

THE **saint**  
DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

OCT.  
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*Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS*



Persons or Things Unknown

*by CARTER DICKSON*

The Doctor Calls It Murder

*by GEORGE HARMON COXE*

The Man Who Had No Friends

*by HUGH PENTECOST*

Ceremony Slightly Delayed

*by B. TRAVEN*

The Loving Brothers

*by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

**UNITED NATIONS MURDER CASE**

**A NEW STORY by LAWRENCE TREAT**

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



IT HAS OFTEN SEEMED to me that the United Nations enclave in the middle of New York City should be a ready-made setting for tales of global intrigue and international skull-duggery that would make the Monte Carlo of E. Phillips Oppenheim's heyday look like an unspoiled European Dogpatch; and for this very reason I have never used it as the location of a story, having always been convinced that at any moment its possibilities would ineluctably be suggesting themselves to a horde of more energetic and faster writers than I, who in a few days would be flooding the market with such romances while I would be left with ink on my fingers and the first page still in the typewriter. But years have slipped by, and somehow the locale has spawned extraordinarily few pieces of legitimate fiction (as distinct from the utterances of certain Delegates) and only one movie sequence that I recall. Now Lawrence Treat, being happily free of my inhibitions and inertia, has completed and editorially entranced us with **THE UNITED NATIONS MURDER CASE**, to which we are gladly allocating the Royal Box this month.



When a new writer appears from nowhere on the literary horizon, and is almost instantly accepted by cultural astronomers as a star; and moreover when he is so retiring that he cannot be personally interviewed, photographed, or even found—this is either an Event or a fabulous publicity gimmick. Anyway, this was the dawn of one “B. Traven,” and naturally gave rise to great speculation as to who was using the name as a pseudonym, or if he was a fugitive from justice, or an inspired hermit living in a cave. When his *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* was being filmed in Mexico, it was reported that a strange little man would show up at times and hover around, watching and sometimes commenting, but refusing to identify himself. . . . Well, I wasn't there. But we do have in this issue **CEREMONY SLIGHTLY DELAYED**, the newest story by this most mysterious of writers, and I'd call that a scoop in any publishing league.

But since we seem to have gotten you accustomed to surfeits rather than modicums of entertainment, we went right on loading this issue with other stories by George Harmon Coxe, Hugh Pentecost, and the maestro of maestros Carter Dickson. Plus, of course, the usual Saint story, **THE LOVING BROTHERS**, which you get stuck with because of the name of this Magazine. I don't know if this can go on forever, but we keep trying.

*Wm. Chandler*





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that triumphs over hearing loss and hides deafness as never before*

# New Way for Deaf to Hear with Both Ears ...Eye-Glass Hearing

by Gabriel Heatter Internationally Famous Commentator  
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# united nations murder case

*by . . . Lawrence Treat*

**She knew that her work would sway nations and change history. What about Cleopatra? Rubbish! She couldn't type!**

THE corpse was well dressed, in a suit of foreign make, and it lay in a gully well below the wide veranda of the house. Now, at night, the dead, vacant eyes were open. If you looked at them from the proper angle, you could catch the cold glint of starlight. No one, however, did.

The house overlooked the Hudson River, at a point within sight of the George Washington bridge. Inside, the ambassador was asleep. The mound of blankets on his side of the bed was higher than on hers, for the ambassador was a portly man, layered with fleshy substance. By contrast the blonde beside him was decorated with a mere hint and suggestion of it, just enough, say, to give chic to her figure. She had formerly been a model, and one of the elite.

She waited until his breathing came slow, deep and even. Then she slipped out of bed, draped a robe over her slim shoulders, and tiptoed out of the room. She closed the door cautiously.

In the hallway she felt lost, and she shivered, although not

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*For some reason murder has apparently not raised its interesting head too often in U. N. circles, at least as far as most of us know. Lawrence Treat, author of the recent BIG SHOT (Harper's) and WEEP FOR A WANTON (Ace), remedies this with the present report on the troubles of a New York Homicide lieutenant interested only in his job and not in international politics!*

---



from cold. The house was strange to her, she was scared of the dark corridor and panicky with the fear that she'd stumble over an unfamiliar object and wake him with the crash. She groped along the wall, feeling doors and wall brackets and then the console table. The turn in the hallway was just beyond.

She found the study at the end of the corridor and she entered and switched on a light. She closed the door gently and glanced at the desk. The original and two carbons of the report were lying there, in plain sight. Anyone, anyone at all, could sneak in and steal them. With a shock, Isabel realized that his carelessness made the murder senseless, unnecessary. Then it occurred to her that he'd been careless on purpose.

At the thought, she had misgivings. He'd been a master of international intrigue when she'd been learning to add and subtract. She was no match for him, she was a child compared to him, and she looked it, too. The sweep of her hair, combed straight back from her face, gave her glamor in the daytime, but here, with no make-up and with that soft, guileless look in her blue eyes, she was the picture of innocence.

"Vickie," she said to herself, "please don't blame me." Then she sat down and picked up the document.

On the second page she saw a passage that differed from the version she'd seen yesterday. She penciled it and went on, reading attentively and judging in terms of the politics of his country.

"It's a small nation," he'd remarked once, "and a sort of international plaything. Very few of its people have the advantage of an Oxford education, like myself. Nevertheless they have rights."

