how to go on with it. That's why nothing else happened for two days. Perhaps he hadn't finally worked anything out until last night, when you got the first message. But then I upset him again by showing up in the act. So when he talked to you later, it was to tell you to get me out of here. Another delay. That's why I was so sure we were safe last night and today. He's still stalling for time."

"So are you," she said angrily. "Will you tell me just one thing straight?"

He grinned, throttling back as they circled around to the lee side of the private island, and switched off the engine to coast to a perfect dead-stick landing at the dock.

"In a few minutes," he said. "I have to make a phone call first."

She walked speechlessly beside him up to the house. But now she realized that he was enjoying himself, and she would not give him the satisfaction of making her protest again.

While he was dialing a number, he said: "To give you something to go on with—does anything ring a bell with you about a man who's excessively self-conscious about names?"

Without a word, she turned and went over to the bar cupboard.

He said to the telephone: "Mr. Van Hessen, please. This is Mr. Templar."

He put his hand over the mouthpiece and said: "Another thing. Weren't you surprised that a character like our boy, who was so anxious that you

shouldn't talk to anyone, would leave such a melodramatic warning with anyone who answered the phone, like your caretaker?"

The only reply was a heavily restrained clinking of glassware.

He said to the phone: "Oh, Dick. Glad I caught you. Have you gotten to know anyone in the police higher up than a traffic cop? . . . Good. And do you have one of the Company boats there? . . . Better still. Will you please call this Inspector, and persuade him to let you pick him up and bring him out to Parker's island right away—you know, where the Daynes are staying. I mean as quickly as you can get here. I can't call him myself, because if I gave my name he'd think someone was pulling his leg . . . No, I don't want to say any more on the phone, but this is the most serious thing I ever asked you . . . Okay, feller. Thanks."

He hung up.

Lona Dayne was standing beside him with a glass in her hand.

"A nice drop of sherry before lunch?" she suggested sweetly.

He took it.

"Is it poisoned?"

"If it was, no jury would convict me."

He moved to the end of one of the davenports, studied it for a couple of seconds in relation to the doors into the room, and slid a blue-black automatic out of his hip pocket and behind a cushion.

"Tell me one thing," he said. "If I'm quoting you correctly, you were talking to this caretaker, and his boss had just told him to try and rent the place. But how did you happen to meet him and be talking to him in the first place?"

She raised a glass of her own to her lips, holding it with a tense care that just failed to be completely casual.

"I've been waiting for that," she said. "This house must have something to do with it, of course."

"How did you meet Bob?"

"He came to see us at the hotel, the same day our story came out in the papers. He said that he once worked for a Mr. Rogers here, who threw a lot of wild parties, which he couldn't forget—you've seen what a strait-laced type he is. With that coincidence of names, he wondered if it could be the man we were looking for. But his description didn't fit anywhere. His Mr. Rogers was very tall and thin with a big hooked nose. Then it was after we'd ruled that out that he went on talking about this house and the island . . . Please," she said, with her voice suddenly rising a sharp third, "don't say how half-witted you're thinking we must have been."

He was at the telephone again,

and did not even seem to have heard her.

"Did you ever see this trick?" he inquired.

He took off the handset, and dialed four numbers, and put the handset back again. Immediately, the telephone began to ring. He let it ring a few times, and then picked up the handset again.

"If you know the right combination, you can make any telephone ring like an incoming call," he said. "But do you know where all the extensions are in this house? It could be done from any of them."

He hung the instrument up and turned away.

"Once upon a time," he said, "there was an attorney in Toronto named Robert Parker Illet. He was born and educated in England, but taken to Canada after his parents died in a 'flu epidemic and raised there by a maternal uncle. Seven years ago he was hardly middle-aged, but he'd built an inspiring reputation. It was so good, in fact, that he had a wide-open chance to embezzle five million dollars, with no more trouble than writing a few checks. I told you I was looking for him when we first met, but I don't think you took me seriously."

She stared at him with her chin dropping and her mouth and eyes equally open, temporarily stunned out of any vestige of poise.

"Plenty of lawyers have had chances like that," he went on, "but this one grabbed it. He packed the loot in a couple of suitcases, in cash and bearer bonds, and vanished into the blue. When I heard about the case a few months ago, I decided to go after him like I'd go on a treasure hunt. First, because he'd been gone so long without being caught, I figured he must have gone further than the United States. But where could he go without a passport? Spies have forged passports; big-time international crooks can get 'em; but a previously respectable attorney wouldn't have any idea where to buy one. That narrowed it down to Central America and the West Indies.

"I found out that he didn't speak any Spanish, and I decided that that might have made him leerier of the Latin countries. Most people—even policemen—automatically think of the banana republics as the perfect place for a crook to hide, but I can tell you that there's nothing so conspicuous down there as an obvious gringo. However, that still left plenty of British islands. But then I found out that Illet had spent a couple of vacations here, and it was the only one he seemed to have visited. I bet on another hunch that this man might be most likely

to head for a place that he knew a little about, where he could melt as quickly as possible into the local scene, rather than a place that would be totally strange to him; and I decided to start sniffing around here first."

"But if he'd been here even as a tourist, there'd be people who might remember him!"

"Not in the new identity he was going to create. He had another lawyer's trait: patience. With five million bucks stowed away, he didn't have to rush out and start splurging. Even if he lay low for ten years, it'd be like earning half a million a year, tax free, which was a lot better than he could've done legitimately. My guess is that he originally planned to hibernate at least until the statute of limitations ran out, when he'd be absolutely in the clear.

"In a nice house like this, with his books and his records, it shouldn't have been too hard to take. Of course he couldn't have much social life, but some men don't mind that. I expect he went to church regularly, though. An innocent unsuspecting minister would be the easiest person for him to cultivate who'd be qualified to endorse a passport application after knowing him for several years—and he had to get a passport eventually, to go to places like London and Paris where he could make the playboy splash that he'd always secretly dreamed of."

Simon had moved over to the corner of the chesterfield again. He put his half-empty glass down in precarious balance on the back, and lighted a cigarette.

"Unfortunately," he said, "our boy's good resolutions weren't quite equal to the strain. He stood it for several years; but counting over all that spinach that he couldn't spend, and thinking about the rip-roaring times he could have with it, his patience finally ran out before the statute of limitations would have let him thumb his nose at the law. He had to break down and treat himself to one preliminary fling, and in the rôle and disguise of Roger Ivalot he thought he could get away with it.

"He did, too. But then, like dopes who experiment with dope, he found it was habit-forming. Six months later he had to go back for more. And before that encore was over, he found himself threatened with a lawsuit which he knew damn well could make all his castles in the air end up like iron balloons. That was the reason he couldn't stay and fight it. And you know now why he couldn't take it on the lam in the same way from Bermuda: this is where he has his only other identity, and he's stuck with it.

You can't create those things overnight."

"But if he'd got a passport here in the name as Ivalot," she objected, "we'd have found a record of him in no time."

"So he didn't," said the Saint. "He didn't become Ivalot until after he'd landed in England—after a couple of weeks which he'd spent in any small flat growing those fast chin-whiskers and the other fuzz you've described, which in turn would have been after an overnight stop in a back-street hotel which he left very early before anybody was up in the morning, so they wouldn't notice how different he looked after he made his first personality change."

"Then how did he leave here?"

"Under the name he was known here by. Didn't I ask you to notice his complex about names? 'Ivalot' was outrageous, but he took the bull by the horns and disarmed everybody by making jokes about it. To his corny sense of humor, his other name must have been just as funny. For a man who was going to ease into a fortune the slow patient way, what could be more apt than the old-English-sounding name of Inchpenny?"

The door from the dining area to the kitchen swung gently open, making a very muted creak; but Simon Templar did not jump. He turned his head almost lazily, and smiled cordially at the man standing there. He heard Lona Dayne gasp at the sight of the gun in the caretaker's hand, but the Saint declined to bat even the proverbial eyelash.

"I was wondering how much longer this would take you, Bob," he murmured. "But there—that would be the legal training again. You wouldn't tip your hand till the very last moment, when you knew I had every loose end tied together and you were an utterly dead duck."

"You really do mix your metaphors horribly," Illet said primly. "But I must admit your thinking was quite brilliant. And so was Mrs. Dayne's, up to a point."

Simon glanced sympathetically at the blonde, but she was still striving heroically to recover from her last relapse.

"This is Mr. Robert Parker Illet, the legal weasel I was talking about," he explained kindly. "The Stanley Parker who bought this place, I imagine, is the ancient uncle who brought him up—now in his second childhood, and a convenient stooge for an operation like buying this house. But it was our boy who had all the fun out of it: as the caretaker, he could have the same use of it without anyone bothering him. You were looking for him as Jolly Roger Ivalot, the play-

boy of Piccadilly. You were never even close to recognizing him as Bob Inchpenny, the colored caretaker and apparent candidate for churchwarden."

Illet came slowly across the room, holding his gun very competently.

"You were rather lucky yourself," he said. "If you hadn't met Mrs. Dayne, I don't think you'd have recognized me."

Simon observed him with critical detachment.

"It's one of the best jobs of blackface I ever saw," he conceded. "You were smart to shave your head all over—nobody would notice whether your hair was kinky or not, and you didn't risk showing a margin on your skin make-up. You were lucky to have brown eyes and rather thick lips to begin with—but who ever looks at a Negro and wonders if he could be a white man in disguise? You only made one conventional mistake. For some strange reason, four out of five crooks who take an alias don't seem to be able to shake off the habit of their original initials. That's where you started to click with me the minute I met you."

"It's a pity you're so clever," Illet said, coming closer. "I'm going to search you now, and I hope you won't do anything silly, but I'll warn you that I was a Commando in the last war."

Simon drew at his cigarette, deeply enough to inhale enough fumes for a smoke-ring, but keeping his elbows away from his body and his hands ingratiatingly above his shoulders, while Illet felt his pockets and around his waist and under his arms.

"Havelock Dayne never left this island, did he?" said the Saint. "A lot of this rock is hollow—I was remembering a couple of spots where they take tourists, Leamington Cave and Crystal Cave, over near the Castle Harbor. I think one thing that may have helped sell you on this place is that there's a lovely little private cave right under our feet."

"There's a door to it in the basement," Illet said, stepping back. "Mr. Dayne is there now."

"Alive?" Simon inquired, rather carefully.

"Certainly. You remarked very observantly that I'm cautious. It was as easy to chain him up there alive as to kill him. And if anything had gone wrong, the penalty for kidnaping here is much lighter than for murder. I hope I can keep you and Mrs. Dayne alive, too—until I'm quite sure that everyone's given you up and it's safe to kill you."

The Saint shrugged. "Well, that's almost friendly," he drawled. "We'd better get go-

ing, because that policeman you heard me send for should be here very soon. May I finish my drink? And did they teach you this in the Commandos—?"

He reached for the glass he had put down, but in the same movement he bumped clumsily against the couch with his knee. The glass tilted and began to fall. His hand followed it frantically, but somehow veered off and dived behind the cushion. It came out again instantly, with his automatic in it, and without even a fragmentary pause he shot Mr. Ivalot-Inchpenny-Illet —having taken everything into consideration, only through the right forearm.

V

There was no difficulty about finding the entrance to the cave —it was a locked door in the cellar which the "caretaker" had once told Lona Dayne led only to a storeroom in which Mr. Parker kept a lot of old trunks full of personal papers. Nor was there any additional problem about finding Havelock Dayne, by way of a crooked tunnel that sloped down into a limestone cavern of quite spacious dimensions considering the size of the island that covered it.

It must have been discovered long ago in the course of excavating for a rainwater cistern; but however Illet had come to hear of it, he had evidently envisaged an emergency use for it, in his prudent way, for the iron ring set in concrete to which the missing bridegroom was attached by a long chain was no antique but had certainly not been installed within the past week.

Mr. Dayne was dirty and unshaven, but looked as if he would be fairly personable when he was cleaned up. He revealed no physical damage, but he had been badly frightened, and was correspondingly indignant when he realized that there was nothing more to be frightened about. He seemed to be a very serious-minded young man, who did not regard being chained in a cave for three days and nights as an amusing adventure.

"This settles it—you're resigning from that goddam newspaper right away," was one of the first things he said.

"We'll talk about that as soon as I've cabled this one last story," said his bride, with what a more experienced spouse would have identified at once as ominous serenity.

Simon Templar was less interested in various other things that they had to say to each other than he was in a couple of large mildewed valises which he located in another corner of the cave. They were not locked, and when he opened the lids he

knew that he had never seen so much cash all in one place at one time.

"Here are those personal papers you were told about," he murmured. "If this episode had gone exactly the way I was dreaming when I took up the trail, and I weren't involved now with you respectable citizens, I suppose I'd have left Jolly Roger trussed up upstairs just as he is now, but with only my Saint drawing chalked on his bald head for a souvenir; and I'd still be gone with the boodle before the cops got here—if I'd ever even sent for them. And now all I can do is hope for a lousy few hundred thousand dollars' reward."

"If you helped yourself to a few handfuls in advance," Lona said, "we'd never tell anyone. Would we, Havvie?"

An infinitesimal, scarcely perceptible spasm passed over the Saint's face, as at the twinge of an old wound.

"I wonder if Mrs. Havelock Ellis called her husband that," he said in suddenly appalled conjecture; but neither of them were even listening to him again.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS,
with "The Prince of Cherkessia"

MACKINLAY KANTOR,
with "The Light at Three O'Clock"

FREDERICK NEBEL,
with "Ghost of a Chance"

ANTHONY GILBERT,
with "The Sequel to Murder"

CRAIG RICE,
with "The Frightened Millionaire"

G. K. CHESTERTON,
with "The Worst Crime in the World"

and many others

murder is my business

by . . . Raoul Whitfield

Jardinn knew that even the most diabolically planned murder may be vulnerable — on celluloid.

WHEN BEN JARDINN came into the outer office there were a half dozen roses angling from a tall glass on Bridget Callahan's desk. The small clock showed five thirty-two and Bridget had left for the day. Jardinn frowned from the clock to the roses. His right-hand fingers slowly lifted a slip of white paper; Bridget's firm, small handwriting covered some space.

He read softly, thoughtfully: "Collis phoned and said never mind San Diego . . . Byron Jones came in—Willis will plead guilty and you won't be needed down-town . . . Hanneford has changed his mind. He says to let his wife go ahead and play . . . I bought the roses for you to give to me. Thanks for remembering my birthday."

Jardinn said under his breath, "Damn—it *was* her birthday, at that!"

He broke the stem of a rose and stuck it in the button-hole of his gray suit coat, went into his office. He was looking down

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In the nineteen-thirties the late Captain Shaw's BLACK MASK *magazine towered memorably at the crossroads of American mystery fiction, pointing the way to highroads of achievement both hard-boiled and heartwarmingly laced with a private eye's own brand of lyrical tenderness. Without it we might not have had today the Chandlers and the Cains—or even Mickey Spillane! And like so many of those early Black Mask contributors Raoul Whitfield has remained a contemporary gladiator, his narrative punch grown mightier with the years.*

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at the flower, frowning at the odor of it, as he passed the file case that stood just inside the door. A voice said: "Hello, Jardinn."

Jardinn stopped and looked up. He kept his right-hand fingers on the stem of the rose. After a few seconds he coughed nervously. His dark eyes were narrowed and his tall, lean body was motionless.

Carrow said, shifting the automatic just a little: "I hope to hell you roll over on your back for the finish. The camera boys'll get a break on that cute thing in your button-hole."

Carrow's voice was low and colorless. Jardinn let his right, browned hand drop away from the rose. Carrow raised the gun muzzle a little.

"Hold the pose," he said in the same toneless voice. "I never seen a louse with a flower before."

Jardinn said quietly: "Don't be a fool, Carrow. I just left my stenographer downstairs. She wanted to tell me something, but I said you were waiting up here."

Carrow had a wide face and a good jaw. His blue eyes held a cold expression.

"You're a bad liar, even with a gun on you, Jardinn. I've been waiting here twenty minutes, and that note was on the desk out there when I came in."

Jardinn's thin lips showed a faint smile. "She was coming back to talk business with me when I met her."

Carrow shook his head. "No good. I watched you parking your car across the street. While you were doing that I called her house. She didn't know it was me because I did things with my voice. She'd just got home and her little nest is three miles from here."

Jardinn kept his eyes on the gun. "You think of a lot of things, don't you, Carrow?" he said quietly.

Carrow leaned back in the straight chair. His back was to the window of the office, two stories above Hollywood Boulevard, and the automatic was held low.

"I told you to lay off the Rainey accident, Jardinn. You didn't do it. You been digging around."

Jardinn sighed. "I guess it was an accident, after all," he said. "I didn't find a thing wrong."

Carrow made a sucking sound. "Your number three lie isn't any better than the other two, Mr. Louse. You think that Phil ran her car into the wall with one big idea ahead of him. That was to beat her over the head with a wrench and make it look like a crash job. Phil likes the way the beer thing stands. He thinks what happened to that gal was his business. So he sent me up to say so long to you."

Jardinn tapped trouser cloth with his long fingers. He took his eyes away from the automatic and looked thoughtfully at Carrow.

"If Phil likes the beer business, and doesn't want to hang for murder—what's he turning you loose on me for? I'm in this racket for money, and Rainey knows it."

Carrow shook his big head slowly. "We offered you enough to lay off. It you know anything important enough, spill it, Jardinn. Or stick your chin up and take it!"

Jardinn said sharply: "Wait!"

He watched Carrow's trigger finger on the Colt. Carrow's blue eyes were half-closed; his gun arm was still from the elbow out.

Jardinn spoke very softly and slowly. "I'll admit I'm on the floor of this office now, Carrow. You're on the way out. Maybe you can get away—maybe not. I'll give it to you straight. I got the goods on your boss early. Some time after that, a certain cop was found shot to death downtown, in a vacant lot.

"That was the cop who was first to reach Ruth McLean's car, after the murder you call an accident. He was first to reach the car because Phil Rainey had it fixed. He took care of anything that looked like murder, and maybe he helped things look more like an accident. But he had a rotten record. It was enough to make me suspicious. I got him in a corner and worked the truth out of him. Maybe he told Rainey I'd better be paid off. Anyway, he was."

There was a little silence, except for the traffic sounds on the boulevard. Then Carrow said grimly: "So what?"

"At four-thirty I went inside of the *International Pictures Studio.*"

Carrow repeated steadily and coldly: "So what?"

A street car rumbled by, on the boulevard. The sun was getting low and the day had been cloudy. When Jardinn didn't speak at once Carrow stood up and reached out with his left hand. The indirect light from the bulbs above flooded the office. Carrow kept his back to the window and the gun low, close to his stomach.

"I *talked* to somebody in the studio," Jardinn said.

Carrow's eyes were very blue and very small. He nodded his big head. "We can handle that," he said tonelessly. "It isn't important enough. Stick your chin up, Jardinn!"

The Colt's blackness caught the electric light as it shifted a bit. Jardinn said sharply, desperately: "Listen, Carrow—"

Carrow cut in thinly: "*You* listen, Jardinn. Hell knows it'll be the last sound you'll ever hear."

The indirect lighting suddenly was less brilliant. Sound beat into the room. Crackling sound. The light died completely. Outside glass was crashing. There was an explosion. The office was swaying now. Jardinn staggered and then let his body fall sidewise and downward.

"God!" Carrow shouted hoarsely. "Earthquake—"

His gun crashed and Jardinn felt stinging pain just above the right elbow. The gun made only sharp, faint sound against the great sound of falling material. There were screams in the boulevard, and the shaking was more violent now. Jardinn jerked at the grip of his own automatic, ripped it from his right hip pocket. He rolled desperately on the swaying floor of the office as Carrow shot the second time. Jardinn felt no pain.

A great shadow seemed to swing downward, near the window, as Jardinn, on his stomach, lifted his head to look at Carrow. And as he looked he saw the big-headed man go down beneath the swinging shadow. There was a terrible crash as the ten-foot high, heavy bookcase battered to the floor. The chair on which Carrow had been seated was splintered under the weight of it. Glass stabbed against the walls.

The corners of the room made grinding sound, and plaster fallen from walls and ceiling made a fine dust. Jardinn blinked hurting eyes at the one limp hand extending from beneath the bookcase. Then he pillowed his face in his arms. The streets were filled with sound. . .

The motion now was more gentle—from side to side. After a few seconds there was barely any motion. Jardinn lifted his head. When he rose to his knees he crawled around wreckage and looked at the splinters of glass in Carrow's head. There was no pulse in the outflung wrist.

Jardinn stood up and got to the window. He looked down at the crowds in the boulevard. A fire was starting, across the street. Cars had crashed and were now a mass of wreckage directly in front of the old building in which he had his office.

He turned from the window, fumbled around Carrow's body and got the Colt that lay near dead fingers. On the way downstairs he looked at his right arm. The bullet from Carrow's gun had only grazed his flesh.

Jardinn reached the street and listened to the distant wail of sirens. A man pawed at him and said hoarsely: "Good God! That was a bad one! Just think what *might* have happened!"

Jardinn said grimly: "I'm *thinking*, brother."

II

Bridget Callahan kept Irish

eyes on her shorthand book and her pencil made a scratching sound. Ben Jardinn looked at the battered office walls.

"Phil Rainey's partner died. Rainey tried to buy out the half interest in the two new beer palaces from widow Ruth McLean. She thought he wanted them too cheaply. She was afraid of him and came to me. I took a five-hundred-dollar retaining fee, for protection of Ruth McLean. Rainey murdered her under cover of a machine accident. I got that from a cop he had fixed, and the cop was killed later.

"Rainey's gunman, Carrow, practically admitted the murder when he was getting set to finish me off. The earthquake got him. Ruth McLean had left her share in Rainey's beer business to her brother, Alan McLean, assistant director at *International Pictures.* I'd told him that I'd learned Rainey had murdered his sister—a few hours before the quake. Alan McLean was one of three men killed by the quake in the studio."

Bridget Callahan whistled softly. "Husband dies—widow murdered — brother killed in earthquake," she said slowly. "What's that half-interest in the beer palaces worth, Ben?"

Jardinn smiled. "The two biggest spots in Los Angeles—doing capacity business. At least three hundred thousand."

Bridget frowned. "Who gets the half-interest now?"

Jardinn lighted a cigarette and flicked the match towards a pile of plaster in a corner.

"Fate spins a tenuous web," he stated mockingly. "Alan McLean was crazy about a girl named Jen Lee. Does bits in pictures. My guess is *she* gets the half."

Bridget widened her eyes. "Beauty and the beast, eh?" she said. "What'll Rainey do to her?"

Jardinn grunted. "Let's hope it won't be a fate worse than death," he said with irony.

He inspected the glow of his cigarette. "Trouble is, the quake messed up a lot of things. The police have their hands full, with several hundred dead or hurt and all that sort of thing. A cop whined to me that Rainey was a murderer. The cop's dead. Carrow, here to kill me, practically admitted Rainey was a murderer. Carrow's dead, fortunately for me. I had told Alan McLean about his sister's murder. We were going to the D.A. together, with the story. Now McLean's dead."

Bridget Callahan half closed her greenish-blue eyes. "And a gal named Jen Lee gets the other half of Rainey's beer palaces."

Jardinn nodded. "That's my guess, and it's a good one. We'll work it that way. But Rainey has so much money that my story to

the D.A. isn't worth a damn. Little Jen sits in the spot."

"Well, Ben, you got five hundred from Ruth McLean. And almost a couple of bullets. Is the case closed?"

Jardinn smiled coldly. "Closed? Even if I can't *prove* it, Rainey's a killer. He doesn't want me moving around too much. I know something, and *sometime* I might be able to prove it. Even if Alan McLean is dead, and can't back me up."

"So what?" Bridget said.

Jardinn scowled at her. "The last time I heard that phrase Carrow was sitting in here with a gun on me—and saying it. Don't do it again."

Bridget sniffled. "Getting reminiscent, eh?" she muttered.

Jardinn swore at her. "Stick the notes in a safe place and—"

He broke off. Bridget swore. The office swayed gently from side to side. Doors swung in both offices and loose things rattled. After a few seconds the motion stopped.

Bridget said nervously: "That's the fifteenth in four days. Or maybe I missed a couple."

Jardinn stood up. "Seventeenth," he corrected, "and we'll have more of 'em. Dig up Jen Lee's phone number for me, and shake it up."

Bridget moved her well-formed body towards the outer office. "If you get between Phil Rainey and this Lee girl it may be worse than a quake," she said over a shoulder.

Jardinn kicked a wall and watched loose plaster fall. His lean, browned face was turned towards the outer office.

"She's probably good looking," he stated. "Rainey won't mind that. *I* probably know too much. Rainey *will* mind that. But if she's worth half those two beer spots—that means money."

Bridget called: "And *you* mind *that.*"

"You're a mind reader," Jardinn said coldly.

The outside, private phone rang. He walked over to the desk, lifted the receiver. Bridget came into the office and wrote Jen Lee's number down on the desk pad.

Jardinn said into the phone: "Who—Ramsey Bennett?"

Bridget Callahan went to the window and stood with her back to Jardinn until he hung up. When she turned he smiled grimly at her.

"A little murder job at *International Pictures,*" he said slowly. "A cutter by the name of Ramsey Bennett. They just found the body, in the cutting room."

Bridget said calmly: "So what?"

Jardinn swore at her. He took his felt hat from an end of the desk.

"So I go down and get the murderer."

Bridget smiled. "Wouldn't it be fun if you did?" she said. "While you're down there you might look up Jen Lee. She works at that studio."

Jardinn narrowed his eyes. "Sure," he said after a few seconds. "Everything happens over there. They even had the earthquake."

Bridget Callahan made a clicking sound and Jardinn went outside and down stairs that were being repaired. On Hollywood Boulevard, a heavyset man, not badly dressed, came up to him and said thickly: "I lost about everything in the big shake. Brother, can you spare a dime?"

Jardinn said coldly: "Did you say a dime or a dame?"

The heavyset man looked puzzled. Jardinn sniffed the odor of beer from the man's breath.

"Never mind the answer. I can't spare either."

He crossed Hollywood Boulevard, got into his car and drove rapidly towards the studio of *International Pictures.*

III

Joe Bedford stood aside and let Jardinn look at the floor of the cutting room. Ramsey Bennett was sprawled near a chair, most of the back of his head crushed in. The chair was near a six-foot bench that held the apparatus, lighted from below, over which the film was run. There were racks in the room holding cylinders of film. Bennett was wearing a soft, loudly striped shirt, and his sleeves were rolled up.

Jardinn looked around the room. "That a new uniform you're wearing, Sergeant?" he asked.

The Hollywood police sergeant smiled with his thick lips. "The wife made me do it. I hear a guy got himself killed in your office, during the big shake."

Jardinn nodded, stepped inside the cutting room and looked down at the body. "Some bookshelves fell over. One of the few good things the quake did. The name of the louse was Carrow."

Bedford said, slowly: "Yeah, we've been trying to get something on him for a long time. The shake did it."

Jardinn took the cigarette from between his lips and tapped ashes on the floor. He pointed at them. "Those are mine—not the murderer's. How long ago did it happen?"

Bedford shrugged. "It's about three. He had lunch at the studio cafeteria at one, and talked to Gary Lord near the line of cutting rooms at one thirty. At two fifteen a messenger came in with a notice that the studio was previewing a picture tomorrow night. He found the body. The doctor from the studio hospital came along and figured he'd been dead around thirty minutes, may-

be not that long. Skull smashed in. They called the station and I got here about two thirty. Things were just this way. I haven't learned a thing."

"Thanks," Jardinn said. "I did some work for Brayden Gracie, and he called me in. Bennett was one of his pet cutters."

Bedford scratched his left ear noisily. "Bennett was the friend of everybody," he said in a toneless voice. "I been asking questions."

Jardinn smiled faintly. "Maybe someone made a mistake," he said. "Got the wrong man."

Bedford grinned. "That would be a help, wouldn't it?"

Jardinn walked around the body, looked at the hands. Miss Somerville stood near the opened door, looking pale.

"Mr. Gracie asked me to come over and tell you anything that might help, Mr. Jardinn," she said.

Jardinn walked out of the cutting room and stood beside Gracie's secretary and Sergeant Bedford.

"No enemies, Miss Somerville? Bennett, I mean?"

She shook her head. "Not that we knew of. Everyone liked him."

Jardinn nodded. "How about the adjoining cutting rooms? Who uses them?"

"They're closed. The earthquake stopped production until yesterday. We had a lot of repairing to do. Only three cutters are working. The other two are in the old cutter's building, on the other side of the lot."

"He didn't go much for the ladies, Miss Somerville?"

She shook her head. "Not that I ever heard. He was a quiet man, didn't talk much."

Jardinn looked at Bedford. "It's a police case, of course?"

"Sure," Bedford said. "But we don't mind a master mind like yourself doing his bit."

Jardinn laughed hollowly. "You're so good, Sergeant. I suppose the machinery of the police is grinding?"

Bedford frowned. "Working smoothly, not grinding. Smoothly doing the usual stupid, police things."

"Sergeant, I hate to tell you you're the smartest police human in or out of uniform in Hollywood. What do you think?"

Bedford shook his head. "It might have been a hunk of lead pipe. A woman might have swung it, if it was heavy enough. Me—I don't think a woman did it. Whoever did, did it quietly and took the weapon away with him or her. Just one slam, maybe with both hands getting a grip. The motive? I couldn't even guess."

Jardinn said to Miss Somerville: "How many employees in the studio, around lunch time?"

She was thoughtful. "Probably fifteen hundred. And eight or

ten visitors, on pass. We're getting the names of those who came in on pass."

"Fine," said Jardinn. "I'll just poke around. I'll see Mr. Gracie before I leave."

Gracie's secretary went away. Bedford brushed a knee of his trousers.

"Funny, Carrow getting knocked off in your office," he said casually.

Jardinn got a cigarette pack from a pocket. "I laughed myself sick," he said.

Bedford said: "You weren't covering anything up, were you, Jardinn?"

Jardinn offered the sergeant a cigarette, and they lighted up.

"By the quake?" Jardinn said. "My timing wasn't that good. Did you see the remains?"

Bedford nodded. "Yeah. The idea of a gun like Carrow getting kicked out in *your* office interested me. But he was all busted up, so I guess it was a natural."

Jardinn drew a deep breath. "Thank God you won't pull me in." He turned and looked at Ramsey Bennett's body. "Nothing much has been shoved around in here?"

The sergeant shook his head. "It's just the way it was when I got here, except for those ashes you let hit the floor."

Jardinn inhaled deeply, let his dark eyes smile at the sergeant's. "Fingerprint stuff done yet?" he asked.

"I'm waiting for Jeff Lane now," said Bedford. "But I don't figure he'll turn up a print."

Jardinn walked a few feet from the doorway of the cutter's room, one of a line of ten office-like affairs built of concrete. He narrowed his dark eyes.

"See you later," he said and moved away.

The sergeant called after him. "I still owe you that ten, Jardinn."

Jardinn said without turning: "Don't worry about that. I'm not."

He walked along the macadam studio street to a wider cross street. To the left were a line of sound stages. His eyes looked at a jagged crack on one of them, then went to a bulletin-board at one side of the wide street. He went to the bulletin-board and read a list of the productions that were being shot, the names of the directors and players.

There was one called *Lovely Lady*. After the names of stars and more important players he read, half to himself: "Jen Lee."

Stage Four was down the wide street and to the right. When he reached it the red light was on, above the outside sound door, and the warning bell was ringing. After a few seconds the red light went out and the bell stopped ringing.

Jardinn went through both sound doors and immediately was on a dining-room set. A

hoarse voice said loudly: "Okay here—over to Stage Eight for the Twenty-third Street subway station. In half an hour—not ready until then."

There was a general movement away from the set. Al Sneedon waved a hand at Jardinn, who called over to him: "Miss Lee on the set?"

The chief electrician looked around and pointed towards one end of the elaborately set table. "In white, with the red hair," he called to Jardinn, and left the set.

Jardinn dropped his cigarette and squashed it with a new heel. He walked slowly towards the end of the table and Jen Lee. Her back was towards him and her figure was nice. Tall and slender and straight. She was talking with a short actor in dinner clothes and as Jardinn came up she said in a throaty voice: "It was terrible. And imagine, little me in the bathtub. If the apartment had tumbled over—just think!"

Jardinn halted just behind her and said: "Miss Lee?"

She turned slowly. She was beautiful in a cold, precise way. Her eyes were blue and her features small. Her hair was very red and smartly arranged.

"Yes?" she said.

Jardinn smiled gently. "I'm Ben Jardinn, from the detective agency of my own name. I'd like to have a short chat."

Jen Lee's blue eyes widened a little. The man in dinner clothes said: "You got a half hour, Jen. I'll trot along."

She nodded and he went away. Jardinn looked at a divan at one end of the dining-room set.

"Let's squat," he suggested, and moved towards the divan. When he reached it he stood up until she arrived and sat down. He sat fairly close to her and watched her long fingers as she crossed her legs, and adjusted the severe and thin evening dress she was wearing.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Jardinn," she said.

He smiled. "I'm flattered. I've heard of you."

She didn't say that *she* was flattered. Jardinn offered her a cigarette, which she refused. Her right-hand fingers played with imitation pearls and she kept her blue eyes on Jardinn's face.

"A man named Phil Rainey, who didn't have too good a reputation before it was legal to drink beer, owns the two largest beer drinking spots in Los Angeles," Jardinn said thoughtfully. "I'm telling you this just in case."

Jen Lee raised her eyebrows. "Just in case of what?"

Jardinn smiled cheerfully. "Just in case you don't already know it."

The actress laughed lightly. It had a forced quality. "I've heard of Phil Rainey, of course."

she said. "He was a gambler, I think."

"Yeah, and he still is," said Jardinn. "Now I'll get along with this. He had a partner in these two spots. The partner died. Phil tried to buy his partner's share, which had been left to his partner's wife, Ruth McLean. He tried to get the share cheap. It didn't work. He kept at it. He didn't exactly threaten, but Ruth McLean began to get frightened. That's where I came in. She came to me and paid me to sort of see that things didn't get too tough. She was really frightened by then."

Jardinn was smiling very tightly. Jen Lee was attentive, but her blue eyes were cool and almost expressionless.

"A week or so after she had come to me she was killed in an automobile accident," Jardinn said slowly. "Her car crashed into a wall. By one of those strange twists Phil Rainey happened to be driving the car that forced hers into the wall. He was unconscious for a short time, and a cop nearby got to Ruth McLean first. He reported she was dead when he reached her. Head crushed. He reported Rainey was unconscious. Rainey recovered."

"Terrible, wasn't it?" Jen Lee said. "I remember reading about it!"

Jardinn looked at his fingernails. "Terrible," he agreed. "Her will left everything to her brother, Alan McLean. I suppose you know him?"

Her blue eyes were wider now, held more expression. "Slightly," she said. "He was an assistant director here, in the studio."

"Listen, Jen," Jardinn said, "let's not play that way." His voice was suddenly cold. "Let's play we'll be on the level with each other."

The actress stiffened. "I don't understand—"

"Alan McLean was one of three men killed in the earthquake, here on the lot. You knew him pretty well, pretty damned well. He left all his property to you. Everything he had."

Jen Lee drew a sharp breath. Her eyes were very narrow on Jardinn's. Slowly she relaxed. She wiped her red lips with a small handkerchief.

"Well—what if I *did* know him well?" she asked defiantly.

Jardinn smiled with his thin lips curving downward. He rolled the cigarette between his browned fingers.

"It helps me to know we're getting along," he said, staring at her levelly.

There was a little silence. Working lights above switched out. The dining-room set was almost dark. Jardinn spoke with the cigarette between his lips.

"As things stand, when the will of Alan McLean is probated you're a half owner—with Phil Rainey in the two beer spots."

Jen Lee said coldly: "Yes, I suppose so."

Jardinn nodded. "Okay. Now we come to something else. Some time between one-thirty and two-fifteen, this afternoon, a cutter named Ramsey Bennett was murdered—in his cutting coop."

The actress rested her head against the back of the divan and closed her eyes. She was breathing quickly and was pale.

"All these terrible things," she murmured. "The accident to Ruth McLean, then the earthquake—and Alan dead. And now a murder—"

Jardinn said steadily: "And between the accident to Ruth McLean and the earthquake something else happened."

Jen Lee opened her eyes slightly. Jardinn was smiling a little.

"Phil Rainey sent a killer named Carrow to my office to shoot me silent. Know why?"

The actress closed her eyes and shivered. She shook her head slightly.

"Because I'd made a crooked cop come through with the truth. Ruth McLean didn't die in an accident. She was murdered. So when Rainey found the cop had talked they finished him off in a vacant lot soon after. And Carrow came for me. He would have got me, but the earthquake got him instead."

Jen Lee leaned forward, touched her lips again with the tiny handkerchief.

Jardinn said: "That half interest he wants passed from Ruth to Alan to you. What I'm getting at is this—did Ramsey Bennett figure in this in any way?"

Jen Lee opened her eyes slowly. She said in a weak voice: "It's all so terrible about Bennett. I'm sure I don't know. He was just a film cutter. I don't think I'd ever met him."

Jardinn drew a deep breath. "Okay. I'm not trying to hang *every* murder in the city on Phil Rainey. But I wanted to talk to you about him."

The actress said more steadily: "Are you sure Phil—Mr. Rainey did the things you—"

Jardinn stood up and looked down at Jen Lee. "You're lying," he said coldly. "You haven't just *heard* of Phil Rainey. You *know* him."

She rose and stood erect, her hands clenched at her sides. There were spots of red in her cheeks and her eyes held rage.

"Damn you, Jardinn!" Her voice was low and fierce. "You can't drag me into this! I'm just getting a start in pictures. Because Alan McLean loved me, even though I didn't love him—because he wanted to leave me everything he owned—I won't be dragged down! I won't be—"

"Never mind the acting," Jardinn said. "If you don't want to help me—sit on the spot alone."

The rage died slowly from her eyes. She dropped on the divan, and leaned back, her hands at her sides, unclenching. After a few seconds she spoke softly.

"What do you mean—I'm on the spot?"

Jardinn stood looking down at her. "Did Phil Rainey know Al McLean was crazy about you, had left you everything?"

She looked at him for several seconds. Then, slowly, she nodded her head. "I've been out with Rainey three times," she said in a dull voice. "I'd been warned against him, but there was something about him—"

Jardinn cut in: "I know what he does to women. And you told him McLean had made a will leaving things to you?"

She nodded. "I didn't mean to. Alan had just told me. I thought it was funny. That night I was out late with Phil Rainey. I didn't know there was any connection between Alan and Phil—any financial connection. After a few drinks I told him what McLean had told me—that he was naming me in his will. Phil just laughed."

"Sure. It was funny all right." Jardinn's voice was very grim. "I can't *prove* a thing on Rainey—not yet. He hates me, and he'd fight me to the finish, and win. But he murdered Ruth McLean because he couldn't buy her. Maybe he thought he could buy Alan McLean, or do something else. And then he heard that McLean was leaving everything to you, because he'd fallen for you. And while he was thinking that over the quake got McLean, and left you sitting on a nice warm spot."

Jen Lee said in a firmer voice: "I don't want that half interest. I don't want anything of McLean's. I didn't love him. I can tell the court that."

Jardinn shook his head. "Don't be a fool," he said. "You're not even featured in pictures yet. You might flop."

She shivered. "But you tell me that Rainey is a murderer—"

Jardinn smiled coldly. "You have got looks. You're a little scared now, but you're not so dumb as you're acting. Sit on the warm spot and wait. If things get *too* tough—sell out cheap. But wait until you see how tough they get."

She spoke anxiously. "Do you think I need a bodyguard?"

Jardinn tapped ashes from his cigarette. "What for?" he asked. "Rainey has a couple of them, and they shoot straight as hell."

The girl covered her face with her hands and made a smothered sound.

Jardinn stood looking down at her, his dark eyes almost closed. The fingers of his left hand tapped the gray of his trouser material.

She took her hands away from her face, and looked up at him.

Her makeup was smeared a little; she was very pale.

"I'd feel better if I were a client of yours, Mr. Jardinn."

Jardinn shook his head. "That would only make things worse. Rainey knows how much I know. He knows I can't prove anything—not yet. But he doesn't feel comfortable. He'd know I was sticking close to you. And that might make him move faster."

She rose unsteadily, and Jardinn got his fingers around her right arm, just below the elbow. "Listen, Jen," he said very coldly. "You wouldn't be running to Rainey and opening and closing your mouth, would you?"

She pushed him away. "Take your hands off me!" she snapped. "I'm going to my lawyers—"

Jardinn smiled grimly. "Be terribly careful," he advised. "Careful what you tell them. Even a law firm with four names can't stop a killer's choppers."

Jen Lee moaned and her knees buckled under her. As she slipped downward Jardinn caught her roughly in his arms. He stood motionless, holding her and smelling too much perfume.

The studio floor started to move slowly—to shiver gently from side to side. Things overhead made a creaking sound.

"Another one of those damn' shakes!" Jardinn muttered.

Men were shouting to each other. Something somewhere beyond crashed to the floor. Jardinn turned his head and watched the water in a glass on the long table swing from side to side. The actress was a dead weight in his arms, so he let her slip gently to the polished floor of the set. After a few seconds the swaying and creaking stopped.

Jardinn leaned over and lifted Jen Lee to the divan. A tall man with hornrimmed glasses came along and widened his eyes on the actress' figure. His lips made a clicking sound as he looked at Jardinn.

"It's Miss Lee," he stated in a deep voice. "The earthquake shock cause the faint?"

"Sure—women are like that," Jardinn said. "Grab some water for her, will you?"

While the tall man was moving towards the elaborately set table to get the water, Jardinn walked rapidly off the set. Outside the sound stage, in the hot sunlight, two gaily uniformed soldiers of some king were talking.

Jardinn passed near the shorter of the two, who was saying: "I've always figured she was a better liar than actress."

Jardinn smiled narrowly. "It's an idea," he breathed softly and moved away.

IV

Mack Cosden frowned down at his polished shoes. He tapped

a pencil on his desk, frowned up at Jardinn. "Three dead in the earthquake and now this murder. Police all over the place. Learn anything, Ben?"

Jardinn shook his head. "Not a thing," he replied. "You got off lucky, Cosden. If the studio had been in Long Beach there would have been hell to pay."

Cosden grunted. "Bennett was one of my best cutters. He was a quiet chap. We gave him our most difficult and important negatives. He did developing once in a while, too, if it was a very special job."

Jardinn said very quietly: "I've been talking to some of the camera crew on the *Lost Metropolis* set. They tell me that when the first—the big shake came—they were shooting. The lights went out and everyone headed for the sound doors. There was a lot of excitement in the darkness. The cameramen ran for it, too. But the camera kept on working until a bulb blew.

"They discovered that when they looked the camera over, after coming back to the stage again. Boyd, the director, figured they must have photographed some of the excitement, as there was a dim light for about ten seconds until everything went out. The footage register showed the camera had turned over for about fifteen seconds."

The camera department boss looked narrowly at Jardinn.

"Yeah, we thought maybe we had something. A shot of things falling and the boys running for it. The set was a tricky one—a lot of structural stuff, some of it heavy. It smashed all over the place. Just chance that it didn't crack the camera."

Jardinn said tonelessly: "Alan McLean was killed on that set, wasn't he?"

Cosden nodded. "That was one of the things we figured the camera must have shot," he replied. "We wanted to see how it happened, although it would have been pretty gruesome stuff to run in the projection room. But he was found lying about six feet from the camera, in front of it. Head battered in. A heavy column near him and some other stuff off to one side. I turned that film over to Ramsey Bennett for developing and cutting. Not that it needed to be cut, but he could have trimmed off the few scenes that had been shot before."

Jardinn yawned. "No good?"

Cosden shook his head and looked at the chewed tip of his cigar.

"Too dark—didn't show a thing. I asked Ramsey about it personally. We were all interested. He said he didn't get a thing. He threw the stuff away. It was a tough break."

"How about the stuff shot just before?"

Cosden nodded. "That was

okay. Ramsey just cut the dark stuff off. We're using the other shots."

Jardinn looked at a still of Greta Harpa that hung behind and above the camera department head's desk.

"You couldn't use the scene they had started to shoot just before the shiver came along, could you?" he asked.

Cosden looked puzzled. "You getting at something? The scene had run only about five seconds. It wasn't anything much—just a meeting between a couple of characters. They had discovered each other, and one of them was saying: 'You, Steponson!' Then the shock came. Everything stopped. Bill Cary, who was playing Steponson, yells: 'Good God! It's a quake!' We hear a couple of other shouts and the sound of things crackling. Then it went dark. That's where Ramsey Bennett cut out the dead stuff."

"Okay—he was a good man," Jardinn said thoughtfully. "Quiet and efficient. He developed this film, because you thought it was important. He let you have all that was any good."

Cosden frowned. "Sure."

Jardinn spoke slowly. "Even if the stage was so dark that the camera didn't photograph after a certain second—how about the *sound?* The mechanism must have picked that up. Wouldn't that have been worth *hearing,* even if you couldn't *see* anything?"

Cosden whistled softly. "Sure it would have," he muttered. "I wonder why in hell Bennett—" He broke off, stood up. Then he shook his head.

"The sound must have gone bad, too. Though the sound track wasn't damaged much. But then, Bennett was a good man, Jardinn. He knew his film stuff. He said the camera didn't get anything. Maybe the sound was all a jumble. And not enough light for the camera. So he scrapped it."

"Where would he scrap it?"

Cosden stood up. "What are you after, Jardinn? That film is inflammable. The stuff not wanted is tossed in special metal boxes and burned in the big incinerator every night."

Jardinn swore softly. "You didn't know Ramsey Bennett very well, personally?"

The camera department boss frowned at the detective. "Don't think anyone did. He was a quiet man, lived alone. No relatives around here. I think he told me his parents were dead. Only one thing besides pictures was on his mind. He wanted a small boat—one big enough to cruise along the Pacific Coast in. South America, and that sort of thing. He was saving his money for that, but he figured he'd be working another ten years or so. He wanted to retire, you see?"

Jardinn nodded. "Okay and thanks. Wouldn't mind doing the cruise stuff myself, until these damned shocks get over." He smiled and moved towards the door of Cosden's office.

"What was the point of the questions, Ben?" the camera boss asked.

Jardinn shrugged, reached the door that led to a camera department corridor. "Just questions. Bennett was murdered, so I'd like to know all I can about him. Sometimes murderers have reasons for killing."

He opened the door and went outside. Closing the door behind him he stood for several seconds, thinking. Then he went along the corridor and outside of the camera building. At the nearest phone booth he called his office, his features tight with strain.

Bridget Callahan said: "Hello, Ben. That last shake seems to have cracked the pint flask—the one in your lower drawer."

Yeah—how'd you find that out?"

Bridget chuckled. "I got scared and needed stimulation. The stuff's leaking through the crack so I guess I'll have to drink what's left."

"If you do I'll brain you," Jardinn said grimly. "Anything new?"

Bridget's voice was calm. "A Mr. Phil Rainey came in to see you. He said he'd try again."

Jardinn was silent for several seconds. "He didn't say anything else?"

"That was all he said," Bridget replied. "He was smiling when he said it."

Jardinn tapped a finger against the phone mouthpiece. "Must have been in a good humor," he replied. "Did you say I might be in this afternoon?"

"I told him you might be along around six. He grinned and said *he* might be along, too."

Jardinn stopped tapping the phone. "Nothing else happened?"

Bridget said in a serious voice, "He's a cold-looking man, Ben. Please be careful."

"It's a habit I accumulated," he replied. "Call the Hollywood Ticket Agency and get a couple of good seats for *Dinner at Ten*. Birthday party for you, tomorrow night. We'll have dinner at eight somewhere."

"But my birthday is over," Bridget said. "And I got flowers for you to give to me."

Jardinn chuckled. "We'll catch up with it, and there may be a full moon. After the theater we'll drive into the big pine country, and—will *that* be romance!"

Bridget snorted. "Romance would have to hit you over the head with a blackjack and announce itself three times—before you got the name, Ben."

"You won't go with me?"

"Sure," she replied. "It'll be a free show, anyway."

Jardinn hung up and went from the booth. He walked up the studio street, turned to the left and reached the line of cutters' rooms. Sergeant Bedford stood near the opened door, and Jeff Lane, the fingerprint expert, stood besides him.

"Get anything?" Jardinn asked.

Lane shook his head. "The only prints in there are Bennett's. I'd say whoever smashed his skull in got him from behind with one wallop, and then walked out."

Sergeant Bedford nodded. "And he didn't have an enemy," he said cheerfully.

The body of Bennett had been removed. Jardinn looked at Bedford.

"You through in there? Completely through?"

Bedford nodded again. "All finished. The lieutenant and me, we gave it a good going over. Got some photographs and all that. Jeff did the print stuff. The room is yours, Jardinn."

The fingerprint expert said: "I'm going along. You coming my way, Sergeant, or are you sticking around?"

"I'm going out to the front office, anyway," said Bedford. He looked at Jardinn. "If you get anything let me know, will you?"

Jardinn smiled faintly. "Sure. I'm getting too old to make pinches of killers myself."

Bedford sniffled. "I'm going on vacation in ten days. So it'll have to be before then."

"How late will you be on duty tonight?"

The sergeant narrowed his eyes. "I'm through at seven, but I can stick around until quarter after if you think you can turn up the murderer by then."

Jardinn nodded. "I think so. I'll call you before seven."

Bedford looked at Jeff Lane, and both of them looked at Jardinn. Bedford's eyebrows were raised.

"If you got any ideas—maybe I can help," he suggested.

Jardinn shook his head. "I've got ideas, but you can't help," he said simply and went into the cutting room of the murdered Bennett.

V

It was ten minutes of five when Brayden Gracie, Al Sneedon and Ben Jardinn went into Number Four projection room.

"You spoke to the operator, Mr. Gracie?" asked Jardinn.

Gracie was short and thickset. His eyes were keen, gray. "He understands perfectly," he answered crisply.

They sat in comfortable leather chairs at the rear of the small, narrow room, facing the screen at the far end. The lights dimmed as Gracie pressed a button.

"I wanted you here, Al," Jardinn said, "because you know

about everyone in the studio—working here, I mean. And you were on the *Lost Metropolis* set when the quake hit. I found this strip of developed film in Bennett's room. It was rolled inside of a cigarette tin—one of the kind that holds fifty cigarettes standing on end. The tin was behind the film can rack, pretty well hidden. It was over a half hour before I got to it. The film shows that Alan McLean was murdered—and how."

Brayden Gracie said sharply: "I'm ready." He leaned forward and pressed a button that buzzed in the operator's room, above and behind them.

The screen showed the camera shooting on a slate with a number on it. The words *Lost Metropolis* appeared. There were sounds of voices and a man not photographed said: "All right, let's make this meeting a good one now. Both of you are surprised. It's a weird setting. You haven't seen each other for years. Okay."

The slate was jerked away and the camera was shooting on some sort of an excavation. There were ornamental pillars around, with masks hanging from them. The camera was shooting on the empty scene as the unseen voice said: "Quiet please, everybody! All right—camera!"

Gracie said, his head close to Jardinn's but his eyes on the screen at the end of the projection room: "That's the director speaking."

Jardinn nodded. The lighting of the scene was not sharp, bright. Two figures came into view, from behind the tall pillars. They discovered each other and one said in a tone of surprise: "You, Steponson?"

Al Sneedon whispered: "Here is where the quake hit!"

The sound coming from the screen was suddenly the sound of material creaking. There was a rumbling noise. One of the two characters turned towards the camera, fear in his eyes. He said hoarsely: "Good God! It's a quake!"

"That's Bill Cary," said Sneedon.

The sound tract of the film was making a terrible racket now. Jardinn said, above the screen noise: "Watch—now!"

Men were running past the camera. The two actors hurried out of the scene. A script girl ran past. A column fell with a crash. The lighting of the scene was suddenly very poor. Material was falling all around, and there was still enough light to distinguish the set. Two more figures hurried past the camera.

"The camera crew had quit," Jardinn said, "but the camera was still shooting. Now—"

A figure came into the camera's range, limping. For a brief second the man's face was turned towards the camera.

"Alan McLean!" cried Gracie.

"He's limping—hit by something—" said Jardinn.

The lighting of the screen became dimmer. There were the sounds of things crashing all around. In the faint light McLean came towards the camera, stepping over some wreckage. And then another figure was in the scene. The man's back was to the camera; he was beside McLean. His hands suddenly were lifted high above his head. They came down forward, swiftly. His body swung aside, moved from the scene. Faintly the body of Alan McLean could be seen sprawled amid the wreckage. Then the screen in the projection room was nothing but a black blur. Sound died—yellow color flooded the screen.

Gracie said huskily: "Good God! He struck down McLean!"

"He *murdered* Alan McLean," Jardinn said grimly. "With a brick or some piece of wreckage he picked up. You thought McLean's head was crushed by something that fell. But it was murder. You can rest assured of that."

Al Sneedon muttered: "Murder! The others had got clear, but McLean had been hurt. I remember; he was standing out of the scene to the left. When things started to sway I ran for the sound doors, behind the camera. He was trying for the other doors."

"Who killed him, Sneedon?" said Gracie.

"We can run it more slowly," Jardinn said softly. "You get only a flash of his face, and the light is very bad. We can run it a lot of times. I want to know who that man is."

"I couldn't recognize him—that time," said Sneedon.

Gracie said slowly: "Before we run this again—why was McLean struck down? And if you found this film in Bennett's cutting room why didn't he come to me with it? Why did he hide it?"

Jardinn flared a match to a cigarette tip. "You're shooting the questions too fast, Mr. Gracie. One thing seems certain. Your cutter, Bennett, was murdered *because of* this film. The murderer knew it existed."

"Then it must have been the same one," Al Sneedon said excitedly. "The one who killed Alan McLean learned afterward that the camera had kept on turning—had got something. He found that Bennett had developed it, had it in the cutting room—the film. So he murdered Bennett, to get the film."

"It's an idea, Al," Jardinn said calmly.

Brayden Gracie was breathing heavily. "I've been a studio manager for ten years, but I've never—"

Jardinn cut in: "We'll run this film again and again. Try to recognize the killer's face. Try

that first. Then the body movement, the clothes. Al, you try to remember who was on the set. A visitor, watching—one of the mechanical crew. One of the actors."

"Right," Sneedon said. "I'll burn my eyes out, trying."

The studio manager spoke more calmly: "Who would want to strike McLean down that way? And why?"

Jardinn inhaled deeply. "Whoever struck him down that way was a fast thinker. He was hating McLean. He wanted to kill him. But he couldn't *plan* an earthquake. He simply saw an opportunity. The others off the set, which was pretty dark, were running in panic. And McLean was hurt, trying to get clear, limping. If he could slam McLean down, crush his head, the quake would be blamed. And this killer did it, not realizing the camera was turning over and being in at the death."

Gracie drew a deep breath. "The trouble is—it was a dark death," he muttered. "The scene wasn't lighted. Most of the arcs and tin cans were out."

Al Sneedon muttered: "The thing I can't figure is why Ramsey Bennett didn't speak up. He developed the film, so he couldn't have missed the scene. And why was it hidden in the cigarette box?"

"Let *me* worry about that," Jardinn said simply. "I'm being paid for it. You try to recognize this killer. Then we'll be getting places." He stood up. "I'm going out and look over the names of those who came into the studio on pass, and I've got some other things to do. I'll be back in fifteen minutes or so."

Gracie nodded, pressed a button. He spoke through a phone on the control desk to the operator in the booth. "Run it more slowly and cut the sound effects down a little." He hung up.

Al Sneedon looked up at Jardinn. "We don't actually *see* whatever that man has in his hands hit McLean's head. It looks like murder, but there might be a slip-up."

Jardinn smiled grimly. "The picture isn't evidence. It's more than circumstantial, but it isn't absolute evidence. That's why we've got to find the man who *seemed* to be murdering McLean. After we find him—" He made a swift gesture with both hands, palms up.

"It was murder, all right," Garcie said. "But *why* it was murder—" He broke off.

Jardinn said, as he moved towards the door of the projection room: "It's easier to figure why Ramsey Bennett was killed. Murder breeds murder. Name me that killer on the screen, and I'll play detective in a way that may *mean* something."

Gracie grunted. "If we can

spot that man you won't *have* to play detective, Jardinn."

Jardinn leaned a shoulder against the sound door of the projection room. "Wrong, Mr. Gracie. I may even have to change the rules of the game, and play faster and dirtier."

He shoved open the door and went out into the sun. He walked rapidly to the front office and looked over a list of names ready for him. None of them meant anything. When he came out of the waiting room Bill Bright, one of his operators, was leaning against the corridor wall and looking sleepy.

Jardinn walked slowly past the tall, sandy-haired operator, dropped a package of cigarettes near his feet and leaned over.

"Men's room, behind Stage One," he said softly.

He picked up the cigarettes, went out a back door to the lot. Stage One was nearest the front office, which held the row of executive offices. When he got inside he made sure he was the only one present. After a few minutes Bright came in and shut the door.

"I phoned you over because things are looking like a break," Jardinn said. His voice was low. "Ramsey Bennett was murdered because he had some footage shot by a runaway camera during the earthquake. A man murdered in front of the camera and found out after that the camera had been turning over. He didn't know whether the film was dark or not. McLean, the assistant director, was thought to have been killed by a falling pillar, on the set. The film makes it look different. The film's been developed for a couple of days, but Bennett didn't say anything about what he must have seen."

"Uh-huh. Why didn't he?" asked Bright.

Jardinn softened a cigarette between his fingers by rolling it.

"Maybe he wasn't such a swell guy as everyone around here thought. Maybe he wanted a yacht, and didn't want to work ten more years in order to be able to get it. He had a strip of film that showed something. So instead of yelping about it to the world he just sat tight. Or maybe he said something about it to someone it hurt."

"Uh-huh. Tried blackmail and got the works."

Jardinn shrugged. "Something like that, maybe. McLean had been left a half interest in Phil Rainey's beer layouts. He got killed. A gal named Jen Lee, working here in the studio, gets the half interest now. She's scared."

"Uh-huh. Maybe she figures the way you do," said Bright.

Jardinn stuck the cigarette between his lips. "*How* do I figure, Bill?" he asked softly.

Bright smiled a half smile. "Rainey wants the half interest

without paying for it. Ruth McLean dies. Alan McLean died. This cutter gets in the way and gets careless with his blackmail ask. He dies. And now this Lee gal rates the beer interest, when the will is okayed. So she's scared."

Jardinn grinned. "I'll be turning the agency over to you pretty soon. You're learning. There's only one thing wrong with your thinking I figure that way."

"What's that?" Bright said.

Jardinn stopped smiling. "I *don't* figure that way," he replied.

Bright said nothing. Jardinn looked at his wrist-watch.

"It's quarter after five. This Jen Lee picture unit is winding up at six. She's scared and she wants to make some statements. I told her at first I wouldn't take her as a client, because Rainey hates my insides and that would only put her in a spot. A little later I got soft. She came to me again, begged me to protect her. I'll take her over to the office at six."

"Bridget won't like that," said Bright.

Jardinn grinned. "I want you outside, sitting in a car. I'll make sure that Rainey isn't there before I take her up. When Rainey *does* come along—you come right up behind him, unless the girl and myself are out by the time he gets there. In that case just see how long he stays upstairs, and then call me at the apartment. Don't stick around after seven, if we got out before Rainey shows."

"Uh-huh. And what makes you think Rainey'll show?"

"He told Bridget he'd drop back," Jardinn replied.

Bright grunted. "It's a dumb stunt—walking in on you and the girl he's got scared, isn't it?"

Jardinn smiled coldly. "If it is, Bill," he said gently, "it'll be the first dumb one Phil Rainey had pulled in a long, long time."

VI

Brayden Gracie shook his head and frowned. "It's no use," he stated emphatically. "We ran it ten times and I've had it over a cutter's light. We can't recognize the features. The head was in a dark spot when he turned. He seems to be a fairly tall man, and not very big. But we might be wrong on that. We can get the movements of the arms and hands, when he raises them. It looks as though he was battering something on poor McLean's head. Then he's away—and McLean is on the floor. A figure is on the floor, anyway. It looks like murder, all right. But who did it?"

"From all I can see," Al Sneedon said, "it might have been one of a dozen men on that set. Or it might have been someone who just walked in. But the light

just wasn't good enough to distinguish anything definitely. Nothing but the movement. That looks like murder."

Jardinn's face was expressionless. "All right," he said. "The projection man understands he's not to talk. You won't talk, Al. And Mr. Gracie—"

The business manager shrugged. "We called you in. My only doubt is whether the police shouldn't be informed."

"I'd like until noon tomorrow, Mr. Gracie. If nothing turns up by that time—"

The business manager nodded. "You found the strip of film. I think you're entitled to run things as you wish, for a while. But the studio wants this killer. McLean — and Bennett. Both murdered, probably by the same man! Both with their heads crushed."

"I've got to get moving," Jardinn said. "I'll report anything new, Mr. Gracie."

He smiled at Al Sneedon, moved along the studio street towards Stage Eight. Inside the stage there was a lot of confusion. The set was supposed to be a platform of the Twenty-third Street subway station, in New York. There were fifty or sixty extras moving around, and it took Jardinn almost ten minutes to find Jen Lee.

She was sitting in a corner of a room that had been shoved aside to make space for the subway platform set. When she saw Jardinn a faint smile showed on her face. He went to her side, smiled down at her upturned face.

"Feel better?" he asked. "No more faints?"

She shook her head. "I feel better now that you have changed your mind and will help me."

He grinned. "To tell the truth, I suspected you might be lying, when I first talked to you," he said. "But something's turned up that's made me change my mind."

Her eyes widened. "Something important?"

Jardinn nodded. "Pretty important," he replied. "Think you're going to be late here?"

She shook her head. "One more scene. We've had two takes of it already. I don't think it will be long, now. And I'm anxious to make a statement for you—about my friendship with Alan McLean. Then, if I'm dragged into this—" She broke off, shaking her head slowly.

Jardinn smiled down at her. "We'll get it all typed and signed, and then I'll call the man I want to stay near you into the office. He's a nice chap. Tomorrow you can have your lawyers offer to sell out to Rainey, when the will has been probated, of course, and that half interest is really yours."