He had told her that he had to perform a delicate, balancing act and make endless compromises, else he might lose his job. There were two factions, he said, and they were bitterly opposed. He called one of them the democrats' party and the other one the cartel's party. When she had accused him of oversimplification, of omitting nationalistic trends and communist intrigues, he had replied, "Perhaps. But it's preferable to overcomplication, which can lead to a state of stasis. And whatever I am, I'm not static."

"If you were," she'd said archly, "I wouldn't be here."

She frowned and marked another paragraph. The alteration was crucial and yet subtly hidden in a statistical summary. He could easily have missed its significance while under the stress and strain of his formal presentation.

She realized more clearly than ever that the pages in front of



her were of enormous importance. Once read, they would be beyond recall. They would be recorded verbatim, and filed and accepted as a matter of course by the U. N. temporary committee, the specialized agency and finally the assembly itself. The fate of his country would be decided by the contents of this document.

Feeling pleased with herself, she retyped three pages and inserted the vital statistics which she had memorized earlier in the day. The last paragraph she redrafted completely, using phrases that would come naturally to his lips. But the ideas, the policies laid down, were hers.

They were American in concept, and strongly anti-cartel.

When she had finished, she fitted the new sheets neatly into the three stacks, carbons and original. She took the old sheets to the bathroom, where she burnt them and flushed the ashes down the toilet. She felt that her work would sway nations and change the course of history. Cleopatra could not have done as well, for Cleopatra could not type.

Isabel returned to bed.

Lying next to the ambassador, she began to calm down. She thought of his massive, almost monumental honesty. She thought of the respect in which his fellow-delegates held him.

Then she let herself think of the man who lay dead in the gully below the house, with a bullet in his brain. She shivered.

Her shuddering woke the ambassador. "Cold?" he said.

"No," she murmured. "Nervous about tomorrow."

"Nothing to be nervous about," he rumbled. "These things are arranged in the delegates' lounge. Report's ready. I read it, they accept it. Tomorrow I'm what you Americans call the Big Shot."

She nestled closer to him. "Big Shot Vickie," she said.

He breathed with deep contentment. "Ah," he said. He was not a demonstrative man.

At dawn, the first spread of light revealed a trail of partly crushed grass in the steep slope behind the house. A handyman next door, emptying garbage, noticed the swathe and investigated. He called the police, who swarmed, investigated and converged on the ambassador's residence.

When he and Isabel came downstairs, arm in arm, a tall, pug-nosed police officer with a lop-sided mouth and a crop of dark, stiff hair was waiting for them.

"I'm Lieutenant Greenwood, of the local precinct," he announced.

The ambassador nodded pleasantly. "You're an early riser. I



suppose you have a purpose in being here?"

"Homicide. We found a body behind the house."

Isabel started to ask, "Was he—," but the ambassador's voice drowned her out. "Male or female?" he asked.

"Male. Apparently a foreigner. All identifying objects were removed from his person, and I'd like you to look at him."

"That would be idle," the ambassador said. "Even if I knew him, I'd deny it."

"What for?" the lieutenant asked sharply.

"Because I am my nation's chief representative in the United States, and with my position goes a patriotic obligation to involve myself in no scandal. I am consequently allergic to associating my name with crimes of violence."

"Who mentioned a crime, or violence?" Greenwood demanded.

"My dear fellow, would you be setting traps for me if he had died gently?"

The lieutenant switched the subject. "You haven't lived here long, have you?"

"As a matter of fact we don't live here at all," the ambassador answered. "Just a borrowed house. It belongs to a friend of mine who recently received a foreign appointment, and sold out. New owner doesn't receive title until next month, and the

day before yesterday we took over the diggings, complete with servants. When the new owner comes, we go."

The lieutenant grunted, and his lips twisted into a vague, wet smile of disapproval. In a perverse way and because he scared her, Isabel liked him.

"Come and have breakfast with us," she said. "And be as gruesome as you want. I love it."

She led the way into the tiny breakfast room with the green table and two small, green benches. Paul, the butler, waited in silence, but Greenwood ignored him. Unsmiling, Greenwood picked up a folding chair, fumbled with its mechanism, and couldn't quite open it. When he finally sat down, it spread the last couple of inches and locked itself with a sharp click. He squirmed, and escaped damage.

"American gadgets," observed the ambassador, "are wonderful things, but they require an engineer to operate them. Or at least a chap with your Yankee know-how."

The lieutenant cleared his throat, as if to indicate that the remark was not funny. The butler, smiling discreetly, went out and then returned with an extra cup and saucer.

"I'd like to know where you were yesterday afternoon," Greenwood began, addressing Isabel.



"I went to a concert at Carnegie Hall," she answered promptly.

"Alone?"

"Oh, no. There were hundreds of people there."

"Anyone who knew you?"

Isabel trained her large, limpid blue eyes on his glittering dark ones. "Practically everybody."

"Who, for instance?"

She mentioned several people whom she had seen, and the lieutenant jotted the names down on a pad. Then he turned to the ambassador. "And you?" he said.

"What is the precise purpose of this?" asked the ambassador.

"The man whose body we found was shot. His suit, his shoes, his hat, his underwear—all came from your country."

"Yes?"

"We traced him to this house."

"How exciting!" Isabel exclaimed. "You mean a murder—here?"

The lieutenant glared, a hard, professional glare that nailed you down and dared you to squirm.

Isabel winked. Then, as if by prearranged signal, the ambassador went into action.

"I might remind you," he said, "that I'm a U. N. delegate. I have an important report to give at eleven o'clock this morning and it concerns the welfare of several million people. For

just such a contingency as this, I have a contract granting me certain immunities. I'm due at the U. N. building this morning and I can give you—" he consulted his watch—"precisely ten minutes."

"Where were you yesterday afternoon?" the lieutenant asked.

"Upstairs, working. And I was quite alone."

"Did you hear a shot?"

"My dear man, I wouldn't have heard a cannon go off."

"Were you expecting anyone?"

The ambassador sighed. "In my wretched business I'm always expecting people, but if anyone came yesterday they could have walked off with the house without my realizing it. However, I venture to make two suggestions: That you pursue your inquiries about me without publicity and through the proper channels, which are the offices of the U. N. Secretary-General. And, before you do so, note and consider the chair you're sitting in. It folds in a rather ingenious manner." He stood up ponderously. "Might save you a bit of work," he said. And, smacking his lips in pleasure, he lumbered out.

The lieutenant frowned. "U. N.," he muttered. "Diplomats. Chairs. Secretary-General. What the hell is this, anyhow?"

He got up and went to the telephone. Isabel heard him saying that a U. N. delegate was



involved and asking how reporters should be handled, but she couldn't overhear the answer. Besides, she was worried, for the lieutenant was sitting in the gray, Cogswell chair in which a man had been murdered. And, in her shapely bones, she knew that the lieutenant would find out.

She said goodbye to the ambassador upstairs.

"He's fun, isn't he?" she said, referring to the lieutenant.

"My dear, you have a perverted sense of humor." The ambassador studied her gravely. "And thank God for it," he added.

"Thank *you*, Victor," she amended, and curtsied low.

From her window, she watched him leave. He gave no suggestion of worry, no hint of whether he knew. But that, she told herself, was his strength and his greatness. He had played the game of international poker for so long, the habit of repression was so ingrained, that he maneuvered equally to conceal his innocence or his guilt.

Thoughtfully she entered the study. The three piles of papers were lying on his desk, exactly as she had left them last night. For a brief moment she wondered whether he had forgotten them, but she was certain he hadn't. His mind was too well organized, his thinking too precise. He could never have forgotten them.

Therefore he was guilty.

She changed her clothes rapidly and put on a cream-colored, suede jacket. She came downstairs humming and went into the kitchen. The butler, Paul, wiping the silver, said, "They've asked us not to leave the house. We were at my cousin's yesterday afternoon. We can prove it, and we have, but the police don't care. We're practically under arrest. Ten years of service, and now this."

Katie, the cook, looked at Isabel as if it were Isabel's fault. "It wasn't like this before," Katie said pointedly. "We're respectable. We want to give notice."

"You may leave at the end of the month," said Isabel. "When we do."

Then she headed for the front door. A uniformed cop was standing guard.

"Lady," he said, "the lieutenant wants you to stay in."

"But I'm going out, and he has no right to stop me."

"He can do anything he wants. You want to get locked up as a material witness?"

"All alone?" she said. "Goodness, no!"

She removed her hat and sauntered into the living room. From the rear French doors that opened onto the veranda, she could see the lip of the ravine and a half dozen police searching the slope, between there and



the house. From where she stood, the trail made by dragging the body through the high grass showed unevenly, like a line drawn with a faulty pen. At one point, the police were taking pictures.

She looked for Lieutenant Greenwood, but she didn't see him. Presently he barged into the living room and, without glancing at her, walked straight to the telephone and picked it up.

She said, "Wouldn't you like permission to use it?"

He stopped dialing. "These calls go free."

"I didn't mean the money. I was just thinking of the courtesy. I'm used to it, you know."

He stared at her and his eyes dropped to her gold ankle-bracelet. "Nuts," he said, and resumed his dialing.

She bit her lips and glanced at the gray, Cogswell chair. She seemed still to see a dead man sitting there, with two suitcases next to him and a dispatch case chained to his wrist. Blood had dripped slowly from the wound in his head.

She turned swiftly and left the living room. Upstairs, she lifted the extension phone. The lieutenant was saying, "There was only one reporter and I told him it was just a tramp. The lab man are working and—" He broke off. "Somebody's listening in on the extension, Inspector."

There was a long pause. Isabel said, "It's my extension."

"I'll call you back, Inspector," said Greenwood. A minute or so later, a cop came to the door of her room and asked her to lay off.

She obeyed, but she found a spot on the stairs where she could overhear most of what the lieutenant said. He was speaking to the inspector again, and then he called the U. N. and tried to get through to the Secretary-General. Later, she heard him listening to reports, mentioning Paul and Katie and describing them and saying over and over, "Yeah, I know. They had the afternoon off and they went to see this cousin, they didn't get back here till eight o'clock, long after he was dead. The cousin backs them up, every detail. And that leaves our two friends, this diplomatic big shot and his one-girl harem."

Isabel smiled happily for the first time all day. She wanted to thank the lieutenant, but she thought better of it. Still, it *was* a nice compliment.

At eleven o'clock the police experts found traces of blood in the living room. Isabel heard talk of the benzidine test and of blood groupings. She went as far as the entrance to the living room, but she didn't go in. The chair was covered with a dark blue blanket.

She tried to reason out the



ambassador's behavior. He had not taken the courier's documents with him. And, although she supposed he was delivering his report orally and without notes, relying on his prodigious memory, the question she kept asking was *what* was he remembering?