Jen Lee touched her hair with fingers that were shaking a little.

"I wish Alan hadn't left anything to me. I thought we were only good friends. I thought he'd get over acting so foolish, and understand I didn't love him."

"Some men are funny that way."

There was a little silence, then the girl spoke in a soft voice. "Did you learn anything about the killing of the cutter, Mr. Bennett?"

Jardinn shook his head. "Not a thing. But the police are on that, too. I'm more anxious to see that you don't get in too hot a spot."

She shivered slightly. "I can hardly believe that Rainey would want to—" Her voice broke. "He was so nice to me the few times I saw him. And he's an older man. I felt that I could talk to him. That was why I told him about Alan leaving me everything."

"Yeah, I know," said Jardinn.

A voice called loudly: "Everybody on the set make it fast—last take. Miss Jarrett, Mr. Kirk —on the set, please. Miss Lee—"

Jen Lee rose, opened a square, black box and looked into the mirror on the inside. She did something with her lips, put powder on her face. An effeminate looking man came along. He had a large black box-like bag in his right hand.

"Hair all right, Jen?" he called, smiling beautifully.

She nodded. "All right, thanks."

He went along, almost skipping. Jen Lee closed the makeup bag, placed it on the chair on which she had been sitting.

"I'll be around," Jardinn said. "If I go away, I'll be back in five minutes."

She nodded, and suddenly fear crept into her eyes. "You think I'll be safe on the set."

Jardinn swore cheerfully. "Sure. The spot isn't that hot, and we can make it cool."

She flashed him a grateful smile, and moved towards the subway platform and the camera that was on the crance. The extras were grouped on the platform and there was a fake but realistic train at one end of it.

Jardinn smoked a cigarette for a minute or so. The director called, somewhere near the camera, which was shut from his sight by the extras: "Quiet, please. You people listen to me."

Jardinn reached down and picked up Jen Lee's makeup box. He moved through a door of the room set, and turned to the left. Leaning against the wall of another room he opened the box.

When he got below makeup stuff he found a dollar bill and a quarter. There was a slip of paper with a telephone number on it. Jardinn read the number and smiled. That particular gent was very cheap and very tricky. Something was folded under a thin

layer of powder that had escaped from a box. He unfolded it. It was a pawn ticket for a lady's watch. Five dollars had been loaned.

Jardinn got things back in the right spots, closed the box. Casually he went to the other room, and placed it on the chair.

While the scene was being shot he went to a water cooler and got a drink. The cooler was at the far end of the stage and it took a few minutes. On his way back he heard someone call: "That's all for today. Tomorrow at eight. Exterior on the back lot—Edith's yacht. Got that, people? Edith's yacht!"

When Jen Lee reached his side he smiled at her. "What kind of a picture is it?" he asked.

She stood very still and narrowed her blue eyes on his. "Don't talk about it. There's a murder in it." Her lips trembled a little.

Jardinn grinned. "There's a murder in most of them," he said.

She drew a deep breath. "I don't see how you can smile that way. When you think—Alan McLean killed in the earthquake and Ramsey Bennett murdered."

"Sorry. I know how you feel, but murder is a business with me."

Jen Lee lifted her makeup box and said unsteadily: "I've got to change. Will you come to the dressing-rooms?"

He nodded. "I'll be glad to."

They moved away from the set towards sliding doors that had been opened. In the fading sunlight Jen Lee didn't look as young or as nice as she had on the set. When they reached the dressing-room line Jardinn looked at his wrist watch. "Six-five," he said. "I'll wander around here."

She smiled wearily and left him. Jardinn went across to a telephone booth and called his office. Bridget's voice was businesslike. "Benjamin Jardinn Agency."

"I hope so. Did you get the tickets?"

"Third row, right center," said Bridget.

Jardinn swore cheerfuly. "Good. Phil Rainey turn up for the second time yet?"

Bridget's voice was suddenly changed. "No, but listen, Ben. Don't come over here tonight."

"Why?" he asked into the phone.

"I don't like the way he looked when he said he'd try again." Her voice was low. Jardinn looked out through the glass of the booth at the end of the dressing-room line. A big Lincoln went past with a beauty and a sheep dog in the rear seat.

"What was the matter with him? Wrong color in his tie?"

"Ben, don't joke. He may know about—" She stopped.

Jardinn swore at her. "Don't

get that habit of starting things and leaving them in the air. Rainey may know *what?*"

"That you're out to get him," she said in an unsteady voice.

Jardinn grunted. "He's known that for weeks. I'm all right, Sweet. I've got to come over. Fixing something up for a client —a frightened client."

Bridget said: "Male or female?"

Jardinn chuckled. "Run along home so you won't know." His tone changed. "I mean it, Sweet. Clear out. And lock the door this time."

Her voice was anxious. "Ben, you won't be foolish, will you?"

Jardinn said: "Only about you. You're so beautiful! If I could only kiss your lips, your eyes, your neck, your hair! And get the hell away from the office, right now, will you?"

He hung up, walked out of the booth. After ten minutes or so Jen Lee came from the dressing-room. He went to her. She was wearing a blue sport costume, with a small blue hat and blue gloves. She seemed softer.

"What's the matter — been crying?" he asked, looking at her eyes.

She nodded. "Scared, I guess. Nervous. I wish I'd never met Phil Rainey."

Jardinn took her by the arm and they walked towards the main gate of the studio.

"A lot of humans have wished that one," he said. "Trouble is— most of them start wishing too late. He's a tough gentleman to go up against. Smooth and genial, and particularly nice to the ladies."

He felt her body tremble a little. They reached the main gate and went outside the studio.

"I've got a small car parked a half block away," Jardinn said. "How about yours?"

"I'd rather ride with you. My chauffeur will wait."

"Okay," said Jardinn.

He led her across the street. When they climbed into the car he reached in his right suit coat pocket and took out a cigarette tin. Jen Lee looked at it as he placed it on the car floor, near his feet.

"Bang against you, in my pocket," he said with a smile, and got the car moving.

"Like them that way—those round tins?" she asked.

Jardinn nodded. "Keeps them fresh," he replied.

They drove to Vine Street and turned right towards Hollywood Boulevard. The actress spoke in a steadier voice. "I can't get over what you told me about Rainey. He murdered Ruth McLean, and had a policeman who had talked to you—had him murdered, too. Why, he might have murdered Alan McLean, if the earthquake—" She broke off, shivered.

Jardinn went to the left of a beer truck, passed it. "Can't

prove what I've told you," he said. "But I'm damned sure that's the way it happened. Rainey never paid for anything he wanted, if he could get it another way. Carrow had me a few seconds from death, when that big shake came. A bullet from his gun clipped me, at that."

Jen Lee shook her head slowly, and her eyes looked frightened. "If he went to the police—"

Jardinn smiled grimly. "The police have their hands full, with this quake. I haven't any proof. Rainey has a lot of money. And he isn't frightened by third-degree threats. He'd never talk."

They reached Hollywood Boulevard and turned to the left. When they got near the office building of the agency Jardinn found a parking space, pulled the car to the curb. He slipped the cigarette tin into a pocket. They walked a half block until they reached the frame and brick building of the office.

"Place is pretty much of a wreck inside," Jardinn said. "But it's been examined. It won't tumble over."

He stopped and lighted a cigarette, looking along the curb near the office building. The car of Bill Bright wasn't around. He took Jen Lee by an arm and they went into the building entrance and started up the wooden stairs.

On the first floor she halted and looked around at the cracked and fallen plaster. "It's a wonder the building stood up. What's on the floors above?"

Jardinn grinned. "No heavy machinery to fall through if we get another bad shake. Just empty offices. Building isn't very swanky. I'm the only occupant, except for a lawyer who never seems to be around."

They moved on to the office door. Jardinn used a key, shoved the door open. Jen Lee went in. There was a slip of paper on Bridget Callahan's desk and as the door swung closed behind them Jardinn lifted it and read: "The other Eldridge is in the lower left drawer. For God's sake be careful."

He tore the slip of paper into small bits, and let them slip into the waste-paper basket. He smiled at Jen Lee.

"It's about Eldridge," he said. Walking to the door of the inner office, he opened it, stepped aside. The actress went in and Jardinn gestured towards the most comfortable of the chairs.

Jen Lee seated herself with her back to the boulevard window. Jardinn switched on the overhead lights, and sat down behind his desk. He smiled at the girl.

"Like a touch of Scotch?"

She shook her head. "Thanks, no."

Jardinn's smile broadened. "Swell for the nerves."

"No, please. I'll wait until I get home."

She looked around the room. Jardinn poured one still drink into a small glass and lifted it.

"To your career, Jen," he said in an amused tone and tossed off the drink.

Her eyes were narrowed on his. Jardinn chuckled and put the decanter and glass back in the lower left drawer. Eldridge gleamed a dull blue in the office light. He closed the drawer most of the way. The bell of the outside phone rang and Jardinn lifted the receiver.

It was Bill Bright's voice. "Jardinn? Are you all right?" he asked.

"Sure. Why not? You know I'm indestructible."

Bright spoke rapidly. "I was parked outside when two guys climbed in the car. One put a gun on me and told me to drive or take a load of lead. I drove out Hollywood, over to Sunset and out Sunset to Beverly. Then up into the hills. I'm about twelve miles from the office, and they've got the car. I got to a house to call you."

"Ever see the men before?"

"I've got their descriptions, but you'd better get away from the office."

"Why?" asked Jardinn.

Bright swore. "They knew I was working with you—and they pulled me away. You'd better get clear."

"Come on in as soon as you can, but don't rush a report of the stolen car. And don't kill yourself getting here."

Bright's tone was anxious. "Listen, Ben. You get the hell away from the office."

Jardinn smiled at Jen Lee. "Thanks for calling, Mr. Bright," he said cheerfully, and hung up. He lighted a cigarette, after the girl had refused one.

"A stolen car," he said. His right hand went into a pocket of his suit coat and he put the cigarette tin on the desk before him. "Now, I think the best thing for us to get down on paper is your statement—"

He broke off as the outer door opened. He glanced at Jen Lee. She was staring towards the outer office.

Jardinn lifted the receiver of the telephone and said quietly: "Central, this is Ben Jardinn of the Jardinn Detective Agency. A Philip Rainey just came into my office. Remember that—"

Rainey's voice said from the other room: "Hang up that receiver Jardinn!"

Jardinn hung up. Jen Lee's eyes were wide; her fingertips were trembling against her lips. Jardinn smiled at her.

"It's all right, Jen," he said softly. He spoke in a louder voice: "Come in, Phil."

VII

Rainey came into the room, and closed the inner office door

behind him. He stood with his back to the door and his left hand out of sight in the pocket of his coat, where it made a slight bulge.

"Rainey to you," he said in a hard voice.

He was medium in size and had sharp, gray eyes. He was dressed smartly and his gray felt hat was pulled low over his forehead. His lips were thin and long, and his right hand was slender.

Jardinn swung his desk chair so that he almost faced Rainey. He could see Jen Lee without turning his head. Rainey looked at the girl.

"What did he say on the phone?" he asked.

"He told Central you had just come in."

Jardinn smiled coldly. "I figured she might remember it—after they found the body."

Rainey bared his even teeth in a sneering smile. "And how much will that help *you*?" he asked in the same hard voice.

Jardinn shrugged.

"For God's sake, Phil," Jen Lee said. "Be careful what you do! Let me get out of here!" She half raised, then slumped back.

Rainey narrowed his gray eyes on the girl. "What did you come *in* here for?"

She covered her face with her palms.

"Miss Lee's nervous, Rainey," Jardinn said. "I'll tell you why she came in here. You told her to."

Jen Lee's hands came away from her face. She stared at Jardinn who kept his dark eyes on the half-closed ones of Phil Rainey.

"Yeah?" Rainey said. "Any idea why I did it?"

Jardinn blew a thin stream of smoke to one side. "Sure," he replied. "You wanted to be sure I'd come in here tonight, and you wanted to know about what time."

Rainey smiled, showing his teeth again. "You can't get away with that, Jardinn. It comes down to this—you brought my girl up here."

Jardinn drew a deep breath. "So *that's* the way it's going to work. You found me here with your gal and you shot me in self-defense."

Rainey nodded slowly. "That's the way it's going to work, Mr. Jardinn. With little Jen telling how she was fighting to get away from you, when I came in."

Jardinn looked at the girl. "That'll be swell for your picture career, won't it?"

The girl crossed her legs and smiled. "To hell with my picture career," she said very steadily.

Jardinn nodded. "The acting's off for the day, eh? Jennie Lee gets back to the old days in Columbus, when Phil Rainey was getting his start and she was working with him."

The girl laughed harshly. She looked at Rainey. "Is everything right down below?"

"Yeah." Rainey said. "Doll's down there with a building inspector's badge. He'll keep everybody from entering an unsafe building."

Jardinn shook his head. "Not everybody," he stated quietly.

Rainey looked at him sharply. "Why not?" he demanded.

Jardinn shrugged. "It didn't make any difference—you having Bright pulled away from here. He was just along to act up to Jen. I wanted her to think I was falling for her line. Bright was to be her bodyguard."

The girl said swiftly: "That's a lie, Phil. I had him fooled, all right."

Jardinn smiled coldly. "Not even for ten seconds," he said steadily. "Your face hasn't changed that much in ten years. And I've got a sweet file of clever faces in the outer office. Lady faces are easy."

"You're finished, Jardinn," Rainey said harshly. "You've been in my way too long. You're finished."

Jardinn looked at the left pocket of Rainey's coat. "Okay, that makes two of us. If I were you I'd make a deal."

Rainey sneered with his eyes slitted. "I don't *have* to make a deal," he said tightly.

Jardinn shrugged. "You did for Ruth McLean and a cop. I'll give you the outside on the two. The quake finished off your killer, Carrow. And then there was a slip-up, Rainey."

A street car brought sound into the office. The girl and Rainey kept their eyes on Jardinn.

Jen Lee said: "I think it's in the cigarette tin, Phil—"

Jardinn reached a hand towards the cigarette tin and Rainey said sharply: "Don't."

Jardinn took his hand off the desk.

"Open it up," Rainey said to the girl.

Jen Lee got up and took the cigarette box from the table. She stood near the desk, took the top off. When she lifted the strip of rolled film from inside, Rainey sucked in a sharp breath.

"Nice," he said. "Nice!"

"Yeah, swell," Jardinn said tonelessly. "It shows Alan McLean getting slammed out so that Jen got the half-interest and any other dollars McLean happened to have around. But you had to work him for that will-leave, Jen."

The girl was unrolling the film. Rainey stood with his back to the door and his left hand in his coat pocket.

Jardinn spoke as though reciting a piece. "You finally wangled him around, and got what you wanted. Then it was advisable to get McLean dead. The quake was an opportunity. But there was a slip-up. The camera

ran on and shot the scene. And a cutter named Bennett, who wanted a boat to cruise around in—he saw an opportunity."

Jardinn looked at Rainey. "How much did he want for that roll of film, Rainey?"

Rainey got the Colt from his left-hand pocket and shifted it to his right hand. He held it low, on Jardinn. "I don't get you, Jardinn," he said slowly and steadily.

Jardinn looked at the ceiling. "He had pictures of a murder. He wanted money for them. He wanted to quit his cutting job and drift around in water. So he held you up. Blackmail. And he was murdered."

Rainey said nothing. Jardinn narrowed his eyes on the Colt.

"If Bennett hadn't been murdered I might never have known that McLean was murdered. A kill breeds a kill, Rainey."

The man with his back to the door said harshly: "You're using words, Jardinn."

The girl was holding the unrolled film high. She had the overhead light above it.

"I'll use a few more," Jardinn said quietly, "and then quit. Jen lied to me. She lied about you. She said she'd only seen you a few times. But her big lie was something else. She told a story that she was taking a bath in her apartment when the earthquake hit."

Jen Lee said in a rising tone: "Phil, this film doesn't mean a thing—"

Jardinn smiled. "It certainly doesn't," he agreed. "It's a cut from a horse opera—a horse running down a hill."

Phil Rainey's face showed two red spots. He said hoarsely: "Listen, Jen. If you've sold out—"

Jardinn shook his head. "She didn't sell out, Rainey. She wasn't clever enough. The day of the earthquake she wasn't working. But she came to the studio. She was wearing pants, slacks. She went in to watch Alan McLean work. She hated him. You hated him. That made her hate him. She wanted that half-interest because she wanted you. And she couldn't get it with McLean alive."

The girl was staring at him, breathing heavily. Rainey kept his Colt low and motionless.

"She lied about where she was during the earthquake," Jardinn said quietly. "I caught her on that. She was seen at the studio, a half-hour before the quake. She needed money to hold you. She wasn't making much. She bluffed, but I found a pawn ticket for her watch. And by that time I had her face out of my files."

Jardinn paused. "She saw a chance, and took it, Rainey," he said. "She battered McLean down. Then she learned the camera had run on. So she went to you. While you were figuring

what to do, Bennett, the cutter, went to Jen and told her what he had on the film. A shot of Jen in the kill act. And Jen went to you."

There was silence in the office. Rainey broke it. "It's a swell story, but it don't mean a thing to me," he said slowly.

Jardinn smiled. "The film that shows Jen's face is at the studio, inside of steel. Does *that* mean anything to you, Rainey?"

Rainey shrugged. "I don't see how," he said slowly. His face was suddenly very expressionless. "With you and Jen *both* out of things—Jardinn, you will shoot her, then commit suicide. I'll fix that."

The girl's eyes were staring at Rainey. She cried out bitterly. "Phil, you can't do that! Throw me over, when they got the goods on me—shoot me out—"

Rainey said with contempt: "Shut up! You'd talk before they got you in a cell—"

Jardinn let his left hand drop towards the drawer that held his gun. His legs were drawn back under the chair on which he sat.

The girl screamed: "You killed Bennett, damn you! If you'd paid him off like I wanted—"

Rainey said: "You slut! Shut up!"

Jardinn jerked the drawer open, groped for the gun. Rainey expelled his breath and his Colt jerked. The office filled with sound.

Jen Lee screamed. Pain streaked through Jardinn's right shoulder. He slumped as if he was finished, and apparently Rainey saw it that way. Jardinn had the gun in his left hand as Rainey, swinging away from him, squeezed his Colt again.

The girl moaned and fell to her knees. Jardinn shot with his Colt braced against his left side.

Rainey's legs gave way and he fell as he tried to twist his body towards Jardinn. When he hit the floor Jen Lee was lying on her back. Rainey lay face downward.

Jardinn got the gun from Rainey's spread fingers, holding it by the barrel. He placed it on the desk and went over and looked at the girl. She was dead.

There were footfalls on the stairs, in the hallway. Jardinn faced the door with the gun in his left hand. The voice of Jake Bedford called: "Jardinn—you in there?"

"Yeah—come on in."

The police sergeant, followed by Eddie Grey, his partner, came in. Jardinn put his gun on the desk beside the other.

"How'd you happen to be around?" he asked.

"That gal of yours called us. We just got over. What's here?"

"The girl's dead," Jardinn said simply. "Look at Phil Rainey." He lifted the receiver and called the Vine Street Emergency Hospital.

"Rainey's finished," Bedford said. "Just below the heart. Who got him?"

Jardinn said: "I did, and I'm not sorry." He sat down behind his desk and pressed a handkerchief against his shirt, at the right shoulder.

"We'll let you get patched up," Bedford said, "and then you can give your story to the chief or the D.A. What'll it be?"

"I won't have to. You'll tell it—you and a couple of hunks of lead. The one in my shoulder and that in the girl. Check 'em with lead out of Rainey's gun that has his prints. Mine are on the barrel where I picked it up. Then I couldn't have got my bullet *after* he got his, see?"

"Sure," said Bedford. "That's an easy one—if they check. This is a mess. What's it all about?"

Jardinn smiled wearily. "Rainey always was greedy. He tried to get something for nothing. He used the girl and then didn't back her up. We had the showdown in here. He killed her because he was afraid she would talk."

Bedford grunted. "You had something on the girl?"

Jardinn shook his head. "If she had denied it—I didn't have a thing. A strip of film that wasn't clear enough. But I didn't tell *her* that. And she squealed on him."

The sergeant looked at the bodies and shook his head. "Rainey was a tough gent," he muttered.

Jardinn nodded. "Better send Eddie down tó look for a chap named Doll with a building inspector's badge. Rainey said he'd posted him below to keep people out."

The two policemen looked at each other.

"That's the guy was beating it," Grey said. He left hurriedly.

Jardinn lifted the receiver with his good hand and called Bridget Callahan. When he heard her voice he said: "Listen, Sweet—cancel those seats for tomorrow night. I picked up a hunk of lead. You can sit at the bedside and tell me funny stories."

The wail of the ambulance outside hit his ears above Bridget's questions.

"Not at all serious," he interrupted. "But thanks for putting Eldridge in the drawer."

When he hung up, Bedford said: "Who in hell's Eldridge?"

Jardinn grinned, but didn't answer. A white-coated doctor came into the room and looked around. When he got through bending over Jen Lee and Rainey he stood up and swore.

"Who did all this?" he breathed.

Jardinn said: "*They* did—and one of them sprayed me in the shoulder with a piece of lead. Maybe you're more interested in the living than the dead."

The ambulance doctor grinned

and went to work on Jardinn. "Clean and simple," he announced. "I'm afraid you'll live. Take it easy now."

"Is the bullet still in there?" Jardinn asked.

"Yes. You want it out now?"

Jardinn winced. "No, but be sure to save it for Jake. He wants it for a souvenir."

"I'll get it all right," Bedford growled.

Jardinn nodded. The doctor looked around the room.

"Looks like a movie," he announced.

Jardinn fumbled for a cigarette with his left hand. "Yeah," he said. "And the love interest is lying on the floor."

From an apartment house switchboard redly aglow
one of America's leading storytellers plucks a dark
crime enigma—in the chill, small hours preceding dawn

THE LIGHT AT THREE O'CLOCK

By MacKINLAY KANTOR

In a brand new mystery John J. Malone threads his
way through the nefarious mazes of a crime lexicon for
millionaires, and jousts with death on swift wings

THE FRIGHTENED MILLIONAIRE

By CRAIG RICE

in the next SAINT

bulldog drummond steps in

by . . . H. C. McNeile

To Bulldog Drummond murder in a chill London Square could lead straight to a *danse macabre* in the bright Suffolk sunlight.

THE FRONT DOOR of Number 3, Bridgewater Square opened suddenly, and from it there issued a discordant volume of sound and a large man in evening clothes. At any hour of the day or night such a thing was unusual in that ultra-respectable neighborhood. At two in the morning it was not only unusual but a definite outrage. And yet what else was to be expected when the Dowager Countess of Betterby had been unwise enough to lease her house for the season to Mrs. van Ranton of Baltimore, U.S.A.?

Mrs. van Ranton was a young and vivacious American, whose husband, with a solicitude wholly proper, was cornering something or other in his native city to enable her to keep up appearances in London. Since her devoted spouse was succeeding most admirably, Mrs. van Ranton decided to throw a party. It was to be a party which would linger in the memory of the guests as a knockout, and to do the little lady justice she had succeeded. The large gentleman in eve-

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We cannot, in good conscience, commend this yarn without first issuing a warning to all of Bulldog Drummond's admirers. Don't crowd! We know there are millions of you, but H. C. McNeile has erected a stadium for you, spacious and mystery-tiered, and if your credentials—which we'll examine at the gate—bear a mystery lover's label, a breathtaking entertainment is assured.

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ning clothes who came out of the door of Number 3 and into Bridgewater Square in the middle of a fine July night was Hugh Drummond, wearing a prominent false nose of crimson hue. It has to be truthfully stated that Drummond was quite unaware of his adornment. To say that he was drunk would be a gross exaggeration. But to say that he was sober would also be a gross exaggeration.

The door closed behind him. The noise died down, and for a while he stood there, contemplating the row of empty cars and wondering why he had left the party. Then he remembered, he was on his way home.

A cat joined him—a friendly cat—and at two A.M. in Bridgewater Square a man needs friendship. It proved that life was still extant in an apparently dead world. And Drummond was on the verge of stroking the new arrival when there came from the distance a most unexpected sound. He straightened up and listened. There was no doubt about it. Someone was running, and running fast. And the next moment the runner came in sight, racing along the pavement towards the door of Number 3.

The cat vanished and Drummond awaited the onslaught. It came with an abruptness that left him bewildered. He had a fleeting vision of a white-faced man whose breath was coming in great sobs. He felt a paper thrust into his hands and heard a gasped out sentence—"Take it to Scotland Yard"—and then he was alone again. The runner had disappeared around the other end of the square.

Drummond blinked thoughtfully. From inside Number 3 there still came bursts of hilarity. Why should a man run, in a condition of great distress, through Bridgewater Square in the middle of the night?

To do Drummond justice, there can be little doubt that with sufficient time he could have solved the problem correctly. However, the solution appeared almost at once in the shape of three more men running swiftly towards him.

He put the paper in his pocket and again waited patiently.

"Hey, you!" cried the first of the runners. "Has a guy passed this way?"

"Why," said Drummond solemnly, "should I reveal information of a strictly private nature to a complete stranger?"

"We're wasting valuable time," muttered one of the others. "Can't you see the fellow's tight?"

"An extremely offensive utterance," said Drummond as a window above was flung up, and the voices of happy revellers came to his ears. "Almost libellous. Dear me! How distressing."

It was a *charlotte russe* that

descended from the stratosphere, and it burst by superb chance on the first speaker's head.

"An albatross without a doubt," said Drummond sympathetically. "How true it is that the rain it raineth upon the just and the unjust alike. However, I think it more than likely that there will be an encore. I wish you all a hearty good night."

"Have you seen a man running?" snarled the leader plucking macaroons from his ears.

"You remind me of the old song—'Have you ever seen a dream walking?'" said Drummond reminiscently. "Have you a moment? If so, I will sing it to you. No? Well, perhaps you're right."

He watched them vanish round the corner, and waited till the sound of their footsteps had died away. Then, his hands thrust deep in his trouser pockets, he started to saunter homewards. What story lay behind the runners of Bridgewater Square? Who were the pursuers and who the pursued?

Suddenly it struck him that he had not yet looked at the paper and he paused under a street lamp to do so. It was a dirty little fragment which had obviously been torn hurriedly from a cheap note book, and on it three words were scrawled in pencil: *Rest House, Aldmersham.* And having examined both sides, and satisfied himself that there was nothing more, he replaced it in his pocket and walked on.

The note, on the face of it, seemed a harmless enough communication in all consequence. And yet a man with bursting lungs who was running for his life had deemed it of sufficient importance for Scotland Yard. At which stage of his reflections, Drummond frowned.

Running for his life! If he was any judge of men that was no exaggeration. Why had he done nothing about it? It was true that until the pursuers appeared on the scene it had not struck him that way. Moreover, the man had come and gone so quickly that there had been no time to do anything. But for all that, he had an uneasy twinge of conscience that his form had not been too good, and that his brain had not functioned with its usual speed.

He heard the measured tread of a policeman and veered over to meet him.

"This is most fortunate, officer," he remarked as they met. "I'd like to have a talk with you. And what, may I ask?" he continued, "are you laughing at?"

"Your nose, sir. Most refreshing."

"An unusual epithet to apply to the organ in question," said Drummond with dignity. "It is a poor thing, no doubt, but—"

He paused as his hand encountered the obstruction.

"I begin to understand the reason for your hilarity," he remarked. "I appear to be wearing a false nose."

"I should hope so, sir."

"Precisely what do you mean —you *hope* so?"

"Only, sir, that if it was a real nose you'd be well advised to look upon alcohol as a curse."

"I see what you mean," said Drummond removing the paper covering. "And to tell you the truth I'm constrained to cry touche. As man to man, would you say I was right?"

"Oh no, sir. Slightly skizzled, if you want my honest opinion."

"That accounts for it," said Drummond with great relief. "I feared it might be softening of the brain. Listen, my trusty guardian, unless I'm very much mistaken there's some scoundrelly work afoot. About five minutes ago a man raced through Bridgewater Square, with three others only a few yards behind him. I slowed up the pursuit, but I'd be willing to swear they had designs on his life."

"Your name, sir?" said the policeman curtly, pulling out his note book.

"Hugh Drummond, eighty-seven Half Moon Street."

"Which way were they going?"

"From north to south."

"Would you know them again?"

"I'd know the man they were after and at least one of the other three."

"Thank you, sir. Good night. I'll know where to get you if I want you."

The constable disappeared almost at a run, and Drummond resumed his way.

"Slightly skizzled," he murmured sorrowfully to himself. "Slightly skizzled. And at my time of life. Disgraceful. It must have been the orange juice in that Bronx cocktail. Very dangerous fruit."

It was at ten o'clock the following morning when his servant, Denny, awoke him with his early tea, and the news that two impatient policemen were waiting in the sitting room to have a talk with him.

"One of them is an ordinary pavement-pounder," he added. "The other is that Inspector chap we've worked with in the past."

"Give them something to smoke and drink," said Drummond. "I'll be with them as soon as I've shaved."

Fate had been kind. His hangover was of the mildest and five minutes later he stepped into the sitting room to find Inspector McIver and his friend of last night. Moreover, their faces were grave.

"Good morning, boys," he said. "Dr. Watson's nemesis deduces that developments have occurred."

"Murder, Captain Drum-

mond," said McIver quietly, and Drummond paused with a cigarette halfway to his mouth.

"You don't say!" He stared at the Inspector. "And the victim is the runner of Bridgewater Square?"

"That must, of course, be confirmed later," said McIver. "On the strength of what you told Constable Baxter I'd say it was likely. But you should be able to settle the matter definitely. I'll tell you exactly what happened. Following your information, Baxter went through Bridgewater Square, and along Taunton Street into Milverton Square. Not a soul was in sight, and he was beginning to fear that the trail was cold when he saw something sticking out from an area gate. He walked up to it to find that it was a man's leg. The man was on the steps inside —dead. Across the pavement lay a trail of blood. It was obvious that the body had been dragged from near the gutter to where it was then lying."

"How had he been killed?" asked Drummond quietly.

"Stabbed in three or four places," McIver said. "And of his assailants there was no trace. The square was quite deserted. So Baxter summoned assistance, took the body to the station and here we are. You must realize that if the dead man is your runner of last night—and it seems almost certain that he must be—you are the only man who has seen the murderers. Are there any further details you can give us before you come with us to view the body, which, incidentally, I have not yet examined myself."

Drummond was frowning.

"I'm sorry about this," he said at length. "I blame myself very considerably. Whoever the poor devil is I feel I ought to have prevented it. But, as Baxter has undoubtedly mentioned in his report, I was a bit high last night. And my brain just didn't function with its usual lucidity. I'd been to a party at Mrs. van Ranton—Number three. And it was just as I left that it happened. The pursued man dashed up to me—gave me a slip of paper torn from a notebook with instructions to take it to Scotland Yard."

"Hold on," cried the inpector. "Have you got it?"

In silence Drummond handed the note to McIver. "I was coming to see you this morning about it," he said. "Hello! McIver—you seem excited."

"Aldmersham," muttered the inspector. "I wonder if what I am thinking is possible. Go on, Captain Drummond, and cut it as short as possible. The sooner I see the dead man the sooner I'll know."