To her, the situation was clear. A courier had arrived yesterday with new instructions, which undoubtedly favored the cartel. The ambassador sympathized with the people's party, but he could hardly register their views in the face of contrary instructions and in the presence of the courier who had brought them. Therefore—get rid of him and pretend the instructions had never arrived. Then submit to the U. N. the report that the ambassador had previously drawn up, and his object would be accomplished.

Isabel began weeping with uncontrolled wretchedness, because her husband was a murderer and because he'd be caught. They were twin tragedies, and they overwhelmed her.

Shortly after lunch, she saw the lieutenant climb the stairs to the attic. He came down with two cowhide bags. Then he was on the phone again, raging at someone and saying he was the lieutenant and he didn't want any personal assistant, he wanted the Secretary-General and this was a homicide and did they

know what the word meant or didn't they.

After that, Greenwood had another long talk with the inspector, and again Isabel heard the same thing. U. N. or not, the lieutenant kept saying, he had enough evidence to make somebody fry, and was this New York or did it belong to the U. N. now? Then he calmed down and said sure, he'd get a warrant, and if that would make everybody happy, why hadn't they told him in the first place?

He was gone for an hour and then he came back and went into the study. An assistant D. A. arrived and Isabel could hear the lieutenant saying that the report was written on two different typewriters and he could prove it.

She saw now that she had only drawn the net tighter and provided one more piece of evidence against the ambassador. She'd sought to be clever, loyal, resourceful. From the moment she'd returned from the concert yesterday and found the body in the living room, she'd thought only of her husband. She'd been petrified, dazed, and the gruesomeness of that corpse would haunt her forever. Nevertheless she'd forced herself to approach it and pick up the brief case. It was chained to the dead wrist, she couldn't open it.

She'd assumed she was alone in the house, for the ambassa-



dor's hearing was acute. No matter how deeply he was absorbed in his work, he heard every sound. The shot would have brought him running.

She'd stood there, scared, shocked, uncertain. Then, afraid she'd keel over and faint, she'd rushed out of the room, banged the door shut and fled the house. She'd wandered aimlessly and tried to decide what to do, but she couldn't make up her mind until she knew where the ambassador had been at the time of the shooting.

After she'd managed to calm down, she returned to the house for the second time. To her surprise, the body was gone and the ambassador was sitting downstairs. His shoes were scuffed and there were two small, brown seed burrs clinging to his trousers. He said she was late and that there was barely time to dress for the dinner that the South American delegates were giving. They had at no time mentioned to each other the existence of the dead man.

Now, worried by the events of the day and fearing the worst, she went to the bedroom and waited anxiously for the ambassador.

Around six she saw a U. N. car drive up to the house. A uniformed chauffeur opened the door and the ambassador got out. He was carrying a cowhide dis-

patch case. The chain that had fastened it to the courier's wrist was missing, but she could have identified the case anywhere.

She flew downstairs and she was at the entrance when the ambassador walked in. He said, "Hello, Isabel," and she said, "Hello, darling. Did it come off all right?"

He smiled contentedly. "Oh, quite. No trouble at all."

"We won?"

"Naturally."

"And who are we?"

"We," he said, "are what we always were. The staunch adherents of our convictions."

Then the lieutenant appeared. "Hello," the ambassador said. "You still here? Crime still flourishing?"

"That's up to you," Greenwood answered. "I want to ask you a few questions. The Secretary-General—" he twisted his lips and pronounced the title with sarcasm — "said it was okay."

"Well, come along, then. You too, Isabel. You won't want to miss this."

The lieutenant gave her a sour look, but he acquiesced.

The ambassador led the way to the living room. He had removed his coat, but he still had the dispatch case under his arm. He sat down on the couch and said, "Well, found out anything?"

"Quite a bit," said the lieu-



tenant. He leaned back in the blanketed chair and took a paper from his pocket. "This means I can make an arrest. It has the name of the person who killed André Madise."

"So you've found out the victim's name, have you? Although that shouldn't have been difficult."

"It was a cinch," said the lieutenant, "even if you held out on us this morning. Madise got to the airport early yesterday afternoon. He was carrying two bags and he had a dispatch case chained to his wrist. The chain made a mark and we have photographs of it. He had confidential papers to deliver personally to you. I guess you got them all right."

"Let's not guess. Let's confine ourselves to facts."

"Facts," the lieutenant said. He took a number of papers from his pocket and consulted them.

"Madise took a taxi from the airport to here, driven by George Pisano. It was a six-buck ride and he paid in new currency, with a dollar tip. He walked into this house at four o'clock and was shot in the chair I'm sitting in right now." He looked for an effect and didn't get it. "I ripped the seat off the chair and sent it down to the lab. It's got Madise's blood on it. And you were here at four, you admitted it."

"Upstairs, working," said the ambassador.

"The body was dragged across the room and pushed out of that French door and dumped off the veranda. Then it was hauled down the hill and left in the gully, where a man by the name of Oscar Smith spotted it this morning. We found Madise's two suitcases upstairs in the attic. The dispatch case is in your lap right now. And the stuff that was in it was lying on your desk, only there were some changes made on it that had the identifying characteristics of your own typewriter. That explains your motive, too. You switched documents and didn't want the courier to give you away. So I got a warrant for your arrest. For homicide."

The ambassador shrugged. "If you believe I killed Madise in order to substitute a document, you have to know what document he brought with him. Otherwise he might prove to be my friend and political ally, whose backing I needed. Do you know his political affiliations? Or mine?"

"International politics don't interest me," the lieutenant said. "I'm a cop."

"You're doing yourself a disservice."

"Listen, I know you got a big fight on back home, the National Socialist party and the Social Nationalist party, and they knock



each other off like a bunch of Brooklyn hoodlums. But to me, a killer's a killer, and I lock 'em all up."

"Commendable zeal, but are you using your great powers of intelligence?"

"About this warrant—"

"Certainly, but let us return to logic, first."

"I never left it, Mister."

"Good. Then isn't it obvious that the only people who could have been waiting here for the courier were myself, my wife, and the two servants?"

"She was at a concert, and Paul and Katie were with this cousin. I never saw alibis that checked out so good."

"In my country, we have a saying that only the guilty have good alibis. For the man—or woman—is poor indeed who hasn't a friend ready to commit perjury for him. So, for the moment let us forget alibis and consider the character and reputation of the servants."

"They been working here for ten years," the lieutenant said. "A good, church-going couple with money in the bank. Are you telling me that, after being respectable all their lives, somebody can come along and pay them to commit homicide?"

"You make my point nicely, and now let's consider me for a moment. You have a warrant with a name written on it. How do you know I'm that person?

Simply because I walked down the stairs this morning, looking as if I lived here?"

"With your harem," Isabel added.

Greenwood gave her a wry look, and she reacted with a sunny smile. Greenwood said to the ambassador, "Do you deny your identity?"

"Lieutenant, I'm trying to help you avoid a serious blunder. How do you know I'm that man? Have you made sure of the point?"

"I'll bet my gun and shield on it."

"I'm not interested in acquiring them, but I have an important request to make before you serve your warrant. Would you be good enough to call Paul, the butler, and ask him to fetch the Christmas ornaments?"

"Huh?" said Greenwood. "What do you want that stuff for? In April."

"I don't. But if he doesn't know where they are, after ten years, it proves he's an impostor, doesn't it? I believe the possibility is well worth investigating. Don't you?"

For answer, the lieutenant left the room.

After the arrest, he explained. "I located the real Paul and Katie. They said they got a wire Friday morning telling them you weren't coming and not to stay on in the house. When I showed



this pair in the kitchen that I had another Paul and Katie who knew every detail of this place, they cracked. They killed Madise and substituted papers that would change the whole nature of your report. They had you down for the fall guy, too. But how did you figure they were phonies?"

"The folding chair," said the ambassador. "I mentioned it this morning. Would a real butler watch a guest struggle with the mechanism of one of those idiotic folding things and not even offer to help? Impossible, my friend."

Greenwood broke into his lopsided grin. "You spotted it all right," he said. "But why didn't you come out with it this morning?"

The ambassador looked shocked. "What!" he exclaimed. "Spoil Isabel's fun?"

The lieutenant blinked, then gave up and left.

Isabel said, "Vickie, I think

you're a humbug. I bet you saw Paul come back here yesterday afternoon, when according to his alibi he was miles away. You didn't deduce anything at all."

"Perhaps," the ambassador admitted. "But if I'd said so this morning, my report would have been suspect, or at the very least buried under the headlines of a murder story. Whereas this way I gained a day's time and forced the police department to learn something about the U. N."

"Big Shot?" she said, smiling.

"Quite. Big Shot Victor. And I have a piece of advice for you, my dear. You see, the wisdom of my country is preserved in traditional proverbs, and one of them says, 'At night a woman's place is in her husband's bed, and not at the typewriter.'"

"We have a proverb, too," she said. "'To the victor belong the spoils.'"

He gave her a look of appreciation. "Nothing spoilt about you. . . ."

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## CAN YOU OBLITERATE THAT DANCING GIRL?

CERTAIN DETECTIVE STORIES to the contrary, it isn't as easy as it sounds to obliterate that tattooed hula dancer or the symbol which may mean membership in the dreaded Society of the Beautiful Seven. Even if another design is superimposed on the symbol, the deception is caught once the design is photographed in infra-red or ultraviolet. Electrolysis, carbonic acid snow, chemical caustics and other methods are often used, but there will still be a scar or some mark. The only certain method of removing tattoo marks, surgery, obviously also has this drawback—the inevitable scar. As a matter of fact, whatever mark you may have had, its removal leaves some scar or surface irregularity which can be seen with a good magnifying glass.



# the loving brothers

*by . . . Leslie Charteris*

**Here was a different kind  
of fraternal devotion —  
made to order for Simon  
Templar's unusual talents.**

"YOU never saw a couple of brothers like 'em," said the garrulous Mr. Penwick. "They get enough pleasure out of doing anybody down, but if one of 'em can cheat the other out of anything it's a red-letter day."

Dissension between brothers is unhappily nothing new in the world's history. Jacob and Esau, Cain and Abel, disagreed in a modest way, according to the limitations of their time. Walter and Willie Kinsall, living in days when a mess of pottage has no great bargaining value, disagreed on a much more lavish scale.

Naturally this lavishness of discord was a thing which grew up through the years. It was not achieved at one stroke. When Walter, aged four, realized that Willie, aged two months, was commanding the larger share of his parents' time and attention, and endeavored to brain him with a toy tomahawk, their mutual jealousy was merely embryonic.