"There's not much more to tell," said Drummond. "I had barely recovered from the hare's arrival when the hounds hove in

sight, and paused to demand if I had seen a man running."

"You would recognize them? I believe you said—"

"As I told Baxter, the leader is the only one I'd swear to. He was a swarthy, powerfully built man of about my own height. I'd know him again at first glance, even though his features were obliterated almost immediately. You see," he explained, "we were still just outside the house, and the party was at its height. At any rate, someone tossed a *charlotte russe* out of an upstairs window, and by the infinite mercy of Allah it burst on the leader's head."

"*Charlotte russe!*" cried Baxter excitedly. "Is that one of those pastry things full of cream?"

"Very," said Drummond. "And sponge fingers and things."

"Proof, sir," said Baxter, nodding at the inspector. "There was a great smear of white cream on the dead man's coat."

McIver tightened his lips. "Go on, Captain Drummond."

"That's all. They departed at top speed, and Baxter knows the rest."

"I see," said McIver. "Could you come with us at once?"

"Give me ten minutes to get dressed and I'll be at your service. Have you any line on it, McIver?"

"Just this," said the inspector. "If the dead man is the man who gave you this note, which I think almost certain, and if he is also the man I believe he is, which I think very possible, we're on to one of the biggest things we've tackled for some months."

"Excellent," said Drummond. "You'll find beer in the sideboard."

The body had been placed in a small mortuary attached to the district police station, and one glance at the dead man's face was sufficient for Drummond. It was the runner of the previous night.

"Is that your man?" asked McIver.

"It is," confirmed Drummond.

"And mine too. So I was right, Captain Drummond. We're on to something very big. Did you find anything in his pockets?" he continued, turning to the sergeant in charge.

"Nothing of the slightest importance, sir. Some loose money, and a cheap watch. Do you know his name, sir?" he added curiously.

"I do," said McIver. "Or one of 'em. At the moment, however, he had better remain an unknown man as far as those gentlemen are concerned."

He glanced through the window, and gestured significantly toward three waiting youths with reporter written all over them.

"It's a pity, Captain Drummond," he continued thoughtfully, "that the man who did this job last night saw you. It was

unavoidable, naturally. But I'd give a lot to have them pointed out to me without their smelling a rat."

"A rather tall order, McIver," said Drummond.

"No, sir. That's where you're wrong. The location, sooner or later, is the Rest House, Aldmersham. But if you spot them, they're certain to spot you, and that's what I want to avoid. Not that I mind you being recognized," he went on cheerfully. "You're quite capable of looking after yourself. But it will show we're after them."

"I'll guarantee to disguise myself," said Drummond, only to pause as he saw a grin spreading over Baxter's face. "Good heavens!" he cried. "I'd forgotten that. Listen, McIver, we're really in luck. As I told Baxter, last night, I was a little high. Now when I saw those three, I was standing under a lamp with an opera hat on, so that my face was in shadow. In addition to that I was wearing a large false nose, of which Baxter is more qualified to speak than I."

"I'll bank on it, sir," said the constable. "They wouldn't recognize the captain again. They only saw him for a second, and he won't be in evening clothes next time."

"You're sure of that?" said McIver.

"Dead sure."

"And are you willing to help, Captain Drummond?"

"More than willing," said Drummond quietly. "It's true I don't know that poor devil on the slab in there. But I have a very definite feeling that if I had acted differently he wouldn't be dead. Therefore, I want to give you all the assistance I can."

"Good. Then we'll have a little talk. Come in here."

He led the way into an inner office and closed the door.

"It's the old story of drug trafficking," said McIver without preamble, "but on an unprecedentedly large scale. You probably aren't aware of this, but since the Geneva commission was set up facts and figures have come to light which prove that far from diminishing, the trade is increasing. Cocaine and heroin particularly. The price of the stuff is decreasing as a deliberately planned maneuver to get more addicts, but they can still make enormous profits because it's being manufactured secretly all over the East.

"Six months ago, Paris got in touch with us. They were trying to get a lead on the Western European gang of distributors. And since the Paris and London underworlds are far more closely interlocked than most people think, we worked together. It soon became obvious that a new and very dangerous crowd had taken over. New, because all the

usual gang were accounted for. Dangerous, because of the vast amount of stuff that was coming through, and because of the skill with which they covered their tracks.

"But three months ago they made one slip. A tiny one, true—but it narrowed our field of search down considerably. From a possibility of anywhere in England, we became tolerably certain that their headquarters was located somewhere in the eastern counties. But nearer than that we couldn't get—though we caught some of the smaller fry and pumped them dry. Honestly, I don't believe they knew themselves.

"And then he appeared on the scene." McIver jerked his thumb toward the mortuary. "He was half French, and half English, and he spoke both languages fluently. He was wished on to me by the Surete, and we took him for what he was worth. He called himself Esmer, which was as good a name as any. But what his motive was we didn't inquire. It was not, I venture to think, a very exalted one. He was a gentleman with a sultry past if I'm any judge of character. But he offered to help us, and we didn't say he couldn't. It was his funeral, and that's what it turned out to be.

"Evidently he knew the gang and managed to link up with them. He as good as admitted he'd been mixed up in the dope traffic himself in the past, so naturally he had no difficulty on that score. He got in with the men at the top, sufficiently to get the information he passed to you."

"Where is Aldmersham?" Drummond asked.

"Suffolk," McIver told him. "About ten miles from the coast. But it wasn't only that that made me suspect before I saw the body. I thought I recognized the writing—even though it was a mere scrawl. In any event, we now *know* where we stand. The Rest House at Aldmersham is a red spot on the map. Whether it's *the* red spot remains to be seen."

"By me?" said Drummond.

McIver nodded. "If you're on," he said. "We shall, of course, be in the vicinity. But in view of their record up to date I'm under no delusions about these gentlemen. They're a swift crowd, and although we don't know them I'm pretty certain they're familiar with the classic features of every inspector in the Yard. And if they saw me at the Rest House it would be a case of goodby forever. We've got to have someone point them out to us without arousing their suspicions in any way. That will take us several jumps nearer the finish right off. And if in addition we can catch them with the stuff on them we're home. Once again, are you with us?"

"You bet I am," said Drummond. "I haven't had any serious fun for a long time. What are your ideas on the plan of campaign?"

McIver rang a bell and the sergeant entered.

"Find out at once all you can about the Rest House at Aldmersham," he said. "When we get the report we'll decide, Captain Drummond."

"Will you be able to charge the swine with murder?" asked Drummond.

McIver shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette. "We haven't much to go on so far," he said. "But one never knows. I should have liked to have seen the *charlotte russe* episode," he added irrelevantly.

"You would," agreed Drummond as the sergeant came back.

"Eight bedrooms; fully licensed, sir," he announced. "Good reputation and crowded at this time of the year with cyclists and hikers."

"Excellent," said McIver. "What about a bicycle tour, Captain Drummond?"

"Hold on now!" exclaimed Drummond, turning pale. "I hadn't bargained for that."

"Then you may hike if you wish," said McIver kindly. "Shorts and a nice knapsack. I leave it entirely to you."

"Thanks awfully, old boy."

"Not at all, not at all. Having arrived there, you will engage a room and make it your headquarters."

"Hiking every day? Must I—"

"You must. But see that you never go far from the Rest House. You might be an artist. However," he added hastily, "once again I leave that to your discretion. I will arrange for some youngster of ours to be there too. He will make himself known to you by asking you for a match. If and when our birds turn up you will let him know by making a similar request of him. And he will pass the information on to me. After that events must shape themselves. But I want to catch 'em, Captain Drummond—with the stuff."

"So do I, McIver. And we will."

The Rest House at Aldersham was certainly crowded when Drummond and Algy Longworth arrived at six o'clock that evening. Quite rightly contending that the whole affair had grown like some night-blooming plant directly out of Mrs. van Ranton's party, and that his attendance at that party had been directly due to Algy, Drummond had insisted that the young man accompany him.

"Variety, me lad, is the salt of life," he had remarked. "After the caviar of Bridgewater Square what could be more appetizing than the ham and eggs of great open spaces in Suffolk? So put on

your paddling pants, and we will join the great army of hikers. It's all right," he added consolingly. "We do all but the last mile by train."

They found an empty table in a corner of the veranda, and proceeded to take stock of their surroundings. And it would have been hard to imagine a setting less likely to harbor crime. Young men and women clad in varying degrees of shorts were dining alone and in groups and strange noises from an open window proclaimed that the Hosh Bosh progressive jazz sextette had jumped a claim on Regional. And in one corner two very dreadful females in Scotch plaids were eating hard boiled eggs. Just an enchanting bit of unspoiled England . . .

"Beer," said Algy faintly. "Beer—or I perish. It isn't," he went on plaintively, "that I dislike legs. Far from it. But a permanent die of this cast would send any man into a monastery pleading for mercy. There should be a law passed prohibiting wearing of shorts and other dangerous practices of an analogous nature. No woman having a knee of greater circumference than a yard ever to be permitted to show it in public: penalty life imprisonment."

A waiter brought them their beer, and at the same moment a pleasant-looking youth arose from a neighboring table and came over.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to Drummond. "I wonder if I could trouble you for a match. Thank you. You'll hold him if he comes, won't you, sir? Until the inspector has seen him."

"Our ally, Algy," said Drummond as the youth sat down again. "And there, I take it, is the proprietor."

A stout and smiling man was standing in the doorway leading into the house, regarding the scene complacently. Aesthetic quibbling about legs concerned him not. His mental range began and ended with the pleasures and consolations of eating. And on that limited plane all was well.

He caught Drummond's eye and was immediately at the table. A room? Certainly. He could manage that for them with ease. And if they had a car there was a garage attached to the house, with a competent man in charge. It has just been opened.

He strolled away, and Drummond lit a cigarette.

"Lower your beer, Algy," he said, "and we'll go on a little tour of inspection. On the face of it," he continued as they threaded their way through the tables, "our host does not look in the least like a criminal. One cannot quite visualize him as the center of a dope gang."

"They probably use the place

unknown to him," said Algy. "One can hardly think of an atmosphere that would afford a better blind."

They rounded a corner. In front of them stood the garage. It was quite obviously, as the landlord had said, a new addition, and as they walked over to the entrance they noticed that three baby cars were in the yard, and also a small empty van with the back axle jacked up and minus its rear wheels.

They were just turning away again when a man emerged from a workshop at the back, carrying a spare wheel. He stared at them for a moment, then leaned the wheel up against the running board of the van and came towards them.

"Looking for anything, gents?" he asked.

"No, thank you," said Drummond affably. "This is new since my friend and I were here last."

"It was opened last May," said the man, shading his eyes with his hand and staring up the road.

"Pretty busy?" said Drummond.

"Just so so," said the man. "It varies, you know. Good evening."

With a nod he turned away and went back to his workshop, to come out again shortly with another spare wheel which he placed by the first. Then apparently conscious of work well done, he sat down on the running board of the van and lit a cigarette.

"Nothing doing here," said Drummond swinging on his heels. "Let's go and sample the bar."

"Anything you like," said Algy cheerfully, "so long as I don't see those females in Scotch plaids again."

"You'll see something a damned sight more interesting," said Drummond curtly. "Here's our man."

A big Bentley had drawn up by the gasoline pump, and the garage attendant had appeared hurriedly.

"That big bloke driving," said Drummond. "I'd know him a mile off. XYZ one-two-three. So far, so good. Let's get hold of McIver's warrior."

The Scotland Yard man was still at the same table, and he glanced up as Drummond approached.

"Just getting out of that Bentley," said Drummond quietly. "The tall dark man. Watch him like a hawk."

He strolled on towards the bar followed by Algy. McIver's man promptly vanished, and the driver of the Bentley, with his passenger, appeared to be barward bound in their wake.

"Remember, we've got to keep him for a while, Algy—until McIver has given him the once over. Now, as I see it, if there's

anything in this joint at all, he'll either be picking the stuff up here or dropping it quickly. Otherwise there would be no meaning to the performance, since no one would come here for relaxation and enjoyment."

"That would suggest that there's a confederate in the house," said Longworth.

"Probably. Watch yourself, Algy! Here he comes."

The first thing that became apparent was that the big man had been there before. He called the barman "George," and was greeted as Mr. Margiter in reply. And having given Drummond and Algy one brief uncompromising stare, in which no shadow of recognition lurked, Mr. Margiter ordered two double whiskies.

"Trade good?" he asked in a harsh domineering voice which was obviously not assumed.

"Very, sir," replied the bartender. "We've nothing at all to complain about."

"Then you're luckier than most of us," said Margiter with a harsh laugh, which turned into a snarl of anger as Drummond bumped "accidentally" against his arm and spilled his drink. "Confound you, man, don't be so clumsy."

Drummond turned around very slowly. "Are you speaking to me, my good fellow?" he said in a drawl so offensive that it would have provoked sudden death at a Brotherhood Week gathering.

Mr. Margiter put the remains of his drink on the counter. His eyes narrowed and his face turned a dull red.

"Did you call me 'my good fellow'?"

"Gentlemen, please!" George was dancing up and down in his agitation, but he might as well have been a fly on the wall for all the attention anyone paid to him. Margiter's companion was plucking at his coat. Algy, wise to the ways of Drummond, suppressed a happy grin. And at the same time he felt the tingle in his veins which is born of danger in the air.

"I did," said Drummond casually. "But now that I've seen you more closely, I withdraw the phrase in its literal sense."

And now the veins were standing out on Margiter's forehead. A vicious backhander nearly knocked over his friend, who was muttering feverishly in his ear. Margiter instantly become blind to all caution. So blind that there was nothing real in his universe save a yokel in gray flannel trousers and an old tweed coat who had deliberately gone out of his way to insult him. So blind that he failed to notice the watchful glint that had come into the yokel's eyes. So blind that when a vicious left hook missed him by a hair's breadth, he failed to read the writing on the wall.

He swung a right haymaker, and then something that felt like a pile driver hit him straight in the mouth. He staggered back, spitting blood, into the arms of his friend. And just at that moment the door opened and a stern official voice rang out.

"Now then—what's all this?"

Inspector McIver was standing there, staring at Drummond without a visible trace of recognition.

"We can't have brawling here, gentlemen!" he roared, as Margiter showed further signs of wanting to go on. "Stop it, sir—or I'll take you in charge. I'm an Inspector of Police."

With a gigantic effort Margiter pulled himself together, though his eyes still looked murder.

"Yes," said McIver staring at him thoughtfully. "And I'm just wondering where I've seen you before."

"Professionally?" cried Drummond happily. "Has he by any chance murdered his wife?" Through half-closed eyes he saw that the second man had turned very white.

"I don't understand you," said Margiter now completely in control of himself. "Why should you have seen me before?"

He lit a cigarette with a perfectly steady hand, and Drummond wondered. Was McIver bluffing, or had he really recognized the man? In either case, it didn't make sense. If he wanted to catch them actually with the stuff, why was he warning them to start with?"

"Why should you have seen me before?" repeated Margiter with rising rage. "As you phrased it, it sounded like a damned libellous remark."

"In fact I'd like to question both of you gentlemen," said McIver unperturbed. He nodded, his gaze shifting to Drummond.

"I trust you haven't seen me before," exclaimed Drummond in alarm.

"I have not. But if my suspicions are correct we shan't be strangers in the future. What were you two men fighting about?"

"I accidentally upset his drink, Inspector," said Drummond.

McIver snorted. "Don't play the fool with me, sir!" he warned sternly. "You'll only regret it. Now where's the stuff?"

"The stuff?" echoed Drummond blankly.

"The dope. You're running a load of it between you, and that's what you were fighting about. Moreover I'm going to find it."

"Heavens!" cried Algy tremulously. "What will my mother say?"

"Well!" repeated McIver. "Where is it?"

"I think, Inspector," said Margiter solicitously, "that the Suffolk sun must have gone to your

head. My friend and I arrived here less than fifteen minutes ago. Our car is outside. If you wish to, you are at perfect liberty to search both us and the car."

"But not me," cried Drummond. "I've got a risque French postcard in my note case."

He gave Algy the suspicion of a wink. The game was becoming easy. But for all that he still failed to get McIver's idea. Did the inspector really imagine the stuff *was* in the car? Or on Margiter? And the humorous point was that Margiter was now treating him as an ally.

"Quite right, sir," he said. "That is the line one ought to take against such a farcical allegation. Well, Inspector—are you ready?" He began to turn out his pockets. McIver stopped him. "We'll have a look at your car," he said curtly. "You stay where you are, sir." He turned to Drummond, who bowed.

"Your slightest wish is law, Inspector," he said amiably. "I'll have a look for the hiding place in here."

He watched the three men troop out. Then he swiftly crossed to the window which opened toward the garage. Directly in front of it he paused, an unlighted cigarette halfway to his mouth.

"Come here, Algy," he said. "Another van has arrived."

"What of it?" asked Algy, stepping quickly to his side.

It was true. Another van identical with the one which had been in the yard was now parked by the gas pump. And the back wheels were being changed. It was one of those heavy, special-duty vans that had double wheels on the rear axle, and against the running boards on each side they could see three wheels propped up.

"Most interesting," said Drummond throughtfully. "Our friend in charge of the garage must be a prophet. "How," he continued even more thoughtfully as Algy stared at him, "did he guess that the two spare wheels which he brought out while we were watching him would be required? You'll notice that they no longer adorn the side of the original van. They are just being put on van number two. Let us see what happens to the two wheels that came off van number two."

For a few minutes they watched in silence, and Drummond's frown grew more and more puzzled.

"Is this a new game?" he said, as the van drove away with the change completed, leaving its own two wheels behind. "Is it conceivable that they actually—" He broke off abruptly, his eyes shining. "It's sheer guess work, of course. But it's worth following up. We will jest with them, Algy, and see if we strike a sensitive nerve."

He strode over to a table and picked up a large bowl of castor sugar. Then he left the bar followed by a completely bewildered Algy, and walked towards the Bentley.

"Are you satisfied now, Inspector," Margiter was saying with a sneer. "Or would you like me to have the engine taken down?"

"Don't worry," affirmed Drummond. "I know where the dope is."

And for the fraction of a second Margiter's face grew strained. Then as Drummond produced the sugar bowl from behind his back, he laughed heartily.

"In the bar, Chief Constable," said Drummond. "Right under our noses. Snow, my dear fellow —cocaine by the pound. Have some."

He offered the bowl to McIver, and Margiter laughed even more heartily. Drummond walked around Margiter's car.

"Do you good, Inspector," Margiter said jovially. "And now, if you don't mind, I'll be getting along. How much was that gas?" he called out as the garage man approached.

"I have the bill right here, sir. I suppose you aren't by any chance going past Durnover's garage just this side of Ipswich?"

"I am. Why?"

"I was wondering, sir, if you would mind dropping these two spare wheels there. They were loaned to a van, and—"

"Put 'em in the back," said Margitter getting into the driving seat. "And the next time, Inspector, I think it would be better if you didn't jump to such farcical conclusions without a shred of justification."

"He's right," said Drummond emerging from behind the car. "In fact, McIver, it was most reprehensible of you," he said as the car drove off. "What are you going to do now?"

"Search this place for the stuff."

"I'll bet you a well-earned double Scotch it's not here," said Drummond with a grin. "And I'll bet you another that I know where it is."

"Where?" snapped McIver.

"In the car. Summon the baby Austin, old sleuth hound, and we will chase the Bentley."

"Don't be a fool, Captain Drummond," said McIver angrily. "How can we possibly overtake it?"

"Yet a third double Scotch is now on," grinned Drummond. "I'll bet you we find the Bentley stationary by the road within three miles."

"Whereabouts in the car is it?" said McIver as their driver drew up.

"Those two spares," said Drummond. "Not a place one would think of looking when

they were actually on the van wheels. The inside one of each pair — always conveniently changed at the Rest House. And I'll bet that Durnover's garage would be a bit surprised if they were handed in. What did I tell you, McIver?" he added, pointing ahead. "There's the Bentley now."

They drew up behind the stationary car just as Margiter, white with rage, emerged from under the tonneau.

"What the hell do you want now?" he demanded.

"Those two spare wheels," said McIver calmly—and things moved.

Margiter's hand shot to his pocket, but he was up against two past masters in a scrap. And a few seconds later, with his wrists handcuffed behind him and his gun in McIver's pocket, he was leaning up against the car panting.

"It's there all right," he said sullenly. "But if only this damned car hadn't died on me you'd never have got it."

"I know," said Drummond sympathetically. "That's what I wanted the castor sugar for. Incidentally, I didn't really think it was snow," he went on brightly. "In fact I don't suppose cocaine would have acted. But castor sugar in the gas tank is wonderful. It gums up the jets marvelously. Stops any car, in fact, within a mile or two, and it's funny how few people know it."

"So that was it," said Margiter softly, staring at Drummond with a look of recognition dawning in his eyes. "Where the devil have I seen you before today, sir?"

Drummond grinned happily.

"A *charlotte russe,* without a doubt, gently descending in Bridgewater Square."

In his ebullient career the Saint has roamed the wide world over—from Paris to the mystery-shrouded jungles of Ecuador. But only in London can he with unalloyed delight survey the thinning thatch of Scotland Yard's Inspector Teal, and relive again the adventures which made him famous. And amidst the many bright chronicles of his London days none can be said to shine with a brighter luster than THE PRINCE OF CHERKESSIA, *yours to enjoy in our very next issue.*

the half-way tree murder

by . . . Theodore Sturgeon

In the bright Jamaican sunlight it was hard for Cotrell to believe that murder could wear so cruelly treacherous a mask.

THE MYRTLE Bank Hotel in Jamaica has a marquee built out over the blood-warm water of Kingston Harbor. It overlooks the swimming pool with its lounging, laughing bathers. Drinks are served swiftly by white-gloved waiters. It is warm and shadowed, restful and luxurious.

Cotrell, the C.I.D. man, sat there with the most extraordinary woman he had ever seen.

This had never happened to him before. He was a good man—the Criminal Investigation Division's best in the district—and he hung doggedly to a case until he had it cracked. But at the same time he had always been able to separate business from pleasure. For weeks now he had been under the spell of Brunhilde Moot, and yet, for all her effect on him, the Half-Way Tree affair kept circling back into his mind.

He watched her while she watched the sea, the haze across the Harbor that was the wicked sunken pirate city Port Royal, the distant mountains marching up

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It isn't often that a writer with a top-echelon reputation in one branch of imaginative fiction reaches a shining pinnacle of mastery in another. But Theodore Sturgeon is the exception which disproves the rule. True, a good many science fiction writers besides Mr. Sturgeon have an enviable record of accomplishment in the mystery field. But a yarn such as this, a perfect gem of a mystery which will linger long in memory is rather special, we think.

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and away to meet the heavy, brazen sky. Her eyes always returned to the fishing boats which worked close inshore, and she watched them . . . perhaps she watched the crews, the half-naked, sweating, muscular black and brown and bronze and tan bodies as they worked.

Cotrell felt a smoky surge of distress at the thought; he shook himself angrily. He had a great deal more to do than to help an exotic brown-eyed blonde enjoy the mysteries in which she cloaked herself. And he could ill afford to let the spell deepen.

He watched her while she watched the sea, or the mountains, or the boats—or was it the men and their nets, the men and their rippling backs?—and he thought, who is she? She had come off a cruise ship three months before, because she liked Jamaica. She would stay indefinitely, leave when it seemed a good idea — tomorrow, next week, or never.

She apparently had unlimited credit. Her clothes told nothing about her but that she had exquisite taste, and that she shopped wherever she found excellence. He knew she spoke Dutch and Spanish, and her English was accented by no accent at all. Her passport was Swiss, which might mean anything. When pressed for information about herself, she used an ancient, woman's weapon—an abrupt, courteous, smiling silence which was like a slap in the face.

"You're hypnotized," he said abruptly.

She drew her attention in to herself, turned and looked at him and away. When she did that, he felt heat, as from the opening and closing of an oven door.

"I am," she admitted. "Jamaica is so—*old*. The old buildings, the old society, decayed and polished. I met a man at Constant Spring last evening who quite naturally clicked his heels when he bowed. And yet, just back a little from the coast, it's savage. Wild growth and rot, breeding and steaming and killing itself, and breeding and growing again."

"You like that." It was not a question.

She knew, and did not answer. She looked at her drink, lifted it, tilted it so that the liquid beaded up on the edge. Not a drop spilled on her steady hand. "Any news on the Half-Way Tree affair?"

"How did you know I'd been thinking of it? No, nothing new. I was going to ask you—"

"Yes?" Her eyes were so wide apart that he sometimes thought they were set on the sides of her head rather than in front. That, and her sharply pointed teeth, and the breadth and strength of her, were what was so strongly animal, for all her impregnable dignity.

"Forgive me—one shouldn't make analytical comments. You are not like other people, Brunhilde. You don't think like other people. I—shall I be frank?"

"Of course." Was she laughing?

"I can't say I always like the way your mind works. It—"

"It's too direct?" She did laugh, now, like wind through a cello. "I've heard it before. Too direct . . . there are things I want, and things I like, and I get them. There are things I have no use for, and I avoid them." She looked again at the boats.

Cotrell hung manfully to what he wanted to say. "I need a new point of view on the Half-Way Tree murder. I would like you to help me."

"Well," she breathed. After a moment she said, "Jeff, I'm hardly flattered. I've heard a great deal about you. You took in at least four extremely important foreign agents during the war. It was you who broke up the Panamanian drug ring. You have a reputation for cracking cases without any but routine help. And now you ask me to look at a thing like this—a simple murder, a month old, of a crossroads Chinese shopkeeper who was killed by a black hill boy for a few shillings. It's not worth bothering with, Jeff."

"It's murder."

"Murder!" she said scornfully. "It was killing, and the jungle's full of it. From what you've told me about the case, it's quite simple. The boy Stanton—"

"Stanley."

"Whatever—the boy had motive and opportunity and can't account for his time. Try him and hang him then, mark up another successful case, and go on with your important work. There are a hundred thousand illiterate hill-runners here. One won't be missed."

"Stanley could have done it," said Cotrell carefully, "but he *wouldn't.*"

"That," said Brunhilde Moot flatly, "doesn't matter." A large red ant chinned on the overhang of the table top. She bent to watch it. It gained the surface and began to amble between the moisture-rings left by their glasses.

She said, "The old Chinaman had a brother who will get all his property—isn't that so? And he certainly knew where the money was hidden. Hang him, then, and have done with it."

"He's my friend," said Cotrell with some difficulty.

Again he felt the heat and brilliance of her gaze. She bent again over the ant. She blew the ash from her cigarette and swept the glowing tip across the ant's antennae. It curled up, straightened, blundered into a drop of moisture from one of the sweating glasses, and struggled there.

"I want you to meet him," said Cotrell.

"I would like to," she said. "I would like to see what a transplanted oriental, living at the edge of the jungle, has to recommend himself to a man of your stature." There was considerable insult buried in the phrase. Brunhilde was richer, stronger, more beautiful, and certainly more intelligent than anyone's average, and was deeply conscious of it. To her, the world was obviously composed of a handful of people and a great many members of the lower orders.

"Lunch there, perhaps?" Cotrell said. "I can offer you a pleasant drive, and certainly some native cooking."

"You do intrigue me," she smiled. "And I would so like to think, later, that I had helped you catch and hang your man."

"Good," said Cotrell. He looked at his watch and rose. "I'll send Yem Foong a wire, and we'll be on our way. I hope I'm not rushing you?"

"I can be ready in five minutes," she said.

While he was taking care of the check, she stepped to the end of the marquee for another long look at the harbor. As Jeff Cotrell stepped up behind her a moment later, a thirty-foot dugout was moving almost directly under the end of the marquee. Brunhilde tensed as she watched it. In the bow was a giant who could have modeled for a Hercules. As he bent over the paddle, they could see three long scratches in his golden back.

"Damn," said Brunhilde Moot. She straightened, turned, saw Cotrell. "I've broken my fingernail," she said. "See you in five minutes. The lobby?"

He nodded and managed to smile. When she had reached the landward end of the marquee he returned to the table, picked up a glass, and with its base killed the red ant which still struggled there. He was a little surprised at himself when the glass broke in his hand. He went to compose and send his telegram.

In Cotrell's low-slung Lanchester, Brunhilde closed her eyes when the car approached an intersection and turned, opened them again on the other side. "Drive left," she read from a sign. "I'm still not quite used to it. Pulling over to the left to let a car overtake you, stopping in the middle of the street to wait for a right turn. I'm glad you're driving."

"You have driven here though, haven't you?" asked Cotrell, his eyes on the road.

"Not enough to like it—oh! What a wonderful place! See—goats on the sidewalk! And that old woman with the donkey!"

"Yes, pretty much the same

as it's been for the last three centuries. That's the charm of this place; but it has its drawbacks. Have you ever noticed the little Spanish-wall houses with thatched roofs and louvred windows?"

"Yes. They all seem to be the same size."

"That's right. About a hundred and fifty years ago the Home Government put a tax on every room of a house over two, and another on glass windows. The natives simply stopped building houses with more than two rooms, and put in those slatted windows. And although the law has been repealed for over half a century, the custom persists.

"And it's the same way with their attitude toward banks. The Chinese shopkeepers particularly were suspicious of banks in the old days, and many of them still have their caches around, in, or under the shops where they make their money."

"Yes, you told me about that right after I arrived."

"So I did," said Cotrell, deftly avoiding a barefoot girl who walked along the road weaving a basket, singing, and carrying a tremendous tray of fruit on her head. "Well, they're learning, I think. Yem Ching, though —he was an educated man. Too intelligent, really, to have followed the old customs the way he did. Well, he's dead. Perhaps a few of his colleagues will profit by the poor chap's murder. Somebody should, besides the brute who did him in."

"Oh—so you believe in basic justice?" smiled Brunhilde. "For every loss, a profit somewhere?"

"In a sense I do," said Cotrell, glancing at her. "For every crime, a punishment, in any case."

She laughed. "I *love* policemen!" She leaned back, taking in the whisking scenery—the bamboo, the rows of mangoes. "I'm hungry."

"Yem Foong will take care of that, and well."

"You seem to mean that. The only thing I've seen the natives eating is rice and beans and that horrible crawly-looking yampi."

"You're in for a surprise. Don't underestimate the culture of certain of these people. It's a culture which isn't measured by telephones and plumbing. Or savings banks, unfortunately."

"You still intrigue me. What do you suppose they'll have for lunch?"

"Couldn't say. Whatever it is will be delicious and—exotic."

"Wonderful, wonderful," she said.

"Though I hope," he said, "that it won't be salt fish and ackey."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Salt fish and ackey. Quite a delicacy."

"And you don't like it?"

"Oh, I do, but I don't eat it."

"What's 'ackey'?"

"I'll show you. There's lots of it growing along here— See? See there?"

He pointed to a line of trees growing across the deep ditch which imperils all Jamaican traffic. They were shadetrees with dark glossy leaves, among which their brilliant orange-yellow fruit showed. Cotrell pulled up.

"I'll show you one," he said.

He vaulted over the low door and leaped the ditch, to come back in a moment with one of the bright fruit in his hand. He gave it to Brunhilde. It was about the size of a large orange, and had a hard black encrustation, like ebony, protruding from its side.

"What's that?"

"The seed," said Cotrell, smoothly shifting gears. "It grows half in and half out."