When Willie, aged seven, discovered that by lying awake at night until after Walter, aged eleven, had gone to sleep, he was

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*Walter and Willie Kinsall, unpleasant youngsters who had not improved with maturity, were most interesting mutants in the species of the ungodly.*

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able to rifle Walter's pockets of a judicious share of their current collection of candy, pennies, pieces of string, and paper clips, his ideas of retaliation were only passing through the experimental stage.

But when Walter, aged twenty, found that he was able to imitate the handwriting of Willie, aged sixteen, so well that he succeeded in drawing out of Willie's savings bank account a quantity of money whose disappearance was ever afterwards a mystery, it might be said that their feud was at least within sight of the peaks to which it was destined later to rise.

The crude deceptions of youth, of course, gave place to subtler and less overtly illegal stratagems as the passing years gave experience and greater guile. Even their personal relationship was glossed over with a veneer of specious affability which deceived neither.

"How about running down to my place for the week-end?" suggested Willie, aged twenty-seven.

Walter ran down; and at dead of night descended to the study and perused all of Willie's private correspondence that he could find, obtaining an insight into his brother's affairs which enabled him to snap up the bankrupt shoe repairing business which Willie was preparing to take over at a give-away price.

"Come and have lunch one day," invited Walter, aged thirty-five.

Willie came at a time when Walter was out, and beguiled a misguided secretary into letting him wait in Walter's private office. From letters which were lying on the desk he gained the information through which he subsequently sneaked a mining concession in Portuguese East Africa from under Walter's very nose.

The garrulous Mr. Penwick had several other anecdotes on the same lines to tell, the point of which was to establish beyond dispute the fraternal affection of the Bros. Kinsall.

"Even their father got fed up with them," said Mr. Penwick. "And he wasn't a paragon, by any means. You must have heard of Sir Joseph Kinsall, the South African millionaire? Well, he's their father. Lives in Malaga now, from what I hear. I used to be his solicitor, before I was struck off the rolls. Why, I've still got his last will and testament at home. Living abroad, he doesn't know about my misfortune; and I've kept the will because I'm going to be reinstated. I had an awful time with him when he was over here. First he made a will leaving everything to 'em equally. Then he tore it up and left everything to Walter. Then he tore that one up and left everything to Willie.



Then he tore that up and made another. He just couldn't make up his mind which of 'em was the worst. I remember once. . . ."

What Mr. Penwick remembered once he could be counted on to remember again. His garrulousness was due only in part to a natural loquacity of temperament: the rest of it could without injustice be credited to the endless supplies of pink gin which Simon Templar was ready to pay for.

The Saint had met Mr. Penwick for the first time in a West End bar; and thereafter had met him a number of times in other bars. He had never had the heart to shatter Mr. Penwick's fond dream that reinstatement was just around the corner; but it is doubtful whether Mr. Penwick really believed it himself.

Gin was Mr. Penwick's fatal weakness; and after several encounters with his watery eyes, his shaky hands, and his reddened and bulbous nose, it was hard to imagine that he could ever occupy his former place in the legal profession again. Nevertheless, Simon Templar had sought his company on many occasions; for the Saint was not snobbish, and he had his own vocation to consider.

The uninitiated may sometimes be tempted to think that the career of a twentieth-century brigand is nothing but a series of dramatically satisfying high

spots interluded with periods of ill-gotten ease; but nothing could be farther from the truth. The Saint's work was never done. He knew better than anyone that golden-fleeced sheep rarely fall miraculously out of Heaven for the shearing; and while he certainly enjoyed a liberal allowance of high spots, many of the intervals between them were taken up with the dull practical business of picking up clues, sifting stray fragments of gossip from all quarters that came his way, and planning the paths by which future high spots were to be attained.

He followed a score of false scents for every one that led him to profit, and there was none which he could pass by; for he never knew until the moment of coincidence and inspiration which would lead him to big game and which would lead to nothing more than a stray mouse.

The garrulousness of Mr. Penwick was a case in point. Lawyers hear many secrets; and when they have been struck off the rolls and nurse a grievance, and their downward path is lubricated by a craving for juniper juice which they are not financially equipped to indulge as deeply as they would wish, there is always the chance that a modern buccaneer with an attentive mind, who will provide gin in limitless quantities, may sooner or later hear some item of remi-



niscence that will come in useful one day.

Some weeks passed before Mr. Penwick came in useful; and Simon was not thinking of him at all when Patricia Holm looked up from the newspaper one morning and said: "I see your friend Sir Joseph Kinsall is dead."

The Saint, who was smoking a cigarette on the windowsill and looking down into the sunlit glades of the Green Park, was not immediately impressed.

"He's not my pal—he's the bibulous Penwick's," he said, and in his mind ran over the stories which Mr. Penwick had told him. "May I see?"

He read through the news item, and learned that Sir Joseph had succumbed to an attack of pneumonia at ten o'clock the previous morning. A well-known firm of London solicitors was said to be in possession of his will; and the disposition of his vast fortune would probably be disclosed later that day.

"Well, that'll give Walter and Willie something new to squabble over," Simon remarked, and thought nothing more about it until that evening when a late edition told him that the Kinsall millions, according to a will made in 1927, would be divided equally between his two sons.

That appeared to close the incident; and Simon decided that

the late Sir Joseph had found the only possible answer to the choice between two such charming heirs as the gods had blessed him with. He dismissed the affair with a characteristic shrug as only one of the false scents which had crossed his path in his twelve years of illicit hunting.

He was turning to the back page for the result of the 4.30 when a wobbly hand clutched his sleeve, and he looked round to behold a vision of the garrulous Mr. Penwick arrayed in a very creased and moth-eaten frock coat and a top hat which had turned green in the years of idleness.

"Hullo," Simon murmured, and automatically ordered a double pink gin. "Whose funeral have you been to?"

Mr. Penwick clutched at the glass which was provided, downed half the contents, and wiped his mouth on his sleeve.

"Ole boy," he said earnestly, "I'm going to be reinshtated. Congrashulate me."

Indubitably he was very drunk; and the Saint relaxed into perfunctory attention.

"Splendid," he said politely. "When did you hear the news?"

"They got to reinshtate me now," said Mr. Penwick, "because I'm only schap hoosh got Kinshallsh will." He dabbed astigmatically at the Saint's evening paper. "Jew read newsh? They shay moneysh divided be-



tween Wallern Willie 'cording to will he made in nineteen-twenny-sheven. Pish!" said Mr. Penwick, snapping his fingers. "Bosh! That will wash revoked yearsh ago. I got the will he made in nineneen-thirry-two. Sho they got to reinshtate me. Can't have sholishitor shtruck off rollsh hoosh got will worth millionsh."

Simon's relaxation had vanished in an instant—it might never have overcome him. He glanced round the bar in sudden alarm, but fortunately the room was empty and the barmaid was giggling with her colleague at the far end of her quarters.

"Wait a minute," he said firmly, and steered the unsteady Mr. Penwick to a table as far removed as possible from potential eavesdroppers. "Tell me this again, will you?"

"Sh-shimple," said Mr. Penwick, emptying his glass and looking pathetically around for more. "I got Kinshallsh lasht willan teshtamen. Revoking all othersh. I wash going to Law Society to tellum, shoons I read the newsh, but I shtopped to have drink an' shellybrate. Now I shpose Law siety all gone home." He flung out his arms, to illustrate the theme of the Law Society scattering to the four corners of the globe. "Have to wait till tomorrer. Have 'nother drink inshtead. Thishish on me."

He bumbled in his pockets, and produced two halfpennies and a sixpence. He put them on the table and blinked at them hazily for a moment; and then, as if finally grasping the irrefutable total, he covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

"All gone," he sobbed. "All gone. Moneysh all gone. Len' me a pound, ole boy, an' I'll pay for drinksh."

"Mr. Penwick," said the Saint slowly, "have you got that will on you?"

"'Coursh I got will on me. I tole you, ole boy—I wash goin' Lawshiety an' show 'em, so they could reinshtate me. Pleash pay for drinksh."

Simon lifted his Peter Dawson and drank unhurriedly. "Mr. Penwick, will you sell me that will?"

The solicitor raised shocked but twitching eyebrows. "Shell, it, ole boy? Thash impossible. Professhnal etiquette. Norralowed to sell willsh. Len' me ten bob—"

"Mr. Penwick," said the Saint, "what would you do if you had five hundred a year for life?"

The solicitor swallowed noisily, and an ecstatic light gleamed through his tears like sunshine through an April shower.

"I'd buy gin," he said. "Bols an' bols an' bols of gin. Barrelsh of gin. Lloyd's gin. I'd have a bath full of gin, an' shwim my-



shelf to shleep every Sarrerdy night."

"I'll give you five hundred a year for life for that will," said the Saint. "Signed, settled, and sealed—in writing—this minute. You need't worry too much about your professional etiquette. I'll give you my word not to destroy or conceal the will; but I would like to borrow it for a day or two."

Less than an hour later he was chivalrously ferrying the limp body of Mr. Penwick home to the ex-solicitor's lodgings, for it is a regrettable fact that Mr. Penwick collapsed rather rapidly under the zeal with which he insisted on celebrating the sale of his potential reinstatement. Simon went on to his own apartment, and told Patricia of his purchase.

"But aren't you running a tremendous risk?" she said anxiously. "Penwick won't be able to keep it secret—and what use is it to you anyway?"

"I'm afraid nothing short of chloroform would stop Penwick talking," Simon admitted. "But it'll take a little time for his story to get dangerous, and I'll have had all I want out of the will before then. And the capital which is going to pay his five hundred a year will only be half of it."

Patricia lighted a cigarette. "Do I help?"

"You are a discontented sec-

retary with worldly ambitions and no moral sense," he said. "The part should be easy for you."

Mr. Willie Kinsall had never heard of Patricia Holm.

"What's she like?" he asked the typist who brought in her name.

"She's pretty," said the girl cynically.

Mr. Willie Kinsall appeared to deliberate for a while; and then he said: "I'll see her."

When he did see her, he admitted that the description was correct. At her best, Patricia was beautiful; but for the benefit of Mr. Willie she had adopted a vivid red lip-stick, an extra quantity of rouge, and a generous use of mascara, to reduce herself to something close to the Saint's estimate of Mr. Willie's taste.

"How do you do, my dear?" he said. "I don't think we've—er—"

"We haven't," said the girl coolly. "But we should have. I'm your brother Walter's secretary—or I was."

Mr. Willie frowned questioningly. "Did he send you to see me?"

Patricia threw back her head and gave a hard laugh.

"Did he send me to see you! If he knew I was here he'd probably murder me."

"Why?" asked Willie Kinsall cautiously.



She sat on the corner of his desk, helped herself to a cigarette from his box, and swung a shapely leg.