"I've never seen anything like it. And is it good?"

"Delicious," said Cotrell. "I avoid it because, when it's out of season, and even in season when it isn't prepared exactly right, it's deadly poison. Really. We have deaths every year from it. I prefer to be on the safe side."

Brunhilde brooded over the fruit for a moment, turning it over and over, and then suddenly tossed it out of the car. "If there is a difference between the way our minds work," she said, "you can see it here. I've never tasted ackey. Just because of that, I want to. If I had tasted it, as you have, and knew it to be delicious, I'd want it again.

"I think that this is one of the biggest things in being alive. If my host is cultured, as you say, and if he trusts his cook, then I am quite willing to trust him. As to the risk—why, one is quite likely to die from a bad cold. One might as well get some pleasure from the process."

Cotrell smiled, glancing briefly at his passenger. "I'll take the cold, thank you. Ackey poisoning is a very unpleasant business. Terrible tummy-ache, y'know, vomiting and choking. Pretty quick, though, if you can't get to a stomach pump."

"Jeff," she said softly, "I simply cannot be frightened. Not by anything."

"I think I realized that some time ago," said Jeff Cotrell. "You're well armed, Brunhilde. It would be difficult to imagine you in a situation where you couldn't use your quick mind, or your strength, or—"

She smiled widely, so that he saw the pointed teeth, and arched her back. "—or any other of my attributes," she finished for him. He flushed. "You're so right," she added. "Hence I have nothing to fear, ever."

They took an unpaved side road just outside Half-Way Tree, and bumped along it for half a mile until they came to a cross-

roads. Under a giant tamarind tree was the shop. It boasted a sign: YEM FOONG. *Ginger Beer —Yard 'goods.* CATERER TO HIS HONOR THE GOVERNOR.

"The sign is new," said Brunhilde.

"Very observant of you," said Cotrell, turning into the shop's yard. "Some of the people, you see, are very superstitious and wouldn't go into a shop if it bore a dead man's name. They'd be afraid he'd wait on them."

"I shall be looking," she said, "for the culture and intelligence you tell me I'll find here."

"I have said you're observant," he countered, opening the door for her. She laid a hand on his arm.

"Jeff . . ."

"Yes?"

"If I help you catch your man, will you do me a favor?"

"But of course. Anything I can."

"You can. I want to go to the hanging."

"You want—"

"Jeff, you promised."

"Very well," he said.

They walked up the short path and entered the shop, blinking the sunlight out of their eyes. It was cool and dim inside. There were no show-windows. The packed-earth walls were thick and the windows small. Along one wall ran a board counter, behind which were bolts of cotton, canned goods, bottles of rum, and fruit juices, racked on shelves.

There were a couple of battered tables and some chairs out on the packed-earth floor, and in the corner was a water-box filled with ice and small stone bottles of ginger-beer, cane-juice, ale, and bright-colored, sticky-sweet soft drinks.

"Mr. Cotrell, sir. Most welcome. This place is entirely yours."

Yem Foong was tiny, wizened, completely bald. He wore a long black linen jacket which buttoned up to its stiff, round collar by a series of black silk frogs. His clothes were pressed and smooth, and so were his face and his voice.

"Foong! So glad to see you again, old fellow. This is Miss Moot, of whom I have spoken to you. She has, she tells me, a high regard for the Jamaican cuisine."

Brunhilde inclined her head and extended her hand. But already Yem Foong had folded his own and was bowing deeply.

"A presence such as yours begins to compensate for the emptiness of this unfortunate house."

"Yes, I had heard about your brother," said Brunhilde huskily. "I can't tell you all I feel."

"You have told me," said Yem, graciously. "Now, if you will step this way, what little I have been able to prepare for you is ready."

They went through the rear door. A low table was set in the inner room, and Brunhilde stopped momentarily at sight of it. It was laid with exquisite Spode, and Jensen silver. A single spray of jasmine lay in a squat crystal bowl in the center of the table.

They seated themselves. Brunhilde looked from end to end of the table, admiringly, and at the tapestried wall facing her, and around and down to the far corner of the room, where there was a fresh-dug hole about a yard square in the earthen floor. On turning back, Brunhilde found herself in the direct gaze of both her companions.

"My poor brother met his ancestors there," said Yem, sorrowfully, "as he was replacing the money, and the other things."

"Other things?"

Yem shrugged. "Things of little value, except to us. Some carved jade, and a little golden casket containing a scrap of rice-paper. It was supposed to be an original poem by Sun Yü," he added regretfully. "The money was nothing. Money is only the substance of living—stuff of the bones and the belly. The craftsmanship of two thousand years ago is important only to that part of a man which is not an animal."

"I understand," said Brunhilde. "And of course it was a man who was all animal who stole the things. Have you found nothing that would indicate who the criminal was?"

Yem Foong shrugged tiredly. "How can one know for certain? The shop was not yet locked. It was just at dusk, which is a rapid thing in the tropics. I was in Kingston, buying yard goods, and the servants were in their quarters. And during that time when everything is shadowed, someone slipped in and did—what was done.

"It could have been from inside or outside; it could have been some wanderer on the road outside, a stranger; or it could have been a neighbor, or even someone here—who knows? The promise of riches draws many kinds of men."

A servant entered, a dark brown youth with sharply slanted brows and woolly hair which grew into a widow's peak. Brunhilde watched him upward through her lashes as he catfooted around the table, setting out the appetizer.

When the boy left, Cotrell said, "That is Stanley?" as if for Brunhilde's benefit.

"Yes," said Yem. "A strange boy, but a good one."

"He looks like Mephisto himself," murmured Brunhilde to the dish before her. It was one she had not seen before—half a star-apple, an exotic fruit with a five-pointed star of red-purple in its center, and delectable flesh which shaded off through red

and pink to snow-white on the outside.

"Mephisto. Interesting you should say that," said Cotrell. "Eh, Foong?"

"Yes," said the oriental. "Stanley's father was an *obeah* man—a wizard, up in the mountains near Gimme-Me-Bit. Stanley is the only native I have ever known who watches a sunset for the beauty he finds there. He collects colored stones, too, and has done some remarkable things in landscapes made with moth's wings."

Stanley returned with the soup —black bean soup, piping hot, freshened with a touch of lime-juice and containing chilled spears of avocado. Again Brunhilde's thoughtful gaze was on the boy.

"You seem very quiet," said Cotrell halfway through the course.

"What else?" smiled Brunhilde Moot. "The soup—it has quite left me speechless! Delicious, Mr. Yem."

"I delight in your enjoyment," said Yem.

"I wonder," said Cotrell, "how you'll enjoy *this*," and, reaching under the table, he scooped up something and dropped it in front of her with a thump. It was an old, earth-stained, leather-bound satchel.

"Wh—" It was barely a sound at all which Brunhilde Moot uttered. "Why should I enjoy a thing like this?" she asked steadily.

"Your sense of the dramatic," said Cotrell.

She looked at him with a new roundness to her eyes. There was obviously a kind of sublety which she had considered quite beyond this sallow, patient, tropical man. She looked at the satchel.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's the bag that was buried in the corner there."

"Where on earth did it come from?"

"Right across the road. It'd been thrown into the canefield," said Cotrell. He busied himself with the straps. Almost defiantly, Brunhilde ate soup.

"Look," said Cotrell, tilting the open top of the satchel toward her. It was full of colorful, oversized British banknotes.

"Is that—"

Yem Foong nodded. "It's all there. All the money, that is. The other things, the little things —they're not here at all."

Stanley was in the room and had reached the table before they saw him. He gathered up Brunhilde's soup-dish and then saw the satchel. He uttered a faint shriek, dropped the dish on the floor, and bolted.

"Stanley!" cried Foong.

Brunhilde leaned back and smiled at Cotrell. "That," she said, "is a very guilty animal."

"Stanley?" Yem Foong's eyes

widened. "Miss Moot—that is impossible!"

"Is it? Mr. Yem, I have seen a good deal. I think I can spot a guilty reaction when I see one. Really, Jeff, are you just going to sit there and let that—that killer get away?"

"Stanley is Yem Foong's servant," said Cotrell coldly. "I'm sure he can handle the situation."

"Thank you, Mr. Cotrell. I am embarrassed for my house and its servants." He clapped his hands. An old woman poked her seamed mahogany face in at the door.

"Sephronia," said Foong quietly, "send Stanley to me directly."

The face disappeared, and almost immediately Stanley shuffled in. His feline gait was gone, and his eyes were filled with raw panic. The slanted eyebrows now looked ridiculous.

"Stanley," said Foong, without anger, "why you behave so, mon?" In speaking to the boy, his voice took on the sing-song cadences of the native dialect.

Stanley looked at the satchel. "It de money-bag, mahstah! It leave heah by de dead han' o' Mahstah Ching his own se'f!"

"What's all that?" Brunhilde demanded.

Cotrell smiled. "He is afraid of the satchel because he thinks it was left here—or brought back—by Ching's ghost." He turned to the boy and said, "You fool youse'f, mon. It was my very han' dat fin' de bag dere an'—" he wiggled his fingers—"it not dead yet. No one harrass de garlic you put 'pon de door an' window-dem, as you can plainly see."

The boy raised startled eyes to the tops of the doors and windows. There were sprigs of garlic over all of them. Relief flooded his strange face.

"Ah, bahss, I love you for dat! I do indeed, for it were a cru-ell an' wicked start I had to see de moneybag itse'f, dere. I know full well no duppie can cross de garlic. I am a eejut, sah, a strikin' eejut."

"Go about you work, mon," smiled Foong.

Stanley picked up the dishes and went out, praising every inhabitant of heaven under his breath.

"You speak that calypso like the natives," chuckled Brunhilde.

Cotrell chuckled with her, but grimly. "I *was* born here, you know," he said.

Eyes down, Brunhilde meticulously positioned and repositioned the silver before her. "You know, Jeff," she said. "I think you're letting that savage pull the wool over your eyes. Think a minute. Didn't you say he magpies pretty things? Didn't you tell me he was a little strange, with his collecting rocks and gaping at the sunset? And doesn't a servant come and go as he chooses—isn't he in a position

to know where everyone in the house may be at a particular time —say, at dusk?

"Wouldn't he know where anything of value might be hidden? You have no real clues here. Only by determining what kind of person might have committed the crime can you choose between suspects. I would say that that boy fills the bill. He had motive, o p p o r t u n i t y, strength, and the peculiar tastes that would make him do such a thing."

Cotrell and Yem exchanged a glance. Stanley re-entered with the next course.

"Ah!" said Cotrell. "Salt fish and ackey! You've got your wish, Brunhilde. Fall to. No thank you, Stanley. None for me. I'll just have the coat-of-arms." And he heaped his plate with the ubiquitous Jamaica Coat-of-Arms—rice and kidney-beans.

"I'd love some," said Brunhilde, passing Cotrell a queenly glance. "A little more. That's fine, thank you." She tasted it. "Why, it's delicious."

"It is good, isn't it?" said Yem Foong. "Especially with the salt fish."

Brunhilde took a little of each. "My! The fish is really briny." She sipped her water, sipped again. "Jeff, you don't know what you are missing."

"I do," said Cotrell. "But I'm quite happy with this, thank you."

Brunhilde munched daintily and sipped. "May I have more water, please? Thank you. To get back to Stanley—what *do* you think? You did ask my help, you know."

Yem Foong said, "Stanley was with me in Kingston that night. Of all the servants, he, least of all, could have done it."

There was a tense silence. Brunhilde Moot ate more ackey. "Where's the evidence to that?" she demanded.

"Yem Foong's word," said Cotrell. "It's good."

"Well, then, the whole thing's perfectly simple." She spoke as if to children. "Mr. Yem can testify that Stanley was here, you can bring up something of his background, and get a conviction."

Cotrell slowly put his fork down. "You really do mean that, don't you?"

"Of course." She looked at him over her glass.

"Because this boy is a little unusual, and because he has no education, and because he's black, you feel I should run him in, throw him to the Assizes, and have him hung whether he's guilty or not?"

Brunhilde shrugged. "You told me yourself that the island is overpopulated."

"That tears it," gritted Cotrell. "That jolly well pays the bloody piper. Miss Moot, you're a rotter. I had an idea before that you

were a filthy swine, but I wouldn't let myself believe it—not really, not even with proof after proof— What are you laughing at?"

Brunhilde Moot carefully nibbled, chewed, swallowed, and laughed again at the fuming C.I.D. man. "You," she said imperturbably. "Ever since I first saw you at the Myrtle Bank two months ago, you have worn that restrained British mask of yours. I wondered then what would ever break it up and make it human, and now I've done it."

Purpling, Jeff Cotrell half rose. Yem Foong checked him with a gesture. "No, Inspector. Now we need only wait."

Cotrell looked at him, slumped back.

"Are you all right?" the old man asked Brunhilde solicitously.

"All right? But of course."

"You were not eating," said Yem Foong, "and I thought—"

With an obvious effort, she addressed herself to the salt fish and ackey again. A delicate line of droplets appeared on her upper lip. She dabbed at them with her napkin, paling. Suddenly she put down her fork, looked at her plate, and at the two intent men.

Jeff Cotrell nodded, his eyes tight on her face. "Just the right food for your kind," he said, "out of season and all."

"My kind—"

"Rats," said Cotrell. "Mad dogs."

"It—isn't poison! Yem has—"

Yem Foong dropped his eyes to his plate. "I haven't touched mine."

Brunhilde Moot's face turned a pasty gray. "I—feel—" Suddenly she was on her feet, her lips twitching. The transformation was more shocking, much more, than had been Cotrell's outburst. She flung herself across the table, clawed hands outstretched, and closed them on Yem's embroidered jacket.

"Eat it, damn you," she screamed. "Eat it!"

Cotrell leaned across and very carefully brought the edge of his palm down on the side of her neck, hard. The expression on her face did not change, but her hands relaxed. She slid limply back, slowly began to sag on to the table. Cotrell rolled her unceremoniously to the floor. She moved, clawed at the dirt floor, and got to her knees, her head hanging.

"You feel sick," gritted Cotrell. "Don't let it worry you, old girl. It'll get worse. The right way for you to go out, too. You're not human. You're not a member of anything human. The colossal gall of you, to go about like a—" his voice thickened—"like a woman, like a beautiful warm human woman."

He pulled himself up with an effort. Yem looked at him with

deep, understanding eyes. "You murdered Yem Ching because you were bored, because you wanted to watch me try to break the case, talk about it with me over a drink!"

There was a horrid, wrenching, human explosion. Cotrell turned his head away. "That's only the first spasm," he said coldly. "You'll do that until you choke to death."

The seizure subsided. She squatted back and turned miserable eyes up to Cotrell. "Doctor," she murmured. "S t o m a c h pump—"

"I wouldn't get a doctor for you if there was a medical convention out there under the tamarind tree!" said Cotrell.

"Get . . . doctor," she whimpered. "I—stomach—" and she moaned. It was a weak, piteous, broken sound. "I killed him," she whispered. "Got—souvenirs." Again there was the frightening, tearing spasm. "Doctor—"

"Souvenirs? The little casket and the jade?"

She nodded.

"Where are they?"

She shuddered violently, and turned up a glance of unqualified hatred. "Get doctor."

"All right. You tell me where the souvenirs are, and I'll see to it you don't die from ackeys."

She made a listless gesture. Following it, Cotrell dumped the contents of her handbag onto the table. In the glittering clutter of gem-encrusted compact, cigarette case, and matching perfume atomizer, was a tiny carven jade figurine. Cotrell held it out to Yem, who took it and nodded.

"Where's the box?"

"Stocking - casket. H o t e l room."

Cotrell took out his notebook, hurriedly scribbled in it. "Diary. Tells how," she added. "Quickly —get me a doctor!"

Cotrell ripped out the leaf. "Have Stanley run this to the telegraph office. Quickly," he said to Yem.

Yem took it wordlessly and went out.

"You—" said Cotrell to the huddled thing on the floor, and the syllable was all scorn, all revulsion. "You couldn't be frightened—not when you could be a woman. But you can't smile and raise your ruddy eyebrow when you're behaving like a poisoned mongrel, eh? By heaven, I had to play you like a fish to get you out here and get that confession—and the 'souvenirs.' That's all we needed. We have two witnesses who saw you near here that night, and half a hundred who saw you driving down the Spanish Town Road on the wrong side.

"We couldn't pin you down to the shop, but now we have the jade and the casket. You didn't think we'd suspect a woman of a bludgeoning, did you?" He broke off to let another

horrible retching spell pass. When it was over, he said, "Oh, yes. That. The salt fish made you thirsty. Made you drink water. Water that was loaded with a nice tasteless essence of *nux vomica*. There's nothing wrong with the ackey."

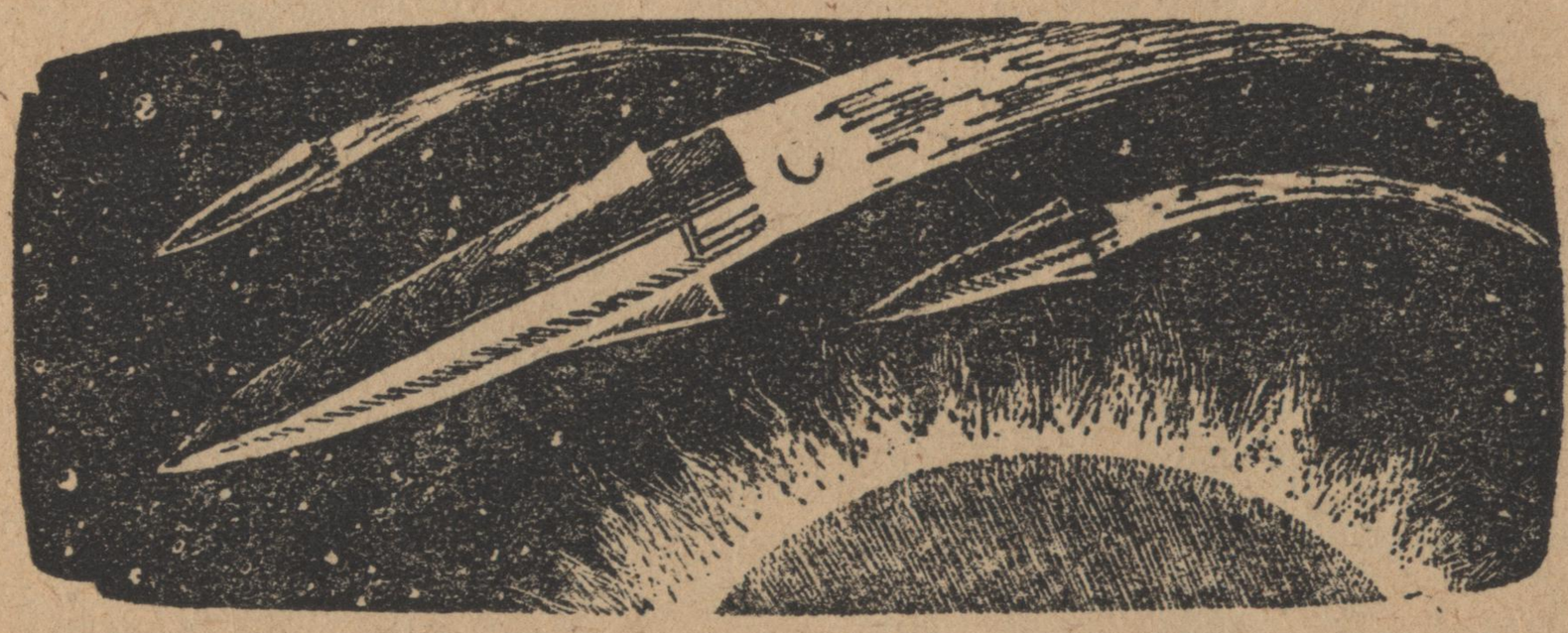
Brunhilde Moot began to cry. Cotrell put the manacles on her. She did not resist. She cried as if she did not quite know how to do it. It was probably the first time in years that she had cried.

"Why?" she said. "Why this sneaky, rotten way to trap me?"

Jeff Cotrell turned his back. His voice came thickly, "It was the only way. If you could have stood up, faced it, fought it, then I—I shouldn't have been able—"

The sound behind him, suddenly, was not a sob, but the shadow of a laugh. "A conquest!" she said. "I suppose I shall get to the hanging after all; and there you'll be too. A mad infatuation can very easily destroy a man—and his pride."

Jeff Cotrell turned away, his face ashen, "Not this man," he said. "No. No, I'm quite sure you're wrong."



In the current issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *the* SAINT'S *monthly companion in reading lamp solidarity, the human brain with all of its devious complexities underwrites a mystery drama extraordinary. It's called* THE ASSISTANT SELF *and it was penned by one of science fantasy's leading craftsmen, F. L. Wallace. The assistant self is a creature of a thousand talents who springs full-grown from a tormented man's abnormal empathy in a world of research miracles and industrial strife. And that's why we so strongly urge you not to miss this pulse-stirring lead novelette, and to discovr for yourself the precise meaning of a thermal concussion and a human personality collapsed to zero. You'll enjoy, too, the fine short-stories by Robert Sheckley, Ib Melchior—and many others.*

the gesture

by . . . Gil Brewer

A great romantic love can have a tragic sequel — when jealousy tempts a man to criminal violence.

NOLAN placed both hands on the railing of the veranda, and unconsciously squeezed the wood until the muscles in his arms corded and ached. He looked down, across the immaculately trimmed green lawn, past the palms and the Australian pines, to the beach, gleaming whitely under the late morning sun.

The Gulf was crisply green today, and calm, broken only by the happy frolicking of the man and woman—laughing, swimming. His wife, Helen, and Latimer, the photographer from the magazine in New York, down to do a picture story of the island.

Nolan turned his gaze away, lifted his hands and stared at his palms. His hands were trembling and his thin cotton shirt was soaked with perspiration.

He couldn't stand it. He left the veranda, and walked swiftly into the sprawling living room of his home. He paced back and forth for a moment, his feet whispering on the grass rug. Then he stood quietly in the

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Every editor of a detective mystery magazine acquires—often without any accompanying rationalization—a kind of conditioned reflex *in regard to "surprise twists," or, if you prefer, "whiplash denouements." He either likes them or is allergic to them, or is lackadaisical in the matter unless they're simply terrific. Well, whatever our own* CR *may be, we think you'll agree that the brilliant Mr. Brewer has here presented us with a twist that's superlatively terrific, with the subconscious motives leading up to it memorably conveyed.*

---

center of the room, trying to think. For two weeks it had been going on. At first he'd thought he would last. Now he knew it no longer mattered, about lasting.

He would have to do something. He strode rapidly across the room into his study, opened the top drawer of his desk, and looked down at the .45 automatic. He slammed the drawer shut, whirled and went back into the living room.

Why had he ever allowed the man entrance to the island?

Oh, he knew why, well enough. Because Helen had wanted it. And now he couldn't order Latimer away. It would be as good as telling Helen the reason. She knew how much he loved her; why did she act this way? Why did she torture him? She *must* realize, after all these years, that he couldn't stand another man even looking at her beauty.

Why did she think they lived here—severed from all mainland life?

He stiffened, making an effort to wipe away the frown on his face. He reached for his handkerchief, and swabbed at the perspiration on his arms and forehead. They were coming, laughing and talking, up across the lawn.

Quickly, he selected a magazine from the rack and settled into a wicker chair with his back to the front entrance. He flipped the periodical open and was engrossed in a month-old mystery story when they stomped loudly across the veranda.

Every step was a kind of unbearable thunder to Nolan. He was reaching such a pitch of helpless irritability that he nearly screamed.

"Darling!" Helen called. "Where are you—oh, there!"

She stepped toward him, her bare feet softly thumping the grass rug. He half-glanced up at her. She was coffee-brown, her eyes excited and happier than he'd seen them in a long, long time. She wore one of the violent-hued red, yellow and green cloth swimming suits that she'd designed for herself.

He abruptly realized how meager the suit was and his neck burned. He had contrived to have her make the suit with the least expenditure of material. It was his pleasure to look at her.

But not now—not with Latimer here!

"What *have* you been doing?" she asked.

He started to reply, looking across at Latimer standing at the entranceway, but she rippled on. "You really should have come swimming with us, dear. It was wonderful this morning." She reached out and touseled his hair. "You haven't been near the water in days."

Nolan cleared his throat. "Well," he said. "Well, Mister

Latimer. About caught up? About ready with your story?"

He wanted to shout: *When are you leaving!* He could not. He sat there, staring at Latimer. The sunny days here on the island had done the man good. He was bronzed and healthy and young and abrim with a vitality that had not been present when he'd first come over from the mainland.

"A few more days, I guess," Latimer said. "I wish you'd call me Jack. And I sure wish you two would pose for a few pictures. It's nice enough, the way you've been about letting me photograph the island, your home, but—" Latimer left the protest unspoken, smiling half-heartedly.

Nolan glanced at his wife. She reached down and touched his arm, her fingers trembling. "After lunch Jack and I are going to take a walk, clear around the island," she said. "You know, we haven't done that in a terribly long while. Why don't you come along?"

"Sorry," Nolan said quickly. "I've some things I've got to attend to."

"Sure wish you'd come," Latimer said.

Nolan said nothing.

"Well," Latimer said. "I've got to write a letter. Guess I'll do it while you're fixing lunch, Helen."

"Right," Helen said. "I'd better get busy." She turned, and hurried off toward the kitchen, humming softly.

"By the way," Latimer said to Nolan. "Anything you'd like done in town? I'll be taking the boat across this evening, so I can mail some stuff off."

"Thank you," Nolan said. "There's nothing."

"Well," Latimer said. He sighed and started across the room toward the hallway leading to his bedroom. It had been a storage room, but Nolan had fixed it up with a bed and a table for Latimer's typewriter when Helen insisted the photographer stay on the island. Latimer paused by the hallway. "Sure you won't come with us this afternoon?"

Nolan didn't bother to answer. He couldn't answer. If he had tried, he knew he might have shouted, even cursed—maybe actually gone at the man with his bare hands.

He would not use his bare hands. He wouldn't soil them. He would use the gun. He listened as Latimer left the room, and sat there breathing stiffly, his fingers clenched into the magazine's crumpled pages.

Yes, that's what he would do. Latimer's saying he was going to remain on the island longer still clinched it. Nolan knew why Latimer had said that. He wasn't fooling anybody. Taking advantage of hospitality for his own

sneaking reasons. Didn't Helen see what kind of a man Latimer was? Was she blind? Or did she want it this way?

The very thought of such a thing sent Nolan out of the chair, stalking back and forth across the room. He could hear Latimer's typewriter ticking away from the far side of the house.

Their paradise. Their home. Their love. Torn and twisted and broken by this insensitive person. He heard Helen call them to lunch then, and, moving toward the table in the dining room, he felt slightly relieved. He knew that while they were gone this afternoon, he would get everything ready.

With Latimer's unconscious aid, Nolan knew exactly what he was going to do and how he was going to do it. He sat at the table, picking at his food, listening to them talk and laugh. He tried vainly to concentrate away from the sounds of their voices.

"This salad's terrific," Latimer said. "Helen, you're wonderful! You two've got it made, out here!"

Helen lowered her gaze to her plate. Nolan stared directly at Latimer and Latimer reddened and looked away. Nolan grinned inside. He had caught the man. But the victory was empty. The long afternoon, thinking about her out there with Latimer would be painful.

They finished lunch in silence. Almost before Nolan realized it, the house was again empty. He could hear them laughing still, their voices growing faint as they moved down along the beach.

Helen had even insisted on taking several bottles of cold beer wrapped in insulated bags to keep cool, and carried in the old musette.

Nolan could not stand still. He paced back and forth across the extent of the house, thinking about tonight. If he didn't do it tonight, it might be too late. He did not want Helen too attached to Latimer and he felt sure it had gone very far already.

He knew Latimer intended to stay on and stay on—until he could take Helen away with him. But tonight would end it. He would go along with Latimer to the mainland. Only Latimer would never reach the mainland. The boat would swamp.

Nolan knew how to swamp a boat. He knew Latimer wasn't much of a swimmer, and anyhow, a man couldn't swim with a .45 slug in his heart. But Nolan could swim well. He would kill Latimer, take him out into the Gulf, weight him and sink him. Then he'd bring the boat in and swamp it and swim ashore. He would report it, and rent a boat and come home. He knew they were in for a bit of heavy weather tonight. It would be just perfect.

And Helen and he would be

happy again. The way they had always been.

He looked back, thinking over the good times. The time before they'd come to the island, when he'd been hard-working at the glass-cutting business he'd inherited from his father. Then more and more he'd become conscious of Helen's beauty and the effect she had on men. And loving her as wildly as he did, he could no longer bear the endless suspense; the knowledge that sooner or later, she would leave him. So he sold the business, retired. His little lie. So far as she knew, he simply wanted island life—quiet, unhurried, alone with her. It was true. But not a complete truth.

All this time they had been happy. Until now. Somebody'd got wind of the beauty of the island and Latimer had shown up, to do his story. Under conditions imposed by Nolan—no pictures of either himself or Helen. He had allowed one fuzzy negative of them standing against a blossoming hibiscus near the house, at twilight—that was all.

Wandering through the house, trying not to think of what they were doing now, he found himself in Latimer's room. The unmade bed, the photographic equipment, the typewriter set up on the table.

Beside the machine was a typewritten letter.

Nolan turned away. But something drew him over to the table. Pure curiosity in this man Latimer. He stood there, staring down at the obviously unfinished letter. An addressed envelope lay beside it. There was a half-completed sentence on the sheet in the typewriter, numbered *Page Two.*

The letter was addressed to the editor of the magazine where Latimer worked.

Nolan began reading, at first leisurely, then feverishly.

"Dear Bart:

Really have this thing wrapped up, but I'm staying on a while longer, just to settle a few things in my own mind and maybe I'll come up with a bunch of pix and a yarn that'll knock your head off . . . sure beautiful scenery on the island . . . house is a regular bamboo and cypress mansion . . . unhealthy, Bart, really sick . . . he watches her like a hawk. He's ripped with jealousy and it would be laughable, except that they're both so very old. He must be in his eighties, but she's a bit harder to read. I did a lousy thing. I confronted her with it. You would have, too. She's so obviously just enduring everything for his sake. Humoring him. My God, think of it! All these years he's kept her out here, away from everybody, imprisoned. It's pure hell. She as much as admitted it. I'm staying on, just to see if I can't work it somehow. Get her

back to civilization, if only for a vacation, Bart. She deserves it. You should hear her ask how things are out there—it would break your damned heart . . ."

There was more and Nolan read all of it through twice. For a moment longer, he stood there, seeing everything clearly for the first time in nearly a half century.

Then he walked through the house to his study, opened the desk drawer, took out the .45 automatic. He sat down in his chair by the desk, put the muzzle of the gun into his mouth and pulled the trigger.

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the club of one-eyed men

by . . . Arthur Somers Roche

A clever crook may decide to follow the maxim: "Where the carrion lies the vulture flies!" But he does so at his own risk.

IT WAS TIME for me to go to work.

I was sitting at an inconspicuous table pleasantly shielded from the crowds on the sidewalk, sipping my vermouth, when the realization struck me with almost the force of a physical blow. Not that poverty presented an immediate problem. On the contrary, from the proceeds of a certain transaction there remained to me, after paying my passage across the Atlantic and my expenses in Paris for three months, some few thousands of dollars. By taking full advantage of the current favorable exchange rate I could hope to live decently for another six months at the very least.

I am, I flatter myself, a man who makes up his mind quickly, and acts without inhibitions. Certainly when I had decided that I would rather live a thief than starve an honest man, I had acted instantly. Let me say, in qualification, that I had not yet had the

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When the brilliant short-stories of Arthur Somers Roche first appeared in the pages of COSMOPOLITAN *a certain dash and world-traveling resplendence was abroad in the land and inseparable from the traditions of the literary craft. A writer could dance the saraband if he so desired or wear a beribboned dinner jacket or recount with gusto a dueling episode in the Parisian dawn. But Mr. Roche was wiser than his predecessors and blended a very modern realism with the adventurous romanticism of that fabulous milieu. And the kind of writing which made him famous is magnificently exemplified in this mystery yarn.*

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slightest reason to regret that decision.

I was not even disturbed by the fact that, when I had kissed an ebullient farewell to the traditions of all the Ainsleys, I, John Ainsley, was the first of my line to embrace crime as a rewarding profession.

That my future must be outside the law I had determined many years before. My first venture into crime had yielded me a profit so great, in proportion to the risk involved, that I never for a moment seriously considered any other choice of a career.

I raised my finger, and an attentive *garçon* hastened to my table. I paid him for my *apéritif,* rose and without the slightest display of haste joined the crowd that surged from the Place de l'Opera up the Boulevard des Capucines. It was springtime, and all the world had seemingly come to Paris.

In the apartment which I had rented, on the Rue Danou, I had deliberately studied my problem. And I had come to the inevitable conclusion that the so-called supercriminal had never existed. For invariably the histories of those over-confident egotists ended with their arrests and convictions to punishments too unpleasant to contemplate. A true criminal would be a studious and reasonable man who escaped the law completely.

Yet some of these egocentric men had shown a talent for crime that approached genius. I asked myself why they had finally failed. The answer was obvious. No single individual can be stronger or cleverer than all the forces of society. The man, then, who deliberately antagonizes these forces is a fool. But the man who recognizes the difficulties before him, and takes precautions that will minimize them, increases his chance of success.

While I could hardly hope to improve upon the methods of some of the more famous crooks, I could, by applying their methods in a different fashion, avoid their errors. For the crook has no friends. Neither has he any of the ordinary resources of the law-abiding citizen.

To prey upon thieves: that should be my career. To prey on them, was the sum and substance of my audacious plan. I would work alone, for a man courts disaster when he trusts another.

I walked across the Place de l'Opera and entered a steamship agency. By a stroke of good fortune a room and bath had been surrendered scarcely an hour before, and it was not at all difficult for me to obtain it. So I left the agency feeling distinctly elated, the possessor of a ticket which entitled me to sail on the following Wednesday from Cherbourg on the *Altæria.*

I realized, of course, that it would be necessary for me to ply my trade in my own country. It is true that I had a smattering of French, but I could not carry on a fluent conversation. I would be handicapped at the outset if I dealt with French criminals.

There was, it is true, a certain risk in returning to New York. My first venture in theft had been at the expense of Daragon, the Fifth Avenue jeweler. But it was not a certainty that Daragon knew who had robbed him. Moreover, looking at myself in the gild-bordered mirror in my bedroom on the Rue Danou, I seriously doubted if Daragon would now be able to recognize me.

And there were just as many persons of ill-gotten wealth in New York as there were in Paris. I was not narrowing my opportunities by returning to a country with which I was familiar. Indeed, as I contemplated my return, I wished that I had never left New York. I wondered, as I sat in my window, just when, where and how I could begin my operations.

I was rather in a good mood as, dressed for dinner, I left my apartment in order to keep an engagement with some casual acquaintances I had met at Maxim's bar.

They were Americans who were in Paris on business, and who had, in return for some little courtesies that I had shown them, expressed a desire that I should be their guest on a tour of Place Pigalle.

I met them at the appointed time. I had explored before all of that famous section, but these were pleasant young men, urbane and cultivated, and it was a pleasure to associate, however casually, with one's own kind.

We wound up, late at night, at the Jardin des Nymphes. I would rather have said good night at the door of this place, but did not wish to seem unappreciative of their hospitality. All such night clubs are alike; the Jardin des Nymphes has its parallel in New York City, and in San Francisco and I imagine that India and China could offer the curious visitor something similar.

One of my hosts ordered champagne. A moment later a bold-eyed girl smiled at him from an adjoining table. My friends rose eagerly to the occasion and in a moment the smiling girl had acquired two other friendly companions, and they had crowded about our table at the edge of the dance floor. More champagne was brought, and presently my two hosts were dancing with their newly-acquired partners.

I pleaded fatigue. The lady who had selected me as her escort for the evening sighed with relief.

"I've danced my shoes almost off," she said. "I am glad that Monsieur feels not too gay."

I looked at her. I did not even wish to talk to her, but after all, my friends had practically invited her to join us. Common courtesy demanded a certain genial pretense on my part. So we talked at random. Little by little, I drew from her bits of information about the habitues of the place. She had a brutally droll humor, and was not sparing in its use.

Suddenly she emitted a whistle of surprise. She had become quite friendly with me by now. She gripped my arm, and pointed to a tall, white-haired man who was just entering a booth on the other side of the floor. In the bright lights that illuminated the room I could see him clearly. He was extremely well groomed, with an easy, assured manner, and a certain droop at one corner of his wide mouth seemed to indicate that of the two worlds represented here, the lower had spawned him.

"That," said my fair informant, "is the White Eagle. Monsieur has heard of him? No?"

"Who is he?" I asked.

She shrugged her powdered shoulders. "He is the White Eagle, monsieur. If the name means nothing—" She shrugged again.

I looked again at the booth across the floor. The White Eagle was seated now, and he had accepted champagne from the occupant already there. I observed that occupant closely. He was an elderly stout man, his ostentation of dress and manner only equaled by the painted and bejeweled old woman who was his companion. I set them down immediately as persons of immense and recent wealth.

The White Eagle turned his head, and it immediately became clear to me why he bore his picturesque appellation. For his nose was a great curved beak. In profile one could not avoid noticing it. That, with his white hair, sufficiently explained his nickname.

"Who is he?" I asked of my companion again.

"Monsieur evidently does not read the Paris papers," she replied.

"With difficulty, mademoiselle, I told her."

She lowered her voice. "The White Eagle, monsieur, was tried for the theft of the Lagan jewels. He was what you call acquit', as he has always been acquit', every time the police try to put him in prison."

"A criminal?" I asked with interest.

She shrugged again. "It has never been proven," she said.

I nodded understandingly. I felt a thrill pass up and down my spine. Here, perhaps, was the opportunity which I needed. For I was quite sure the White

Eagle was hovering around the couple in the booth opposite for reasons connected with his profession. I was looking then at another of the so-called super-crooks, the class upon which I had determined to prey.

I turned to my companion. "Shall we dance?" I asked.

She was obviously tired, but could not afford to offend. We moved out upon the dance floor, and I took care to remain for fully five minutes close to the booth where the White Eagle sat with his prey.

He seemed on familiar terms with them. Indeed, it seemed more than likely that he and the other man were discussing some urgent matter of business. I would have given a great deal to overhear their conversation, for I felt convinced that some cunning swindle was in the air. And I was confident that I could turn that swindle to my own profit if I could only learn its nature.

But for the moment that was impossible. I returned with my partner to our table. As I sat down, I saw the White Eagle rise, kiss the pudgy hand of the overfed woman opposite, shake hands with her husband, and leave them.

A moment later the other two rose. The man draped about the fat and wrinkled shoulders of his companion a cape of ermine that must have cost a king's ransom. He handed a bank note to his waiter, and moved out from the table.

I too rose abruptly. I pleaded a sudden headache, and refused, almost harshly, the offers of my two hosts to escort me home. I would not dream, I told them, of cutting short their evening's entertainment. And so they let me go.

I retrieved my hat and coat from the cloakroom, and raced out into the lobby just in time to see the couple whom I was following enter a limousine. I hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to follow the car ahead. I was reluctant to resort to a strategy so conspicuous, but I could not have followed on foot, and I was determined to find out where the friends of the White Eagle were stopping.

Their car stopped before the Meurice. I dismissed my taxi and entered into conversation with the hotel porter. From him, without difficulty, and without arousing his suspicions, I learned the name of the couple who had just entered the hotel. Then I turned and walked to my apartment in the Rue Daunou.

I find that I think better in bed than when pacing the floor or sitting relaxed in a chair. Undressed, then, with cigarettes on a stand beside me, I pondered the strange relationship which I had been privileged to observe at first hand.

What was the precise basis of the acquaintance between the White Eagle, a notorious though unpunished criminal, and Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Higgins of Cincinnati, Ohio? I wondered that I had not recognized the Higginses at first glance. Still, the photographs of them, which had appeared in the American and European press, had evidently been retouched to a degree. And if I had not instantly recognized the faces, I paid proper tribute to the Higgins glory by immediately identifying their names.

Who except an anchorite in the desert had not heard of Josiah Higgins, who had been a multimillionaire before the war, and who was now popularly reputed to be worth at least a billion? Statisticians had estimated how many times his fortune, if reduced to dollar bills, would girdle the globe, and how many times it would rebuild the Pyramids if reduced to silver coins.

Their extravagances had become a matter of international awe. And the queer parsimony which accompanied their extravagance was also well known. Higgins proudly boasted that he never gave a dollar to charity, and that he never lent money.

And this was the couple who had talked confidentially with the White Eagle! The thought of blackmail entered my mind, but I dismissed it at once. If the White Eagle had been threatening Higgins—strain and antagonism would have been sharply in evidence. No, they had been talking business.

What possible business could exist between the White Eagle and Josiah Higgins? If Higgins had had a son or daughter unhappily entangled in some underworld affair, it would not have strained credulity to believe that the White Eagle had been called upon for aid. But the couple were childless.

I tossed upon the bed, fretting and wracking my brains and smoking a score of cigarettes. Somewhere in the relation between the criminal and the millionaire lay a priceless opportunity for me, if only I could summon the wisdom to solve the underlying enigma.

For whatever the hidden relationship between Higgins and the White Eagle, it must involve an underhanded factor, even though I could not guess why a billionaire should engage in an enterprise of a criminal nature. The White Eagle was a crook. A crook does only crooked business, whether his partner be honest or otherwise.

I awoke with a headache. I had slept for only a few hours, and my sleep had been interrupted by dreams in which the White Eagle remorselessly took a fortune from Josiah Higgins while I looked on, powerless to abstract

the windfall from the triumphant supercrook.

I tried to eat breakfast, but the combination of too much wine and too little sleep had killed my appetite. I was nervous, restless, and finally, in sheer desperation, I decided to go for a walk. I crossed to the Left Bank, wandering aimlessly, my mind still intent on the puzzle, and eventually found myself in the neighborhood of the Luxemburg.

The walk had cleared my head, and my appetite was returning. I continued on to Foyot's and ordered breakfast. Food put me in a more philosophical frame of mind. After all, how could I be sure I wasn't deluding myself? Higgins might have made the acquaintance of a notorious crook simply for the sake of the thrill which some people gain from such an association. At any rate, it did not make sense for me to go on tormenting myself by wrestling with problems that, having no existence, could have no solution.

But despite my resolution to think no more of Higgins and the White Eagle, they were both very much on my mind as I turned a corner into the Rue des Saints Peres, and collided with a group of men standing before a doorway. I muttered an apology, stepped back, and was startled to discover that the member of the group with whom I had come most violently into contact had fallen to the ground. I was even more startled when I saw that he was blind in one eye.

I bent over swiftly, and helped him to his feet. My perfunctory apology become profuse and sincere. Seeing that he was shabbily dressed, I offered him a coin. He seized it greedily, and I would have passed on if I had not at that moment noticed that the rest of the group were all blind in one eye.

Other groups hovered across the street, in the street, and farther down the narrow sidewalk on which I stood. And I noticed that every single one of them suffered the same grievous affliction: They were all blind in one eye.

I suppose that my amazed horror was reflected in my face. For the man to whom I had presented the gratuity laughed at me.

"Monsieur is amazed, yes? To see so many of us is strange?"

"Is this a hospital here?" I asked, pointing at the building before which he stood.

He shook his head. "No, monsieur, it is the home of a patron of all who are afflicted with partial blindness. Monsieur has not read this morning's *Cri De Paris?*"

I shook my head, and he thrust into my hand a copy of the paper, folded back to an advertisement. I read it lamely in my faltering French. Translated, it ran:

A gentleman whose son, having lost an eye for France, bore his wound proudly despite his affliction, until his death by accident recently, wishes to honor the memory of that noble son by kindness to those similarly afflicted. The gentleman will devote part of his large fortune to the founding and maintenance of a club for one-eyed men. It will not be limited only to those who lost their sight in the war. All men who are without the sight of one eye are eligible for membership and may enjoy the privileges of the club. Those interested are requested to apply to Number—, Rue des Saints Peres, between the hours of nine and twelve on Wednesday.

I read this amazing advertisement in astonishment—it was so typically French in sentiment. It was a charity a trifle too bizarre for American taste, but its kindness could not be denied. I placed another coin on my informant's palm, and hurried away from the grotesque scene.

But at the first corner I stopped, turned, and stared after a man who had passed me—it was the White Eagle. And then interest became amazement, for he entered the house before which the blind men were impatiently waiting. Immediately upon his entrance a servant came to the door and beckoned to the unfortunates. Five minutes later they were all within the house.

I waited outside, at a convenient corner. Somehow or other I could not believe that this grotesque advertisement contained all that was of interest. Of course, crooks are notoriously impulsive, and given to streaks of extravagant generosity. Nevertheless, I waited.

One by one, the blind men began to emerge from the house. All of them seemed happy, as though incredible good fortune had come to them. Finally the man to whom I had given the coins reappeared. I accosted him, and he beamed upon me.

"Ah, it is my generous American!"

"Well, did you join the club?" I asked.

"But yes, monsieur!" He almost capered in delight.

As I have said my French is feeble. Yet I managed to gather from his excited speech that all the applicants had been admitted to club membership, and that not only were there no dues, but that members in dire financial need were to be granted annuities. I further gathered that the club was to have an outing upon a Seine river steamer next week, on which occasion detailed plans were to be submitted to the membership by its benefactor.

"Did you meet the patron himself?" I asked.

"M. Armand Cochet? But surely, monsieur. A fine gentleman, white of hair, with an eye

like an eagle. Yes, he spoke to us all."

"I think I saw him enter," I said.

I congratulated my friend, and we parted with mutual expressions of esteem. It seemed incredible to me that the White Eagle, or M. Armand Cochet, could be engaged in such an astounding philanthropy as a club for one-eyed men. And yet, battling against my disbelief, was my knowledge of the impetuous kindness of all those who live by their wits. Could it be that the White Eagle sought to pacify his conscience by such a typically Gallic charity?

But criminals do not ordinarily invite public attention. Of course I did not forget that, according to my fair companion of the night before, the White Eagle had never in his life been convicted of a serious crime. But it was among the ordinary probabilities that one or more of the applicants attracted by his bizarre advertisement would be of the criminal class. One would expect him to be fearful of recognition by such an applicant. Still, beggars can't be choosers, and it was possible that the White Eagle felt that men desperately in need of charity would not be inclined to question the source of the revenues which would change the world for them.

But I had devoted altogether too much purely speculative thought to the White Eagle and his affairs. I confessed myself, finally, beaten. I could neither understand what could be the relation between him and Higgins, nor why the White Eagle should institute a philanthropy in the first place.

I vowed that I would dismiss the problem completely. If in the dealings between Higgins and the white-haired man there lay opportunity for me, I would deliberately forgo it, for I knew it was quite easy for a man to drive himself to distraction by futile speculation.

Even though a sensible man has rented a furnished apartment, and lived in it for only a few months, he quickly finds that little by little one has acquired a considerable quantity of possessions. I was sailing in two days, and could ill-afford to be wilfully extravagant. So I spent the remainder of the day in dealings with second-hand merchants, realizing by my skillful bargaining a few thousand francs. The next day I spent in packing and shipping my trunks and in purchasing some necessities for the trip. And the next morning, promptly at nine o'clock, I passed through the train gates at the Gare du Nord, and entered a first-class carriage.

Having seen to it that my bags were safely deposited in a corner of the compartment, I walked to the platform to observe the rest

of the travelers. I had strolled as far as the train gates, puffing on a cigarette, and was about to turn back when I saw, accompanied by a maid, a valet and an obsequious-seeming youth who was unquestionably the billionaire's secretary, Mr. and Mrs. Higgins.

I had not examined the passenger-list, and so was surprised at their arrival. But beyond a natural interest at the coincidence I would have thought very little about it if they had not been followed through the gates by a man who was blind in one eye. Not merely that, but he was indisputably one of the group with which I had collided on a corner of the Rue des Saints Peres!

I could not be mistaken. The fact that his dress was much improved and that he had been to a barber made no difference. In that first moment of shock, when I had realized that all of the loiterers on the sidewalk shared the same affliction, the features of most of them had been ineradicably impressed upon my memory.

The instant I recognized him my determination to worry no more about Higgins and the White Eagle left me. Instead, I watched eagerly for the arrival of M. Cochet. But he did not come, though I waited until the last moment before the train started.

I strolled through the train shortly after we pulled out from the station. The Higgins party occupied two private compartments, as I could tell from the half-opened doors. The one-eyed man shared a compartment with three other people who were quite obviously American tourists.

The one-eyed man, then, was not part of the Higgins entourage. He had exchanged no signs of recognition with the billionaire as they passed through the train gates, although they had been close enough to touch each other.

Puzzled, bewildered, almost frantic because I could not peer through the curtains behind which I was quite sure a play of vital significance to me was being performed, I rode alone in my compartment to Cherbourg. I was no wiser at the end of the railway journey, and I was still feeling bitterly frustrated five days later when the *Altaria* was only a night out from her dock in New York.

During those five days I had observed—as closely as I could without drawing attention to myself—Higgins and the one-eyed man. But although nearly every one of the first-class passengers engaged in conversation, at some time or other, with Higgins, the one-eyed man never, to the best of my knowledge, even exchanged a look with him.

The one-eyed man kept strictly to himself. Whenever he walked the deck, he was alone. He never seemed to utter more than monosyllables to his tablemates in the saloon and he neither offered nor accepted hospitality in the smoking room. He even drank alone.

On the night before we landed, I attended the concert in the lounge. I sat with a couple of chance acquaintances near the door, and for a full hour we watched our fellow passengers come and go, speculating, after the fashion of travelers, as to their occupations, probable income, and flirtations during the voyage. Then, as Mr. and Mrs. Higgins came through the wide door, we all three gasped.

It was not that Mrs. Higgins' jewels were so expensive. It was that she wore such an unbelievable number of them. She seemed plastered with precious stones, so that one could hardly see the woman for the glitter she provoked. I had read about her jewels, but had assumed that the newspapers had been guilty of the usual Sunday supplement exaggeration. Now I knew that they had been commendably restrained.

One jewel especially—a pearl hanging from a chain until it rested like a round white grape upon her bosom—held my fascinated gaze. It drew my companions' attention too, and one of them, Brokaw, mentioned it.

"See that pearl?" he whispered. "Have you any idea what it's worth?"

I shook my head.

"I know," he said. "I was in Maret's on the Rue de la Paix, when her husband bought it." He chuckled. "And I was buying a hundred dollar brooch to take home to the Missus, and thinking what a hit I'd make with her! In come Higgins and his wife, and at the top of his lungs old Josiah declares that he's come for the Ranee's Pearl, and that he's brought his personal check for a quarter of a million dollars with him. Believe me, I almost died with shame to think how I'd been haggling over my little brooch. I paid what they asked, apologized for annoying them, and sneaked out."

"I wouldn't say that pearl was extremely large," I remarked.

"It's as big as your eye," Brokaw affirmed. "And it's the most perfect pearl of its size in existence. I heard Maret jabbering about it. Some Indian prince went broke and sold it." He whistled. "He'll have to part with more money tomorrow, at the Customs, when he shows them that little treasure. It will break his heart. He hates to spend a nickel where it won't show, the old tightwad."

I agreed with him, thinking how well I could use the money

represented by the pearl. I left the lounge for the smoking room long before the concert was over.

The room was deserted, save for the one-eyed man. Reluctant to arouse any latent suspicion in him I had hitherto refrained from speaking to him. But now I nodded pleasantly and he nodded in return. It was my last chance to make his acquaintance, and I had not yet given up the idea that he might be Opportunity's grandchild.

But when I followed my nod with an invitation to join me in a pint of champagne, he brusquely refused. His one good eye shot a suspicious glance at me and I noted that the eye was gray, and that his glass optic matched the other.

Rebuffed, I made no further effort. I drank my wine, rose, took a turn around the deck, and returned to my stateroom. I immediately undressed and went to bed, finally convinced that whatever the mystery of Higgins, the White Eagle and the one-eyed man, it was beyond my power to solve with any hope of profit.

Somewhere along toward dawn, I was aroused by a pounding at my door. I climbed from my bed, threw a dressing-gown over my pajamas, and opened the door. A ship's officer stood there, regarding me steadily.

"Sorry, sir," he said, "but would you mind coming to the lounge?"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He smiled deprecatingly. "One of the passengers has lost some jewelry. Rather a valuable trinket."

"Well, what has that got to do with me?" I demanded.

"Nothing, sir—I hope," he replied. "But the gentleman insists that all passengers who passed by the door of his cabin tonight submit to a search. It's Mr. Higgins, sir. It's his wife's pearl that is missing and you and three other gentlemen have cabins in this corridor. To reach your rooms you have to pass by the Higgins' suite. And the steward on watch swears that no other passengers have entered the corridor since Mr. and Mrs. Higgins retired."

"And just because I happen to have a cabin in the same quarter of the ship I'm to be insulted without cause."

The officer became more apologetic. "I know how you feel, sir. But I hope you'll make it easy for us. Of course, you have a right to refuse, but if you do it will only cause trouble on the deck. The captain presents his compliments, sir, and hopes that you will waive your rights, and help him to avoid a scandal for the ship's sake."

"If you put it that way, I guess I'll have to go along," I said.

I followed him down the corridor, across an open space and into the lounge. Seated in the

lounge were Mr. and Mrs. Higgins and their servants. Also there were two Englishmen with whom I had struck up a casual acquaintance, and liked quite well. And then I saw the third gentlemen to whom the ship's officer had referred. It was the one-eyed man.

We all submitted to a search. We handed over the keys of our baggage to an officer and half an hour later he returned with the statement that he had searched all of our effects and found no trace of the missing pearl. Then one of the Englishmen did what I had been longing to do. He walked straight over to Higgins.

"We've heard your story," he said. "You returned from the concert—you and your wife. She took off her jewels and laid them on a table in her cabin. She then went into your cabin, to talk to you. When she returned to her own room, five minutes later, the Ranee's Pearl was gone. Someone had opened the door and stolen it."

"And it must have been someone in one of the cabins on the corridor," insisted Higgins, his face still dark with anger.

"That's what *you* say," said the Englishman. "It doesn't matter to a bounder like you that you insult your betters. Now, we've all been searched, and none of us has your filthy pearl. I merely want to tell you that I'm glad you lost it. I hope the loss teaches you and your wife the vulgarity of ostentation. Good evening, sir."

He turned on his heel, followed by his compatriot, and stalked with dignity from the lounge.

The one-eyed man come close to Higgins, and in rapid French upbraided him. And then, suddenly, I understood everything. Higgins' manner had not told me. The plutocrat acted his part to perfection. But the light of one of the brilliant electric bulbs flashed on the Frenchman's face, and the mystery that had been puzzling me for a week was solved at last.

I went back to bed, neither reproaching Higgins, nor paying any attention to his perfunctory apologies. I slept soundly, happily, as a man should who knows that on the morrow he will acquire a fortune.

With the other passengers I disembarked the next day and submitted to the usual examination of my baggage. I saw the reporters buzzing about the Higginses, and knew that the afternoon headlines would be devoted to the loss of the precious Ranee's Pearl. I chuckled as I thought of the story that *could* be written, but would never appear in the newspapers. You see, I had no doubt as to my success.

Outside the Customs shed I followed the porter with my baggage to a taxi. I told the driver

to bring my things to the Hotel Regina, took his number to assure myself of his honesty, and then waited. In a few minutes the one-eyed man arrived. His porter handed his bags to a taxi driver, and he started to climb into the cab.

Very slowly then I sauntered toward him, and also got into the taxi.

"What do you want?" he demanded, staring at me in consternation.

I smiled cheerfully at him. "Your right eye," I told him. I pressed the pistol muzzle hard against his chest. "No use in crying out." I warned. "It would mean jail for you even if you lived."

There, in the center of crowded West Street, he removed his glass eye and handed it to me. At the next corner I knocked on the window and the driver stopped. I alighted, waved an airy farewell to my one-eyed friend, and strolled blithely across town, a little later to pick up a taxi and drive to the Regina.

I was not afraid of the police. For, would Higgins, who had conspired at the simulation of robbery to avoid the payment of a tremendous duty, confess his own attempt at crime?

For the minute that I had discovered the whereabouts of the Ranee's Pearl, I understood why Higgins had discussed business with the White Eagle. His notorious parsimony had caused him to invoke Monsieur Cochet's aid in defrauding Customs. That was the only possible explanation, and it completely satisfied me.

I had discovered the whereabouts of the pearl simply enough: the one-eyed man's glass eye had been gray in the smoking room. It was green when the light flashed upon it in the lounge. Instantly I understood why the White Eagle had printed his incredible advertisement. Among the applicants for membership in his club he had found the thief willing to aid him in his criminal attempt to help Josiah Higgins defraud his government.

Would the one-eyed man have returned the pearl to Higgins later on, or would he have delivered it to the White Eagle? Would there have been honor among such thieves?

Ask me some easier question. Ask me, for instance, what I did when I arrived at my room in the Regina. I will tell you: I deftly took apart the two halves of the green glass eye which had been surrendered to me, and I kissed the Ranee's Pearl.

I had been right in my theory. Where the carrion lies, the vulture flies.

my friend bill

by . . . Horatio Winslow

It's hard at times for a youth to do the "right thing" on his first big city job. But tripping up a thief is a fine beginning.

AND NOW, father, get ready for some good news. In spite of my letters I've not been feeling half as happy as I pretended to be. Yesterday it seemed to me I couldn't stand New York another day. I wanted to lie down and quit.

You see, I'd just answered a help-wanted ad that had taken me clear down to the Battery—only to find the job taken before I got there. I had walked all the way to save subway fare, so naturally I was tired and discouraged when I wandered over to Battery Park and sat down. Well, while I was looking at the harbor and the Statue of Liberty a friendly looking stranger walked over and sat down beside me.

It wasn't any time at all before we got to talking and I found out that his name was Bill. "Just Bill," he said.

Of course I told him about you and the farm, and how I'd spent my boyhood and the more I talked the more interested he became. Finally he said, "My lad, it's lucky we met up together like

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The only fault we can find in a Horatio Winslow crime story is the way his superlative humor occasionally gets lost in the wealth of authentic detail which surrounds his characters as they pursue their dastardly ends in utter defiance of the Law. But here for once the humor remains constant throughout, perhaps because there is no seesawing of justice to distract the mind from a tale as straightforward as a speeding arrow and a bull's-eye deftly scored.

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this because I'm working for the Strangers' Aid Society."

When I asked him what that was he looked surprised. "Don't tell me you didn't ever hear of the Strangers' Aid Society! Why, it's a big organization with offices all over the city that was set up to find jobs for strangers. I'm one of the agents they send around to find responsible people who want to settle in New York permanently. My job is to find jobs for them."

It seemed so providential that I could hardly believe it. "Do you think you can find *me* a job?" I asked him.

He looked me over, and said, "Are you willing to take any kind of a job?"

I told him I certainly was.

"How about being a night watchman?" he asked.

At first the idea literally took my breath away because I hadn't come to New York for anything like that. But I remembered what you'd always told me about any kind of a living being better than no kind at all. So I crossed my fingers over the last thirty cents I had left, and nodded my head.

"Have you got any references?" Bill asked.

So I showed him the letter from the Reverend Abrams, and the one Professor Saunderson wrote when I had to quit high school and the two from Mr. Buckley. I could see right off that Bill was impressed.

"Fair enough," he said. "Now —how about your courage?"

I told him my courage was all right, and let him feel my arm so that he could see for himself what kind of muscles I had.

"Well," Bill said, "here's the proposition. Nobody knows about this job because the previous employee just quit this morning. A big warehouse down by the river is desperately in need of a new night watchman. Naturally they'd rather have a man of their own than one of those unreliable agency watchmen. You've got to realize—"

"I do," I interrupted. "They asked the Strangers' Aid Society to find a man for them and you promised to do your best."

He shook his head. "No, that isn't quite it. The superintendent doesn't put much faith in the Strangers' Aid Society. That's why we're so anxious to find somebody who will make good. Afterward, you see, we can explain to him that we discovered his very satisfactory employee, and that way it will be a big feather in our caps. So if you get the job you mustn't say a word about the Society until you've made good. Understand?"

We started uptown, Bill paying both fares. Bill hasn't much money because, you see, the Strangers' Aid Society doesn't pay big salaries. But he knew I was down to my last three dimes. All the way uptown he told me

so much about himself that long before we reached our destination I felt as though I'd known Bill all my life.

When we arrived at the warehouse Bill let me go in alone to meet Mr. Accord, the superintendent. At first Mr. Accord seemed suspicious when I asked him for the job, and tried to find out how I knew that the position was open. He told me their last watchman had been attacked by a thug the night before and had quit his job because he was afraid to go back.

Of course I couldn't tell Mr. Accord what Bill had told me. But I showed him the letters, and talked with him until he gave me the job.

I go on duty tonight. Say, I'm happy!

Bill was waiting for me outside the warehouse and he took me to his little hotel room and we had a late supper of crackers and cheese. He's a real square-shooter, dad—one of the nicest fellows I've ever met. I would do anything to help him out, and I let him know how I felt. He seemed pleased, and told me he knew I'd do "the right thing." And I certainly will do the right thing—on Bill's account as much as on my own.

The reason they need a night watchman at the warehouse is not money. It's silk. Sometimes they get big consignments worth more than three dollars a yard and Mr. Accord said that a determined thief breaking in could make off with a thousand yards of it without running much risk of getting caught.

"Keep everybody out," Mr. Accord warned when he gave me his last instructions and I assured him that I would.

LATER . . . Father, I've just had a very funny experience. It's midnight and I'm just about at the end of my first six hours on the job. I haven't eaten the sandwich I brought with me because I don't want to delay finishing this letter, and telling you of my first amusing adventure as a night watchman.

Up until about eight o'clock nothing happened and I was just beginning to feel at home in the place when I heard somebody tap at the door on the street side of the building.

I opened the door a crack, and there stood my friend Bill.

"Hello," he said, "open up."

I shook my head. "I can't," I told him. "My orders are not to let anybody in."

"Aw," Bill said, "I don't count. A Strangers' Aid man can go anywhere."

Of course I saw right off what Bill was driving at. He wanted to find out if I was doing my duty—or was an easy mark for anyone with a glib line of talk. I stiffened up.

"You can't come in here," I

said. "It's against the rules." All the time I was laughing up my sleeve to think how quickly I'd seen through his little joke.

He pretended to get very angry. "Come on," he said. "Do the right thing. Cut out the funny stuff."

I was about to explain that I *was* doing the right thing when who should come along but a policeman. As he started across the street toward us Bill jumped back into the shadows as though he were afraid of him, his face dark with anger.

It was all so comical. Underneath his scowl Bill was, of course, really laughing and I almost burst out laughing myself. Tomorrow when I see him we will laugh about it together—because I was just too smart for him.

After Bill left I had a talk with the policeman. He warned me to be careful of clever thieves who might slip into the water and climb up the piles at the end of the wharf. But I am not afraid.

I'll have to close now, father, and begin watching my property in earnest again. Bill told me to do the "right thing." I promised him I would, and I take promises seriously.

FROM THE DEAD LETTER OFFICE.

Bill, I am writing to you not only because I have good news for you, but because I want to know what has happened to you.

Every day for the past two weeks I have gone down to your little hotel, hoping against hope that Mr. Burke, the clerk, would have good news for me. But he has not seen you and he also says he has never heard of the Strangers' Aid Society and so cannot give me the address. That is why I am sending this letter simply in care of the Society, hoping that the post office may be able to supply street and number.

Last night when I dropped in before going on the job I found that Mr. Burke was going to sell your stuff to recompense the hotel for room-rent. But I knew that you would not like that at all. So I paid him thirty-six dollars and took your clothes and suitcase over to my room where you can get them when you come back, which I hope will be soon.

But now listen to the good news.

The last time I saw you—that first night when you tested me to see if I was honest—I began to wonder about something you'd said. Do you remember telling me you expected me to do the "right thing"?

Well, I asked myself, am I doing the right thing by writing to my father while I am supposed to be on guard as a night watchman? I decided I wasn't. So, finishing the letter hurriedly, I be-

gan to patrol the warehouse as though a bunch of riverfront thugs were getting ready to kidnap me.

It was after twelve. I had passed into the moonlight from the shadow of the warehouse, and could not have been more than six feet from the edge of the wharf when all of a sudden, for no reason at all, I ducked quickly to one side.

As I twisted my head a big piece of iron flew past my right ear, hitting me a little on the shoulder. If it had struck my head it would have caved in my skull. As it was, it knocked me halfway around and down on my hands and knees.

For an instant I couldn't figure what had happened. But as I struggled to my feet I saw somebody leaving the shadows with a revolver held by the wrong end. He was coming at me to finish the job.

If I had been as wise then as I am now I would have pulled my gun right away and shot him in the arm. But I did not want to hurt him. So all I did was swing my club in his direction. It must have caught him full in the face because he spluttered, raised his revolver, and began to fire. I was surprised my blow didn't dislodge the handkerchief that covered his face across his eyes.

Also, why I wasn't killed I don't know, because he banged away three times before I drew my own gun, and once after. One bullet went through my coat-shoulder, drawing blood, and another cut my right cheek so that for three days I had to wear a bandage around my head.

I was the better shot. I fired only once, but that was enough. He pulled the trigger again, dropped his gun and went whirling and staggering around as though he had been punched in the wind. All at once I felt sorry for him and tried to catch him before he fell.

But I was not quick enough. He wobbled back, tripped, and fell fifteen feet into the black water. I yelled for help but of course nobody came because the place was locked. I was going to dive over myself and try to rescue him. But I was glad I didn't because while I was standing there I became faint and pretty nearly fell over the side myself.

A little later a whole crowd of cops and other nightworkers were shaking me by the hand and offering to buy me drinks and telling me I was a hero. But the police rushed me home to be attended to by a doctor.

So you see, Bill, I have made good, although I am more sorry than anybody knows to think I had to make good by shooting a fellow man. Well, he tried to kill me and got it himself. That's all there is to it.

But anyhow you don't have to worry about me. Here's what I want you to think about, Bill. There is a big chance here for men who are reliable and are willing to start at the bottom and work up. Next week Mr. Accord, who thinks I am all right, is going to give me a chance in the office. When I told him I had one of the finest fellows in New York for a friend he said he would be willing to try you out at my old place.

Of course at first this may not mean as much money as you are getting at present. But think of the chance for advancement! And perhaps you may be able to work for the Strangers' Aid Society on the side. Wouldn't you like that?

Think of it, Bill. Fifteen years from now we may be partners. You and me, Bill, old man—and I'd never ask for a better partner than you because you're the finest friend a fellow ever had.

I'm waiting to hear from you, Bill.

Famed Father Brown reveals that a murderer may share a secret with the devil while dallying with pleasures insanely intellectual—and with armor shining bright

THE WORST CRIME IN THE WORLD

By G. K. CHESTERTON

Private-Eye Dick Donahue lands a telling blow to a killer's left ear in a free-swinging saga of murder, mayhem and gently humming bullets

GHOST OF A CHANCE

By FREDERICK NEBEL

in the next SAINT

snap judgment

by . . . Frank Bury

The lieutenant was truly puzzled. Did Crayle's photograph show a killer—or the hangman's noose?

WE FOUND Mervyn Crayle in an almost comfortable posture on his settee. But a bullet had passed diagonally through his head, entering at a point behind his left ear and emerging above his right eye.

On his chest was a miniature camera. It hung from a leather strap encircling his neck. On the settee, near his left hand, lay a revolver.

I would have preferred to believe he had simply shot himself, which would have spared me a great deal of trouble. Instead, I sought the experienced advice of Inspector Maddoz.

"The prints on the revolver are indistinct," I told him, "and I doubt if they could be identified. The burn marks show unmistakably that the gun was fired at close range. But that doesn't prove, of course, that he committed suicide.

"Do you know if Crayle was left-handed?" the Inspector asked.

"He wasn't," I replied. "Yet if he did shoot himself he must have held the gun in his left hand. The gun was lying just to the left of his body, and the bul-

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Here is one of those "best laid plans of mice and men" mystery shockers which expose with a narrative precision as keen as a surgeon's scalpel the deadly little slip between the deed and the gallows. We're quite sure you'll like it.

---

let entered his left ear. It is the location of the wound which looks queer."

"It certainly does," Maddoz agreed. "Behind the left ear. Suicides usually aim at the temple. To inflict such a wound Crayle would have had to hold the gun at an awkward angle."

"That's just it," I said. "And suppose somebody came up behind him and fired at close range with the deliberate intention of making it look like suicide? Crayle could have suddenly turned his head, causing the bullet to enter behind the ear."

The inspector nodded. "It's possible," he agreed. "What about that camera, Lieutenant? Any pictures in it?"

"There were," I said. "I'm waiting for the roll to be developed. But I'm not optimistic on that score. Crayle was a rabid camera fan. He shot pictures all over the place."

"We can't rule out suicide absolutely," Maddoz said. "But if it was murder—who stood to gain by it?"

"Nobody financially," I said. "Either by legacy or insurance. And as far as I've been able to find out, only two people could have had any kind of a motive."

The inspector said quickly: "His wife and her boy friend?"

"Yes," I told him. "Crayle's wife, Betty, left him a short time ago. She went off with a man named Dakers. From what I've heard of Crayle, I can hardly blame her."

"What are they like?—the wife and this Dakers?" Maddoz asked.

"Well, frankly, I liked them both," I admitted. "Neither looks capable of murder. They were expecting Crayle to bring a divorce action, and were not afraid of it."

At this point Sergeant Jackson came in with a package. "Here are the prints you were waiting for, Lieutenant," he said.

Thumbing through the camera shots quickly, I gave a long, low whistle when I came to the last one. "This is it, Inspector," I said grimly.

The photo showed Crayle's fireplace and the mirror above it. Reflected in the mirror was the door directly behind Crayle's head.

And framed in the doorway was Bob Dakers, holding in his hand a revolver. And a very grim figure he seemed.

A few days later, when I got back to headquarters from another case, I ran into Sergeant Jackson. He stopped me and asked: "Did you know they've let Dakers go without bail?"

I looked at him in surprise. "Well, that's fine," I said. "I could never see Dakers facing a jury with death in the foreman's stare."

"Better see Maddoz," Jackson advised. "It was his special baby.

He's practically turning somersaults."

The sergeant wasn't exaggerating. Inspector Maddoz actually offered me a cigarette. I had never known him to do that except in rare spasms of good humor.

"Lieutenant, I've always told you it's a mistake to take anything—the smallest detail—for granted in our job."

He smiled at me. "Of course, Crayle shot himself. It's perfectly clear now. He'd already threatened to do so. But when he carried it out he deliberately made it look suspicious to start us probing."

The inspector leaned forward. "Here's how I reconstruct it. Crayle hated Dakers for running off with his wife. He wanted Dakers to be accused of killing him and to hang for it." Maddoz raised a hand to silence me. "Yes, I know what you're going to say. That photo was 'proof positive' that Dakers stood behind him with a gun. It put a photo-finish to Dakers' dream of making it look like suicide.

"But now listen. Dakers is a member of a pistol shooting club. Recently Crayle visited the club's range while Dakers was there. He had his camera with him. It was the simplest thing in the world to get a picture of Dakers with the revolver in his hand. I'm sure you won't be surprised when I tell you that the club afterwards found a revolver missing. It seems pretty clear that Crayle walked off with it."

"Now what would the next step be? You've guessed it. He made a blown-up print of Bob Dakers. It was an extraordinarily accurate measuring job. When the cutout was pasted to the mirror over the mantelpiece, it fitted exactly into the reflection of the doorway, giving the impression that Dakers was standing there with the gun in his hand.

"So Crayle took his picture. Then he removed the print from the mirror and destroyed it. He then used the revolver shown in the photo to blow his brains out, firmly convinced that he had successfully framed his rival for murder."

Maddoz smiled. "But one of the simple facts he didn't take into account was this. The overcoat Dakers wore in the picture had an unusual check design. Two days before Crayle was shot, Dakers took that coat to the cleaners, and it was still at the cleaners the day that Crayle died. As a matter of fact, I got the ticket from Dakers and went round and collected the thing myself."

THE saint

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SD 63

the case of the calico cat

by . . . Mignon G. Eberhart

Missing pearls and a dead man may explain the beat of crime's dark upsurge of passion. But Susan sought a wilder rhythm.

IT WAS nothing short of an invitation to murder.

"You don't mean to say," Susan Dare said in a small voice, "that *both* of them are living here?"

Idabelle Lasher—Mrs. Jeremiah Lasher, that is, widow of the patent medicine emperor who died last year (resisting, it is said, his own medicine to the end with the strangest vehemence)—Idabelle Lasher turned large pale blue eyes upon Susan and sighed.

"Why, yes," she said. "There was nothing else to do. I can't turn my own boy out into the world."

Susan took a long breath. "Always assuming," she said, "that one of them is your own boy."

"Oh, there's no doubt about that, Miss Dare," said Idabelle Lasher simply.

"Let me see," Susan said, "if I have this straight. Your son Derek was lost twenty years ago. Recently he has returned. Rather, two of him has returned."

For several turbulent decades now the modern temper has been inflicting salutary blows on the crinoline school of letters. And for adroit and forthright modernity Mignon G. Eberhart deserves all of the glowing accolades which have been bestowed upon her. We should like to point out, however, that there still hovers about her Susan Dare an aura of invincible, reality-conforming gentility which we wouldn't exchange for all the tough-fibered peregrinations of a Spillane private-eye—no, not even when we're feeling as hard-boiled as a Maine lobster. And here is the famed Susan in a top-bracket mystery chiller.

Copyright, 1934, by Mignon G. Eberhart

Mrs. Lasher was leaning forward, tears in her large pale eyes. "Miss Dare," she said, "one of them must be my son. I need him so much."

Her large blandness, her artificiality, the padded ease and softness of her life dropped away before the earnestness and honesty of that brief statement. She was all at once pathetic and tragic in her need for her child.

"And besides," she said suddenly and with an odd naïveté, "besides, there's all that money. Thirty millions."

. . *"Thirty—"* began Susan and stopped. It was simply not comprehensible. Half a million, yes; even a million. But thirty millions!

"But if you can't tell yourself which of the two young men is your son, how can I? And with so much money involved—"

"That's just it," said Mrs. Lasher, leaning forward earnestly again. "I'm sure that Papa would have wanted me to be perfectly sure. The last thing he said to me was to warn me. 'Watch out for yourself, Idabelle,' he said. 'People will be after your money. Impostors.' "

"But I don't see how I can help you," Susan repeated firmly.

"You *must* help me," said Mrs. Lasher. "Christabel Frame told me about you. She said you were the only woman who could help me, and that you were right here in Chicago."

"How do you feel about the two claimants?" she said. "Do you feel more strongly attracted to one than to the other?"

"That's just the trouble," said Idabelle Lasher. "I like them both."

"Let me have the whole story again, won't you? Try to tell it just as things occurred."

Mrs. Lasher put the handkerchief away and sat up briskly.

"Well," she began. "It was like this: . . ." Two months ago a young man called Dixon March had called on her. He had not gone to her lawyer, he had come to see her. And he had told her a very straight story.

"You must remember something of the story—oh, but, of course, you couldn't. You're far too young. And then, too, we weren't as rich as we are now, when little Derek disappeared. He was four at the time. And his nursemaid disappeared at the same time, and I always thought, Miss Dare, that it was the nursemaid who stole him."

"Ransom?" asked Susan.

"No. That was the queer part of it. There never was any attempt to demand ransom. I always felt the nursemaid simply wanted him for herself—she was a very peculiar woman."

Susan brought her gently back to the present. "So Dixon March is this claimant's name?"

"Yes. That's another thing. It seemed so likely to me that he

could remember his name—Derek—and perhaps in saying Derek in his baby way, the people at the orphanage thought it was Dixon he was trying to say, so they called him Dixon. The only trouble is—"

"Yes," said Susan, as Idabelle Lasher's blue eyes wavered and became troubled.

"Well, you see, the other young man, the other Derek—well, his name is Duane. You see?"

Susan felt a little dizzy. "Just what is Dixon's story?"

"He said that he was taken in at an orphanage at the age of six. That he vaguely remembers a woman, dark, with a mole on her chin, which is an exact description of the nursemaid. Of course, we've had the orphanage records examined, but there's nothing conclusive and no way to identify the woman. She died under the name of Sarah Gant, which wasn't the nursemaid's name, and she was very poor. A social worker simply arranged for the child's entrance into the orphanage."

"What makes him think he is your son, then?"

"Well, it's this way. He grew up and made as much as he could of the education they gave him and actually was making a nice thing with a construction company when he got to looking into his—his origins, he said—and an account of the description of our Derek, the dates, the fact that he could discover nothing of the woman, Sarah Gant, previous to her life in Ottawa—"

"Ottawa?"

"Yes. That was where he came from. The other one, Duane, from New Orleans. And the fact that, as Dixon remembered her, she looked very much like the newspaper pictures of the nursemaid, suggested the possibility that he was our lost child."

"So, on the evidence of corresponding dates and the likeness of the woman who was caring for him before he was taken to the orphanage, comes to you, claiming to be your son. A year after your husband died."

"Yes, and — well —" Mrs. Lasher flushed pinkly. "There are some things he can remember."

"Things—such as what?"

"The—the green curtains in the nursery. There *were* green curtains in the nursery. And a—a calico cat. And—and a few other things. The lawyers say that isn't conclusive. But I think it's very important that he remembers the calico cat."

"You've had lawyers looking into his claims."

"Oh, dear, yes," said Mrs. Lasher. "Exhaustively."

"But can't they trace Sarah Gant?"

"Nothing conclusive, Miss Dare."

"His physical appearance?" suggested Susan.

"Miss Dare," said Mrs. Lasher. "My Derek was blond with gray eyes. He had no marks of any kind. His teeth were still his baby teeth. Any fair young man with gray eyes might be my son. And both these men—either of these men might be Derek. I've looked long and wearily, searching every feature and every expression for a likeness to my boy. It is equally there—and not there. I feel sure that one of them is my son. I am absolutely sure that he has come home."

She turned suddenly and walked heavily to a window. Her pale green gown of soft crêpe trailed behind her, its hem touching a priceless thin rug that ought to have been in a museum. Twenty-one stories below, traffic flowed unceasingly along Lake Shore Drive.

"One of them must be an impostor," Idabelle Lasher was saying presently in a choked voice.

"Is Dixon certain he is your son?" asked Susan.

"He says only that he thinks so. But since Duane has come, too, he is more—more positive—"

"Duane, of course." The rivalry of the two young men must be rather terrible. Susan had a fleeting glimpse again of what it might mean: one of them certainly an impostor, both impostors, perhaps, struggling over Idabelle Lasher's affections and her fortune. The thought opened, really, quite appalling and horrid vistas.

"What is Duane's story?" asked Susan.

"That's what makes it so queer, Miss Dare. Duane's story —is—well, it is exactly the same."

"You don't mean *exactly* the same!" Susan cried.

"Exactly," the woman turned and faced her. "Exactly the same, Miss Dare, except for the names and places. The name of the woman in Duane's case was Mary Miller, the orphanage was in New Orleans, he was going to art school here in Chicago when —when, he says, just as Dixon said—he began to be more and more interested in his parentage and began investigating. And he, too, remembers things, little things from his babyhood and our house that only Derek could remember."

Her voice almost broke.

"Wait, Mrs. Lasher," said Susan, grasping at something firm. "Any servant, any of your friends, would know these details also."

Mrs. Lasher's pale, big eyes became more prominent.

"You mean, of course, a conspiracy. The lawyers have talked nothing else. But, Miss Dare, they authenticated everything possible to authenticate in both statements. I know what has hap-

pened to the few servants we had—all, that is, except the nursemaid. And we don't have many close friends, Miss Dare. Not since there was so much money. And none of them—none of them would do this."

There were tears in her eyes.

"But both young men can't be Derek," said Susan desperately. She clutched at common sense again and said: "How soon after your husband's death did Dixon arrive?"

"Ten months."

"And Duane?"

"Three months after Dixon."

"And they are both living here with you now?"

"Yes." She nodded toward the end of the long room. "They are in the library."

"Together?" said Susan irresistibly.

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Lasher. "Playing cribbage."

"I suppose you and your lawyers have tried every possible test?"

"Everything, Miss Dare."

"You have no fingerprints of the baby?"

"No. That was before fingerprints were so important. We tried blood tests, of course. But they are of the same type."

"Resemblances to you or your husband?"

"You'll see for yourself at dinner tonight, Miss Dare. You will help me?"

Susan sighed. "Yes," she said.

II

The bedroom to which Mrs. Lasher herself took Susan was very large and overwhelmingly magnificent, and gilt mirrors reflected Susan's small brown figure in unending vistas as she moved about.

Susan thanked fate that the only dinner gown she had brought was a new and handsome one, and felt very awed and faintly dissolute in a great, sunken, black marble pool that she wouldn't have dared call a tub. After all, reflected Susan, finding that she could actually swim a stroke or two, thirty millions was thirty millions.

She got into a dress, and was stooping to secure the straps of her flat-heeled silver sandals when Mrs. Lasher knocked.

"It's Derek's baby things," she said in a whisper and with a glance over her fat white shoulder. "Let's move a little farther from the door."

They sat down on a cushioned chaise-longue and between them Idabelle Lasher spread out certain small objects, touching them lingeringly.

"His little suit—he looked so sweet in yellow. Some pictures. A pink plush teddy bear. His little nursery-school reports—he was already in nursery school, Miss Dare — pre-kindergarten, you know. It was in an experimental stage then, and so inter-

esting. And the calico cat, Miss Dare."

She stopped there, and Susan looked at the faded, flabby calico cat held so tenderly in those fat diamonded hands. She felt suddenly a wave of cold anger toward the man who was not Derek and who must know that he was not Derek. She took the pictures eagerly.

But they were only pictures. One at about two, made by a photographer; a round baby face without features that were at all distinctive. Two or three pictures of a little boy playing, squinting against the sun.

"Has anyone else seen these things?"

"You mean either of the two boys—either Dixon or Duane? No, Miss Dare."

"Has anyone at all seen them? Servants? Friends?"

Idabelle's blue eyes became vague and clouded. "Long ago, perhaps," she said. "Oh, many, many years ago. But they've been in the safe in my bedroom for years. Before that in a locked closet."

"How long have they been in the safe?"

"Since we bought this apartment. Ten—no, twelve years."

"And no one—there's never been anything like an attempted robbery of that safe?"

"Never, Miss Dare. There's no possible way for either Dixon or Duane to know of the contents of this box except from memory."

"And Dixon remembers the calico cat?"

"Yes." The prominent blue eyes wavered again, and Mrs. Lasher rose and walked toward the door. She paused then and looked at Susan again. "And Duane remembers the teddy bear and described it to me," she said definitely and went away.

Left to herself, Susan studied the pictures again thoughtfully. The nursery-school reports, written out in beautiful "vertical" handwriting. *Music:* A good ear. *Memory:* Very good. *Adaptability:* Very good. *Sociability:* Inclined to shyness. *Rhythm:* Poor (advise skipping games at home). *Conduct:* (this varied; with at least once a suggestive blank and once a somewhat terse remark to the effect that there had been considerable disturbance during the half hours devoted to naps and a strong suggestion that Derek was at the bottom of it).

Susan smiled there and began to like baby Derek. And it was just then that she found the first indication of an identifying trait. And that was after the heading, *Games*. One report said: *Quick.* Another said: *Mentally quick but does not coördinate muscles well.* And a third said, definitely pinning the thing down: *Tendency to use left hand which we are endeavoring to correct.*

Tendency to use left hand. An inborn tendency, cropping out again and again all through life. In those days, of course, it had been rigidly corrected—thereby inducing all manner of ills, according to more recent trends of education. But was it ever altogether conquered?

Presently Susan put the things in the box again and went to Mrs. Lasher's room. Susan had the somewhat dubious satisfaction of watching Mrs. Lasher open a delicate ivory panel which disclosed a very utilitarian steel safe set in the wall behind it and place the box securely in the safe.

"Did you find anything that will be of help?" asked Mrs. Lasher, closing the panel.

"I don't know," said Susan. "I'm afraid there's nothing very certain. Do Dixon and Duane know why I am here?"

"No," said Mrs. Lasher, revealing unexpected cunning. "I told them you were a dear friend of Christabel's. And that you were very much interested in their—my—our situation. We talk it over, you know, very frankly, Miss Dare. The boys are as anxious as I am to discover the truth of it."

Again, thought Susan feeling baffled, as the true Derek would be. She followed Mrs. Lasher toward the drawing room again, prepared heartily to dislike both men.

But the man sipping a cocktail in the doorway of the library was much too old to be either Dixon or Duane.

"Major Briggs," said Mrs. Lasher. "Christabel's friend, Susan, Tom." She turned to Susan. "Major Tom Briggs is our closest friend. He was like a brother to my husband, and has been to me."

"Never a brother," said Major Briggs with an air of gallantry. "Say, rather, an admirer. So this is Christabel's little friend." He put down his cocktail glass and bowed and took Susan's hand only a fraction too tenderly.

Then Mrs. Lasher drifted across the room where Susan was aware of two pairs of black shoulders rising to greet her.

"How happy we are to have you with us," Major Briggs said beamingly. "I suppose Idabelle has told you of our problem."

He was about Susan's height; white-haired, rather puffy under the eyes, and a bit too pink, with hands that were inclined to shake. He adjusted his gold-rimmed eyeglasses, then let them drop the length of their black ribbon and said: "What do you think of it, my dear?"

"I don't know," said Susan. "What do you think?"

"Well, my dear, it's a bit difficult, you know. When Idabelle herself doesn't know. When the most rigid and searching investigation on the part of highly trained and experienced

investigators has failed to discover the identity of the lost heir, how may my own poor powers avail!" He finished his cocktail, gulped, and said blandly: "But it's Duane."

"What—" said Susan.

"I said, it's Duane. He is the heir. Anybody could see it with half an eye. Spittin' image of his dad. Here they come now."

They were alike and yet not alike at all. Both were rather tall, slender, and well made. Both had medium-brown hair. Both had grayish-blue eyes. Neither was particularly handsome. Neither was exactly unhandsome. Their features were not at all alike in bone structure, yet neither had features that were in any way distinctive. Their description on a passport would not have varied by a single word. Actually they were altogether unlike each other.

With the salad Major Briggs roused to point out a portrait that hung on the opposite wall.

"Jeremiah Lasher," he said, waving a pink hand in that direction. He glanced meaningly at Susan. "Do you see any resemblance, Miss Susan? I mean between my old friend and one of these lads here."

One of the men—it was Dixon—wriggled perceptibly.

Duane smiled. "We are not at all embarrassed, Miss Susan," he said pleasantly. "We are both quite accustomed to this sort of scrutiny." He laughed lightly, and Idabelle smiled.

"Does Miss Dare know about this?" Dixon asked.

"Oh, yes," said Idabelle, turning as quickly and attentively to him as she had turned to Duane. "There's no secret about it."

"No," said Dixon somewhat crisply. "There's certainly no secret about it."

There was, however, no further mention of the problem of identity during the rest of the evening. Just after dinner Susan and Mrs. Lasher were sitting over coffee in the drawing room, and the three men were presumably lingering in the dining room.

It had been altogether quiet in the drawing room, yet there had not been audible even the distant murmur of the men's voices. Thus the queer, choked shout that arose in the dining room came as a definite shock to the two women.

It all happened in an instant. They hadn't themselves time to move or inquire before Duane appeared in the doorway. He was laughing but looked pale.

"It's all right," he said. "Nothing's wrong."

"*Duane,*" said Idabelle Lasher gaspingly. "*What*—"

"Don't be alarmed," he said swiftly. "It's nothing." He turned to look down the hall at someone approaching. "Here he is, safe and sound."

He stood aside, and Major

Briggs appeared in the doorway. He looked so shocked and purple that both women moved hurriedly forward.

"Here—on the divan," said Idabelle Lasher. "Ring for brandy, Duane. Lie down here, Major."

"Oh, no—no," said Major Briggs stertorously. "No. I'm quite all right."

Duane, however, supported him to the divan, and Dixon appeared in the doorway. "What happened?" he said.

Major Briggs waved his hands feebly.

"The Major nearly went out the window," Duane said.

"Oh-h-h-h—" cried Idabelle in a thin, long scream.

"Oh, it's all right," said Major Briggs shakenly. "I caught hold of the curtain. By God, I'm glad you had heavy curtain rods at that window, Idabelle."

She was fussing around him, her hands shaking, her face ghastly under its make-up.

"But how could you—" she was saying jerkily—"what on earth—how could it have happened—"

"It's the draft," said the Major irascibly. "The confounded draft on my neck. I got up to close the window and—I nearly went out!"

"But how could you—" began Idabelle again.

"I don't know how it happened," said the Major. "Just all at once—" A look of perplexity came slowly over his face. "Queer," said Major Briggs suddenly, "I suppose it was the draft. But it was exactly as if—" He stopped.

"As if what?" cried Idabelle.

"As if someone had pushed me," said the Major.

It was fortunate that the butler arrived just then, and there was the slight diversion of getting the Major to stretch out full length on the divan and sip a restorative.

And somehow in the conversation it emerged that neither Dixon nor Duane had been in the dining room when the thing had happened.

"There'd been a disagreement over—well, it was over inheritance tax," said Dixon flushing. "Duane had gone to the library to look in an encyclopedia, and I had gone to my room to get the evening paper which had some reference to it. So the Major was alone when it happened. I knew nothing of it until I heard the commotion in here."

"I," said Duane, watching Dixon, "heard the Major's shout from the library and hurried across."

III

That night, late, after Major Briggs had gone home, and Susan was again alone in the paralyzing magnificence of the French bedroom, she still kept

thinking of the window and Major Briggs. She put up her own window so circumspectly that she didn't get enough air during the night and woke struggling with a silk-covered eiderdown under the impression that she herself was being thrust out the window.

It was only a nightmare, induced as much as anything by her own hatred of heights. But it gave an impulse to the course she proposed to Mrs. Lasher that very morning.

It was true, of course, that the thing may have been exactly what it appeared to be, and that was, an accident. But if it was not accident, there were only two possibilities.

"Do you mean," cried Mrs. Lasher incredulously when Susan had finished her brief suggestion, "that I'm to say openly that Duane is my son! But you don't understand, Miss Dare. I'm not sure. It may be Dixon."

"I know," said Susan. "And I may be wrong. But I think it might help if you will announce to—oh, only to Major Briggs and the two men—that you are convinced that it is Duane and are taking steps for legal recognition of the fact."

"Why? What do you think will happen? How will it help things to do that?"

"I'm not at all sure it will help," said Susan wearily. "But it's the only thing I see to do. I think that you may as well do it right away."

"Today?" said Mrs. Lasher reluctantly.

"At lunch," said Susan inexorably. "Telephone to invite Major Briggs now."

"Oh, very well," said Idabelle Lasher. "After all, it will please Tom Briggs. He has been urging me to make a decision. He seems certain that it is Duane."

But Susan, present and watching closely, could detect nothing except that Idabelle Lasher, once she was committed to a course, undertook it with thoroughness. Her fondness for Duane, her kindness to Dixon, her air of relief at having settled so momentous a question, left nothing to be desired.

Susan was sure that the men were convinced. There was, to be sure, a shade of triumph in Duane's demeanor, and he was magnanimous with Dixon—as, indeed, he could well afford to be. Dixon was silent and rather pale and looked as if he had not expected the decision and was a bit stunned by it.

Major Briggs was incredulous at first, and then openly jubilant, and toasted all of them.

Indeed, what with toasts and speeches on the part of Major Briggs, the lunch rather prolonged itself, and it was late afternoon before the Major had gone and Susan and Mrs. Lasher met alone for a moment in the library.

Idabelle was flushed and worried. "Was it all right, Miss Dare?" she asked in a stage whisper.

"Perfectly," said Susan.

"Then—then do you know—"

"Not yet," said Susan. "But keep Dixon here."

"Very well," said Idabelle.

The rest of the day passed quietly and not, from Susan's point of view, at all valuably, although Susan tried to prove something about the possible left-handedness of the real Derek. Badminton and several games of billiards resulted only in displaying the more perfectly a consistent right-handedness on the part of both the claimants.

Dressing again for dinner, Susan looked at herself ruefully in the great mirror.

She had never in her life felt so utterly helpless, and the thought of Idabelle Lasher's faith in her hurt. After all, she ought to have realized her own limits: the problem that Mrs. Lasher had set her was one that would have baffled—that, indeed, had baffled—experts. Who was she, Susan Dare, to attempt its solution?

The course of action she had laid out for Idabelle Lasher had certainly, thus far, had no development beyond heightening an already tense situation. It was quite possible that she was mistaken and that nothing at all would come of it. And if not, what then?

Idabelle Lasher's pale eyes and anxious, beseeching hands hovered again before Susan, and she jerked her satin slip savagely over her head—thereby pulling loose a shoulder strap and being obliged to ring for the maid who sewed the strap neatly and rearranged Susan's hair.

"You'll be going to the party tonight, ma'am?" said the maid in a pleasant Irish accent.

"Party?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Didn't you know? It's the Charity Ball, at the Dycke Hotel, in the Chandelier Ballroom. A grand, big party, ma'am. Madame is wearing her pearls. Will you bend your head, please, ma'am."

Susan bent her head and felt her white chiffon being slipped deftly over it. When she emerged she said: "Is the entire family going?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. And Major Briggs. There you are, ma'am—and I do say you look beautiful. There's orchids, ma'am, from Mr. Duane. And gardenias from Mr. Dixon. I believe," said the maid thoughtfully, "that I could put them all together. That's what I'm doing for Madame."

"Very well," said Susan recklessly. "Put them all together."

It made a somewhat staggering decoration — staggering, thought Susan, but positively abandoned in luxuriousness. So,

too, was the long town car which waited for them promptly at ten when they emerged from the towering apartment house. Susan, leaning back in her seat between Major Briggs and Idabelle Lasher, was always afterward to remember that short ride through crowded, lighted streets to the Dycke Hotel.

No one spoke. Perhaps only Susan was aware (and suddenly realized that she was aware) of the surging desires and needs and feelings that were bottled up in that long, gliding car. She was aware of it quite suddenly and tinglingly.

Nothing had happened. Nothing, all through that long dinner from which they had just come, had been said that was at all provocative.

Yet all at once Susan was aware of a queer kind of excitement.

She looked at the black shoulders of the two men, Duane and Dixon, riding along beside each other. Dixon sat stiff and straight; his shoulders looked rigid and unmoving. He had taken it rather well, she thought; did he guess Idabelle's decision was not the true one? Or was he still stunned by it?

Or was there something back of that silence? Had she underestimated the force and possible violence of Dixon's reaction. Susan frowned: it was dangerous enough without that.

They arrived at the hotel. Their sudden emergence from the silence of the car, with its undercurrent of emotion, into brilliant lights and crowds and the gay lilt of an orchestra somewhere, had its customary tonic effect. Even Dixon shook off his air of brooding and, as they finally strolled into the Chandelier Room, and Duane and Mrs. Lasher danced smoothly into the revolving colors, asked Susan to dance.

They left the Major smiling approval and buying cigarettes from a girl in blue pantaloons.

The momentary gayety with which Dixon had asked Susan to dance faded at once. He danced conscientiously but without much spirit and said nothing. Susan glanced up at his face once or twice; his direct, dark blue eyes looked straight ahead, and his face was rather pale and set.

Presently Susan said: "Oh, there's Idabelle!"

At once Dixon lost step. Susan recovered herself and her small silver sandals rather deftly, and Idabelle, large and pink and jewel-laden, danced past them in Duane's arms. She smiled at Dixon anxiously and looked rather worried.

Dixon's eyebrows were a straight dark line, and he was white around the mouth.

"I'm sorry, Dixon," said Susan. She tried to catch step with him, for the moment, and

added: "Please don't mind my speaking about it. We are all thinking of it. I do think you behave very well."

He looked straight over her head, danced several somewhat erratic steps, and said suddenly: "It was so—unexpected. You see, I was so sure of it."

"Why were you so sure?" asked Susan.

He hesitated, then burst out again: "Because of the cat," he said savagely, stepping on one of Susan's silver toes. She removed it with Spartan composure, and he said: "The calico cat, you know. And the green curtains. If I had known there was so much money involved, I don't think I'd have come to—Idabelle. But then, when I did know, and this other—fellow turned up, why, of course, I felt like sticking it out!"

He paused, and Susan felt his arm tighten around her waist. She looked up, and his face was suddenly chalk white and his eyes blazing.

"Duane!" he said hoarsely. "I hate him. I could kill him with my own hands."

The next dance was a tango, and Susan danced it with Duane. His eyes were shining, and his face flushed with excitement and gayety.

He was a born dancer, and Susan relaxed in the perfect ease of his steps. He held her very closely, complimented her gracefully, and talked all the time, and for a few moments Susan merely enjoyed the fast swirl of the lovely dance. Then Idabelle and Dixon went past, and Susan saw again the expression of Dixon's set white face as he looked at Duane, and Idabelle's swimming eyes above her pink face and bare pink neck.

The rest of what was probably a perfect dance was lost on Susan, busy about certain concerns of her own which involved some adjusting of the flowers on her shoulder. The moment the dance was over she slipped away.

White chiffon billowed around her, and her gardenias sent up a warm fragrance as she huddled into a telephone booth. She made sure the flowers were secure and unrevealing upon her shoulder, steadied her breath, and smiled a little tremulously as she dialed a number she very well knew. It was getting to be a habit—calling Jim Byrne, her newspaper friend, when she herself had reached an impasse. But she needed him at once.

"Jim—Jim," she said. "It's Susan. Listen. Get into a white tie and come as fast as you can to the Dycke Hotel—the Chandelier Room."

"What's wrong?"

"Well," said Susan in a small voice. "I've set something going that—that I'm afraid is going to be more than I meant—"

"You're good at stirring up

things, Sue," he said. "What's the trouble now?"

"Hurry, Jim," said Susan. "I mean it." She caught her breath. "I—I'm afraid," she said.

His voice changed. "I'll be right there. Watch for me at the door." The telephone clicked, and she leaned rather weakly against the wall of the telephone booth.

IV

Susan went back to the Chandelier Room. Idabelle Lasher, pink and worried-looking, and Major Briggs and the two younger men made a little group standing together, talking. She breathed a little sigh of relief. So long as they remained together, and remained in that room surrounded by hundreds of witnesses, it was all right. Surely it was all right. People didn't murder in cold blood when other people were looking on.

It was Idabelle who remembered her duties as hostess and suggested the fortune teller.

"She's very good, they say," said Idabelle. "She's a professional, not just doing it for a stunt, you know. She's got a booth in one of the rooms."

"By all means, my dear," said Major Briggs at once. "This way?"

Idabelle put her hand on his arm and, with Duane at her other side, moved away, and Dixon and Susan followed. Susan cast a worried look toward the entrance. But Jim couldn't possibly get there in less than thirty minutes, and by that time they would have returned.

"Was it the Major that convinced Idabelle that Duane is her son?" asked Dixon.

Susan hesitated. "I don't know," she said cautiously, "how strong the Major's influence has been."

Her caution was not successful. As they left the ballroom and turned down a corridor, he whirled toward her.

"This thing isn't over yet," he said with the sudden savagery that had blazed out in him while they were dancing.

She said nothing, however, for Major Briggs was beckoning from a doorway.

"Here it is," he said as they approached him. "Idabelle has already gone in. And would you believe it, the fortune teller charges twenty dollars a throw!"

He was frowning indignantly.

The room was small: a dining room, probably, for small parties. Across the end of it a kind of tent had been arranged with many gayly striped curtains.

Possibly due to her fees, the fortune teller did not appear to be very popular. At least, there were no others waiting, and no one came to the door except a bellboy with a tray in his hand who looked them over searchingly, murmured something that

sounded very much like Mr. Haymow, and wandered away.

Duane sat nonchalantly on the small of his back, smoking. The Major seemed a bit nervous and moved restlessly about. Dixon stood just behind Susan. Odd that she could feel his hatred for the man lolling there in the armchair almost as if it were a palpable, living thing flowing outward in waves.

Susan's sense of danger was growing sharper. But surely it was safe—so long as they were together.

The draperies of the tent moved confusedly and opened, and Idabelle stood there, smiling and beckoning to Susan. "Come inside, my dear," she said. "She wants you, too."

Susan hesitated. But, after all, so long as the three men were together, nothing could happen. Dixon gave her a sharp look, and Susan moved across the room. She felt a slight added qualm when she discovered that in an effort probably to add mystery to the fortune teller's trade, the swathing curtains had been arranged so that one entered a kind of narrow passage among them, which one followed with several turns before arriving at the looped-up curtain which made an entrance to the center of the maze and faced the fortune teller herself.

Susan stifled her uneasiness and sat down on some cushions beside Idabelle. The fortune teller, in Egyptian costume, with French accent and a Sibylline manner began to talk. Beyond the curtains and the drone of her voice Susan could hear little, although once she thought there were voices.

But the thing, when it happened, gave no warning.

There was only, suddenly, a great dull shock of sound that brought Susan taut and upright and left the fortune teller gasping and still and turned Idabelle Lasher's broad pinkness to a queer pale mauve.

"What was that?" whispered Idabelle in a choked way.

And the fortune teller cried: "It's a gunshot—out there!"

Susan stumbled and groped through the folds of draperies, trying to find the way through the entangling maze of curtains and out of the tent.

Then all at once they were outside the curtains and staring at a figure that lay huddled on the floor, and there were people pouring in the door from the hall, and confusion everywhere.

It was Major Briggs. He'd been shot and was dead, and there was no revolver anywhere.

Susan felt ill and faint and after one long look backed away to the window. Idabelle was weeping, her face blotched. Dixon was beside her, and then suddenly someone from the hotel had closed the door into

the corridor. A bellboy's voice, the one who'd wandered into the room looking for Mr. Haymow, rose shrilly above the tumult.

"Nobody at all," Dixon was saying. "Nobody came out of the room. I was at the end of the corridor when I heard the shot and this is the only room on this side that's unlocked and in use tonight. I ran down here, and I can swear that nobody came out of the room after the shot was fired. Not before I reached it."

"Was anybody here when you came in? What did you see?" It was the manager, fat, worried, but competently keeping the door behind him closed against further intrusion.

"Just this man on the floor. He was dead already."

"And nobody in the room?"

"Nobody. Nobody then. But I'd hardly got to him before there was people running into the room. These three women came out of this tent."

The manager looked at Idabelle—at Susan. "He was with you?" he asked Idabelle.

"Oh, yes, yes," sobbed Idabelle. "It's Major Briggs."

The manager started to speak, stopped, began again. "I've sent for the police," he said. "You folks that were in his party—how many of you are there?"

"Just Miss Dare and me," sobbed Idabelle. "And—" she singled out Dixon and Duane—"these two men."

"All right. You folks stay right here, will you? You, too, miss—" indicating the fortune teller—"and the bellboy. The rest of you will go to a room across the hall. Sorry, but I'll have to hold you till the police get here."

It was not well received. There were murmurs of outrage and horrified looks over slender bare backs and the indignant rustle of trailing gowns, but the scattered groups that had pressed into the room did file slowly out again under the firm look of the manager.

The manager closed the door and said briskly: "Now, if you folks will be good enough to stay right here, it won't be long till the police arrive."

"A doctor," faltered Idabelle. "Can't we have a doctor?"

The manager looked at the sodden, lifeless body. "You don't want a doctor, ma'am," he said. "What you want is an under—" He stopped abruptly and reverted to his professional suavity. "We'll do everything in our power to save your feelings, Mrs. Lasher," he said. "At the same time we would much appreciate your—er—assistance. You see, the Charity Ball being what it is, we've got to keep this thing quiet."

He was obviously distressed but still suave and competent. "Now then," he said, "I've got to make some arrangements—if

you'll just stay here." He put his hand on the door knob and then turned toward them again and said quite definitely, looking at the floor: "It would be just as well if none of you were to try to leave."

With that he was gone.

The fortune teller sank down into a chair and said, "Good gracious me," with some emphasis and a Middle-Western accent.

The bellboy retired nonchalantly to a corner and stood there, looking very childish in his smart white uniform, but very knowing. Idabelle Lasher looked at the man at her feet and began to sob again, and Duane tried to comfort her, while Dixon shoved his hands in his pockets and glowered at nothing.

"But I don't see," wailed Idabelle, "how it could have happened!"

Odd, thought Susan, that she didn't ask who did it. That would be the natural question. Or why? Why had a man who was—as she had said, like a brother to her—been murdered?

Duane patted Idabelle's heaving bare shoulders and said something soothing, and Idabelle wrung her hands and cried again: "How could it have happened! We were all together—he was not alone a moment—"

Dixon stirred. "Oh, yes, he was alone," he said. "He wanted a drink, and I'd gone to hunt a waiter."

"You forget to mention," said Duane icily, "that I had gone with you."

"You left this room at the same time, but that's all I know."

"I went at the same time you did. I stopped to buy cigarettes, and you vanished. I don't know where you went. I didn't see you again. Not till I came back with the crowd into this room. Came back to find you already here."

"What do you mean by that?" Dixon's eyes were blazing in his white face, and his hands were working. "If you are accusing me of murder, say so straight out like a man instead of an insolent little puppy."

Duane was white, too, but composed. "All right," he said. "You know whether you murdered him or not. All I know is when I got back I found him dead and you already here."

"You—"

"Dixon!" cried Idabelle sharply as she moved hurriedly between the two men. "Stop this! I won't have it. There'll be time enough for questions when the police come. When the police—" She dabbed at her mouth, which was still trembling, and at her chin, and her fingers went on to her throat, groped, closed convulsively, and she screamed: *"My pearls!"*

"Pearls?" said Dixon staring.

Duane darted forward. "Pearls

—they're gone!" he exclaimed.

The fortune teller had started upward defensively, and the bellboy's eyes were like two saucers.

"They are certainly somewhere in the room, Mrs. Lasher," Susan said. "And the police will find them for you. There's no need to search for them, now."

Susan pushed a chair toward her, and she sank helplessly into it.

"Tom murdered—and now my pearls gone—and I don't know which is Derek, and I—*I don't know what to do—*" Her shoulders heaved, and her face was hidden in her handkerchief, and her fat body collapsed into lines of utter despair.

Susan said deliberately: "The room will be searched, Mrs. Lasher, every square inch of it—ourselves included. There is nothing," said Susan with soft emphasis. "Nothing that they will miss."

Then Dixon stepped forward. His face was set, and there was an ominous flare of light in his eyes.

He put his hand upon Idabelle's shoulder to force her to look up into his face, and brushed aside Duane, who had moved quickly forward, too, as if his defeated rival had threatened Idabelle.

"Why—why, Dixon," faltered Idabelle Lasher, "you look so strange. What is it? Don't, my dear, you are hurting my shoulder—"

"Let her alone," Duane cried. "Let her alone." And then to Idabelle: "Don't pay any attention to him. He's out of his mind. He's—"

He clutched at Dixon's arm, but Dixon turned, gave him one black look, and thrust him away so forcefully that Duane staggered backward against the walls of the tent and clutched at the curtains to save himself from falling.

"Look here," said Dixon grimly to Idabelle, "what do you mean when you say as you did just now, that you don't know which is Derek? What do you mean? You must tell me. It isn't fair. *What do you mean?*"

His fingers sank into her bulging flesh. She stared upward as if hypnotized, choking. "I meant just that, Dixon. I don't know yet. I only said I had decided in order to—"

"In order to what?" said Dixon inexorably.

A queer little tingle ran along Susan's nerves, and she edged toward the door. She must get help. Duane's eyes were strange and terribly bright. He still clutched the garishly striped curtains behind him.

Susan took another silent step and another toward the door without removing her gaze from the tableau, and Idabelle Lasher looked up into Dixon's face, and

her lips moved flabbily, and she said the strangest thing:

"How like your father you are, Derek."

V

Susan's heart got up into her throat and left a very curious empty place in the pit of her stomach. She probably moved a little farther toward the door, but was never sure, for all at once, while mother and son stared revealingly and certainly at each other, Duane's white face and queer bright eyes vanished.

Susan was going to run. She was going to fling herself out the door and shriek for help. For there was going to be another murder in that room, and she couldn't stop it, she couldn't do anything, she couldn't even scream a warning. Then Duane's black figure was outlined against the tent again. And he held a revolver in his hand.

The fortune teller said: "Oh, my God" and the white streak that had been the bellboy dissolved rapidly behind a chair....

"Call him your son if you want to," Duane said in an odd jerky way, addressing Mrs. Lasher and Derek confusedly. "Then your son's a murderer. He killed Briggs. He hid in the folds of this curtain till—the room was full of people—and then he came out again. He left his revolver there. And here it is. *Don't move.* One word or move out of any of you, and I'll shoot."

He stopped to take a breath. He was smiling a little and panting. "Don't move," he said again sharply. "I'm going to hand you over to the police, Mr. *Derek.* You won't be so anxious to say he's your son then, perhaps. It's his revolver. He killed Briggs with it because Briggs favored me. He knew it, and he did it for revenge. It's all perfectly clear."

He was crossing the room with smooth steps; holding the revolver poised threateningly, and his eyes were rapidly shifting from one to another.

Susan hadn't the slightest doubt that the smallest move would bring a revolver shot crashing through someone's brain. *He's going to escape,* she thought, *he's going to escape. I can't do a thing. And he's mad with rage. Mad with the terrible excitement of having already killed once.*

Duane caught the flicker of Susan's eyes. He was near her now, so near that he could have touched her.

"It's you that's done this!" he cried. "You that advised her! You were on his side! Well—" He'd reached the door now, and there was nothing they could do. He was gloating openly, the way of escape before him. In an excess of dreadful triumphant excitement, he cried: "I'll shoot you first—it's too bad, when you

are so pretty. But I'm going to do it."

It's the certainty, thought Susan numbly; *Idabelle is so certain that Derek is the other one that Duane knows it, too. He knows there's no use in going on with it. And he knew, when I said what I said about the pearls, that I know.*

She felt oddly dizzy. Something *was* moving, and it was the door behind Duane. It was moving silently, very slowly.

Susan steeled her eyes not to reveal that knowledge. If only Idabelle and Derek would not move—would not see those panels move and betray what they had seen.

Duane laughed. And Derek moved again, and Idabelle tried to thrust him away from her, and Duane's revolver jerked and jerked again, and the door pushed Duane suddenly to one side and there was a crash of glass, and voices and flashing movement.

Susan knew only that someone had pinioned Duane from behind and was holding his arms close to his side. Duane gasped, his hand writhed and dropped the revolver.

Then somebody at the door dragged Duane away; Susan realized confusedly that there were police there. And Jim Byrne stood at her elbow. He looked unwontedly handsome in white tie and tails, but very angry.

"Go home, Sue," he said. "Get out of here."

It was literally impossible for Susan to speak or move. Jim stared at her as if nobody else was in the room, got out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead with it.

"I've aged ten years in the last five minutes," he said. He glanced around. Saw Major Briggs's body there on the floor —saw Idabelle Lasher and Derek —saw the fortune teller and the bellboy.

"Is that Mrs. Jeremiah Lasher over there?" he said to Susan.

Mrs. Lasher opened her eyes, looked at him, and closed them again.

Jim looked meditatively at a revolver in his hand, put it in his pocket. "You can stay for a while, Susan," he said briskly. "Until I hear the whole story. Who shot Major Briggs?"

Susan's lips moved and Derek straightened up and cried:

"Oh, it's my revolver all right. But I didn't kill Major Briggs— I don't expect anyone to believe me, but I didn't."

"He didn't," said Susan wearily. "Duane killed Major Briggs. He killed him with Derek's revolver, perhaps, but it was Duane who did the murder."

Jim did not question her statement, but Derek said eagerly: "How do you know? Can you prove it?"

"I think so," said Susan. "You

see, Duane had a revolver when I danced with him. It was in his pocket. That's when I phoned for you, Jim. But I was too late."

"But how—" said Jim.

"Oh, when Duane accused Derek, he actually described the way he himself murdered Major Briggs and concealed himself and the revolver in the folds of the tent until the room was full of people and he could quietly mingle with them as if he had come from the hall. We were all staring at Major Briggs. It was very simple. Duane had got hold of Derek's revolver and knew it would be traced to Derek and the blame put upon him, since Derek had every reason to wish to revenge himself upon Major Briggs."

Idabelle had opened her eyes. They looked a bit glassy but were more sensible. "Why—" she said— "why did Duane kill Major Briggs?"

"I suppose because Major Briggs had backed him. You see," said Susan gently, "one of the claimants had to be an impostor and a deliberate one. The attack upon Major Briggs last night suggested either that he knew too much or was a conspirator himself. The exact coinciding of the stories—particularly clever on Major Briggs's part—and the fact that Duane turned up after Major Briggs had had time to search for someone who would fulfill the requirements necessary to make a claim to being your son, seemed to me an indication of conspiracy; besides, the very nature of the case involved imposture.

"But there had to be a conspiracy; someone had to tell one of the claimants about the things upon which to base his claim, especially about the memories of the baby things—the calico cat," said Susan with a little smile, "and the plush teddy bear. It had to be someone who had known you long ago and could have seen those things before you put them away in the safe. Someone who knew all your circumstances."

"You mean that Major Briggs planned Duane's claim—planned the whole thing? But why—" Idabelle's eyes were full of tears again.

"There's only one possible reason," said Susan. "He must have needed money very badly, and Duane, coming into thirty millions of dollars, would have been obliged to share his spoils."

"Then Derek—I mean Dixon—I mean," said Idabelle confusedly, clutching at Derek, "this one. He really is my son?"

"You know he is," said Susan. "You realized it yourself when you were under emotional stress and obliged to feel instead of reason about it. However, there's reason for it, too. *He is Derek.*"

"He—is—Derek," said Ida-

belle catching at Susan's words. "You are sure?"

"Yes," said Susan quietly. "He is Derek. You see, I'd forgotten something. Something physical that never changes all through life. That is, a sense of rhythm. Derek has no sense of rhythm and has never had. Duane was a born dancer."

"Thank God!" Idabelle said. She looked at Susan, looked at Derek, and quite suddenly became herself again.

She got up briskly, glanced at Major Briggs's body, said calmly: "We'll try to keep some of this quiet. I'll see that things are done decently—after all, poor old fellow, he did love his comforts. Now, then. Oh, yes, if someone will just see the manager of the hotel about my pearls—"

Susan put a startled hand to her gardenias. "I'd forgotten your pearls, too. Here they are." She fumbled a moment among the flowers, detached a string of flowing beauty, and held it toward Idabelle. "I took them from Duane while we were dancing."

"Duane," said Idabelle. "But—" She took the pearls and said incredulously: "They *are* mine!"

"He had taken them while he danced with you. During the next dance you passed me, and I saw that your neck was bare."

Jim turned to Susan. "Are you sure about that, Susan?" he said.

"I've managed to get the outline of the story, you know. I don't think the false claimant would have taken such a risk. Not with thirty millions in his pocket, so to speak."

"Oh, they were for the Major," said Susan. "At least, I think that was the reason. I don't know yet, but I think we'll find that he was pretty hard pressed for cash and had to have some right away—immediately. Duane probably balked at demanding money of Mrs. Lasher so soon, so the Major suggested the pearls.

"Duane was in no position to refuse the Major's demands. Then, you see, he had no pearls because I took them; he and the Major must have quarreled, and Duane, who had already foreseen that he would be at Major Briggs's mercy as long as the Major lived, was already prepared for any opportunity to kill him. After he had once got to Idabelle, he no longer needed the Major. He had armed himself with Derek's revolver after what must have seemed to him a heaven-sent chance to stage an accident had failed. Mrs. Lasher's decision removed any remaining small value that the Major was to him and made Major Briggs only a menace.

"But I think he wasn't sure just what he would do or how—he acceded to the Major's demand for the pearls because it

was at the moment the simplest course. But he was ready and anxious to kill him, and when he knew that the pearls had gone from his pocket he must have guessed that I had taken them.

"And he decided to get rid of Major Briggs at once, before he could possibly tell anything, for any story the Major chose to tell would have been believed by Mrs. Lasher. Later, when I said that the police would search the room, he knew that I knew. And that I knew the revolver was still here."

"Is that why you advised me to announce my decision that Duane was my son?" demanded Idabelle Lasher.

Susan shuddered and tried not to look at that black heap across the room.

"No," she said steadily. "I didn't dream of—murder. I only thought that it might bring the conspiracy that evidently existed somewhere into the open."

"Here are the police," Jim said.

Queer, thought Susan much later, riding along the Drive in Jim's car, with her white chiffon flounces tucked in carefully, and her green velvet wrap pulled tightly about her throat against the chill night breeze, and the scent of gardenias mingling with the scent of Jim's cigarette—queer how often her adventures ended like this: driving silently homeward in Jim's car.

She glanced at the irregular profile behind the wheel. "I suppose you know you saved my life tonight," she said.

His mouth tightened in the little glow from the dashlight. Presently he said: "How did you know he had the pearls in his pocket?"

"Felt 'em," said Susan. "And you can't imagine how terribly easy it was to take them. In all probability a really brilliant career in picking pockets was sacrificed when I was provided with moral scruples."

The light went to yellow and then red, and Jim stopped. He turned and gave Susan a long look through the dusk, and then slowly took her hand in his own warm fingers for a second or two before the light went to green again.

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

There's a wide choice of exciting reading in this month's survey of crime fiction in hard covers.

HENRI CATALAN'S "Soeur Angèle and the Embarrassed Ladies" (Sheed & Ward, $2.50) is an interesting contribution to a field by no means the exclusive domain of the more rugged and indestructible "Private Eye." The generation that remembers G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown will welcome this younger and undoubtedly more attractive recruit to the ranks. As in the case of Dorothy Salisbury Davis' perfect "The Gentle Murderer," Catalan's little novel—gently ironic, warm and appealing—is for that literate and usually neglected half of our nation that demands something more of its fiction than liberal doses of basic wish-images.

Soeur Angèle, the former Dr. Angèle Persent, comes to Paris to seek funds for the support of the French hospital and orphanage in Bethlehem. A former student of Legal Medicine, Soeur Angèle—side by side with her old instructor, Professor Robin —discovers murder and the reasons for murder in both the side

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A book review, like a good mystery story, can be as lively and exciting as a slender redhead on Fifth Avenue mysteriously vanishing into a cab. Or it can be as stiffly pompous as a giant antarctic penguin—if its subject matter has not been wisely chosen. Fortunately wisdom of choice is assured by the presence of Mr. Santesson, for seven years editor of the famous Unicorn Mystery Book Club, as he presides again over this bright new department of criticism.

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streets and the fashionable shops in Paris. If you concede the possibility that a murderer, which is what we have here—whatever the motivation—can be found without the assistance of either blonde or brandy, relax peacefully with Soeur Angèle as she discovers aspects of Paris she had certainly not known before. Recommended.

Hercule Poirot, the urbane little Belgian with the suspiciously black hair, returns in Agatha Christie's new HICKORY DICKORY DEATH (Dodd Mead, $3.00), which some of you may remember as a serial in Collier's. Miss Felicity Lemon has a sister, a Mrs. Hubbard, matron of a hostel for students, who finds herself watching Poirot—as perhaps we would, too—"with the rapt attention of a small boy watching a conjurer, waiting hopefully for a rabbit or at least streams of colored ribbon to appear." As murder engulfs the placid world of Mrs. Hubbard, and first one and then another of her students is suspected, 26 Hickory Road begins to have something of the quality of other homes where friends have smiled at friends and wondered.

John Dickson Carr has commented on Agatha Christie's "deft characterization while in full view she palms the ace." HICKORY DICKORY DEATH, the new Hercule Poirot mystery, is an example, to quote Leslie Ford, of this "special combination of lucid ingenuity, wit, drama and polished precision."

GEORGES SIMENON reports on Paris Police procedure in INSPECTOR MAIGRET AND THE DEAD GIRL (Doubleday, $2.75), the history of a case from the discovery of the girl's body through to the end. The amount of work—of concentrated *team* work—that goes into a case like this will dismay the adherents of the direct action school whose heroes do not, normally, have Maigret's gift for coordination, his patience, his efficiency *and* imagination.

A young girl has been killed.

Slowly, painstakingly, fragment by fragment, the life of a lonely girl is pieced together, ending with the moment when a frightened killer strikes.

Here is an excellent description of police procedure, and what lies behind the headlines—in America as well as in France. Recommended.

BEN BENSON brings us another story of the Massachusetts State Police in action as he reports again on rookie trooper Ralph Lindsey's new brush with death. BROKEN SHIELD (Mill-Morrow, $2.75) begins with an unnecessary death and is the story of Lindsey's grimly determined but sometimes blind hunt for the

man who had smiled just before he'd shot Ralph's best friend.

Ralph Lindsey discovers that a cop is "pretty much alone." But he discovers as well that there's a reason and a need for such aloneness. It takes the tension of the final decisive moments when he faces death for him to fully realize this—and accept it as inevitable. Ben Benson has won repeated honors for the authenticity of his novels. "Broken Shield," his tenth mystery, is new justification for this praise.

JOE RAYTER's Mexico, in his STAB IN THE DARK (Mill-Morrow, $2.75), lacks the vividness and warmth of the Mexico we have come to know in Aaron Marc Stein's novels. Perhaps this is understandable because this is Tourist Mexico, often ignorant and even more often contemptuous of the real Mexico, playing a game of murder against an almost make-believe background. Don't misunderstand me, please. There are some good moments in "Stab in the Dark." Fear hides behind the martinos—hides as the murderer passes. But will you care?

Kennth Lowe's NO TEARS FOR SHIRLEY MINTON (Doubleday, $2.75) is interesting.

Shirley Minton had been blonde and lovely—and surprisingly lonely. She used to lie in her room many a night and "listen to the crossing whistle of the Burlington." It was a sound heard in the night that would take away the lonesomeness. Blonde and lovely Shirley Minton, delicately made, "moved slimly, smoothly," purposefully —until the end.

Until somebody shot her dead.

The horrible thing was that very few people cried for Shirley Minton and that young Bob Simpson, facing a murderer using terrorist tactics to drive him out of town, found many oddly reluctant to trap a killer.

The solution is concealed in the shadows of the little town, shadows that know their own ghosts and their own furies. Plotwise NO TEARS FOR SHIRLEY MINTON is perhaps a little weak, but it is worth reading as a picture of the undercurrents in the quiet little town whose last moments of excitement had been back in grandfather's time . . .

Murder and the threat of Murder come to Boston's Beacon Hill in Kathleen Moore Knight's THEY'RE GOING TO KILL ME (Doubleday, $2.75). The rather weak Lance White, trying to forget a number of things, is hunted by the men he had fought side by side with in Korea. He is suspected of murder. His fiancee is beginning to have her doubts about him. It all adds up to an

effective study of a man's breaking under pressure—breaking and reverting to his true nature. Interesting.

Harry Carmichael, in his THE SCREAMING RABBIT (Simon and Schuster, $2.75), presents us with certain baffling problems including what had happened to a missing secretary and why something rather violent did happen, later, to moist-tongued Lucille Lynton. What kind of man had this secretary been who "could be neither alive nor dead, who had vanished as though he had never existed?" And what *was* wrong with this house where John Piper, this quiet insurance assessor who'd had some slight experience with murder, could feel all the fear he had known pouring "over him again in a smothering tide that robbed him of breath and movement and the power of thought? Inside his chest something was gripping him tightly and the pounding in his ears was a gigantic noise that shut out all other sound.

"For a moment that was too long to be measured, too short to have a beginning and an end, he wondered why it was a strange voice and yet it had a familiar quality that he recognized so well. That seemed to make a difference—a difference that he clung to while his mind rolled back the first assault of the shock and grappled with the act of living again.

"And then, the moment had passed. He could hear and he could see and his heart was no longer choking him. The palms of his hands were sticky; there was a salt taste on his lips; the room felt stuffy. But that was all. And the man in the doorway had not sounded as if he would be worried about the way Piper felt."

Throughout conversations, accusations, and such rather turgid moods, Piper searches for a murderer who apparently had tried to frame him. A singularly un-British Inspector O'Shea contributes to what is called the solution, and a very un-British solution it is.

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