"See here, beautiful," she said. "I'm here for all I can get. Your brother threw me out of a good job just because I made a little mistake, and I'd love to see somebody do him a bad turn. From what he's said about you sometimes, you two aren't exactly devoted to each other. Well, I think I can put you in the way of something that'll make Walter sick; and the news is yours if you pay for it."

Mr. Kinsall drummed his finger-tips on the desk and narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. By no stretch of imagination could he have been truthfully described as beautiful; but he had a natural sympathy for pretty girls of her type who called him by such endearing names. The rat-faced youth of sixteen had by no means mellowed in the Willie Kinsall of thirty-eight; he was just as scraggy and no less ratlike, and when he narrowed his beady eyes they almost disappeared into their deep-set sockets.

"I'm sorry to hear you've lost your job, my dear," he said insincerely. "What was this mistake you made?"

"I opened a letter, that's all. I open all his letters at the office, of course, but this one was marked 'private and confidential.' I came in rather late that morning,

and I was in such a hurry I didn't notice what it said on the envelope. I'd just finished reading it when Walter came in, and he was furious. He threw me out then and there—it was only yesterday."

"What was this letter about?" asked Mr. Kinsall.

"It was about your father's will," she told him; and suddenly Mr. Kinsall sat up. "It was from a man who's been to see him once or twice before—I've listened at the keyhole when they were talking," said the girl shamelessly, "and I gather that the will which was reported in the papers wasn't the last one your father made. This fellow—he's a solicitor—had got a later one, and Walter was trying to buy it from him. The letter I read was from the solicitor, and it said that he had decided to accept Walter's offer of ten thousand pounds for it."

Mr. Willie's eyes had recovered from their temporary shrinkage. During the latter part of her speech they had gone on beyond normal, and at the end of it they genuinely bulged. For a few seconds he was voiceless; and then he exploded.

"The dirty swine!" he gasped.

That was his immediate and inevitable reaction; but the rest of the news took him longer to grasp. If Walter was willing to pay ten thousand pounds for the will. . . . Ten thousand pounds!



It was an astounding, a staggering figure. To be worth that, it could only mean that huge sums were at stake—and Willie could only see one way in which that could have come about. The second will had disinherited Walter. It had left all the Kinsall millions to him, Willie. And Walter was trying to buy it and destroy it—to cheat him out of his just inheritance.

"What is this solicitor's name?" demanded Willie hoarsely.

Patricia smiled. "I thought you'd want that," she said. "Well, I know his name and address; but they'll cost you money."

Willie looked at the clock, gulped, and reached into a drawer for his cheque-book.

"How much?" he asked. "If it's within reason, I'll pay it."

She blew out a wreath of smoke and studied him calculatingly for a moment.

"Five hundred," she said at length.

Willie stared, choked, and shuddered. Then, with an expression of frightful agony on his predatory face, he took up his pen and wrote.

Patricia examined the cheque and put it away in her hand-bag. Then she picked up a pencil and drew the note-block towards her.

Willie snatched up the sheet and gazed at it tremblingly for a

second. Then he heaved himself panting out of his chair and dashed for the hatstand in the corner.

"Excuse me," he got out. "Must do something about it. Come and see me again. Good-bye."

Riding in a taxi to the address she had given him, he barely escaped a succession of nervous breakdowns every time a traffic light or a slow-moving dray obstructed their passage. He bounced up and down on the seat, pulled off his hat, pulled out his watch, looked at his hat, tried to put on his watch, mopped his brow, craned his head out of the window, bounced, sputtered, gasped, and sweated in an anguish of impatience that brought him to the verge of delirium.

When at last they arrived at the lodging-house in Bayswater which was his destination, he fairly hurled himself out of the cab, hauled out a handful of silver with clumsy hands, spilt some of it into the driver's palm and most of it into the street, stumbled cursing up the steps, and plunged into the bell with a violence which almost drove it solidly through the wall.

While he waited, fuming, he dragged out his watch again, dropped it, tried to grab it, missed, and kicked it savagely into the middle of the street with a shrill squeal of sheer insanity;



and then the door opened and a maid was inspecting him curiously.

"Is Mr. Penwick in?" he blurted.

"I think so," said the maid. "Will you come in?"

The invitation was unnecessary. Breathing like a man who had just run a mile without training, Mr. Willie Kinsall ploughed past her, and kicked his heels in a torment of suspense until the door of the room into which he had been ushered opened, and a tall man came in.

It seems superfluous to explain that this man's name was not really Penwick; and Willie Kinsall did not even stop to consider the point. He did look something like a solicitor of about forty, which is some indication of what Simon Templar could achieve with a black suit, a wing collar and a bow tie, a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez, and some powder brushed into his hair.

Willie Kinsall did not even pause to frame a diplomatic line of approach.

"Where," he demanded shakily, "is this will, you crook?"

"Mr. Penwick," raised his gray eyebrows.

"I don't think I have—ah—had the pleasure—"

"My name's Kinsall," said Willie, skipping about like a grasshopper on a hot plate.

"And I want that will—the will

you're trying to sell to my dirty swindling brother. And if I don't get it, I'm going straight to the police!"

The solicitor put his fingertips together.

"What proof have you, Mr.—ah—Kinsall," he inquired gently, "of the existence of this will?"

Willie stopped skipping for a moment. And then, with a painful wrench, he flung bluff to the winds. He had no proof, and he knew it.

"All right," he said. "I won't go to the police. I'll buy it. What do you want?"

Simon pursed his lips.

"I doubt," he said, "whether the will is any longer for sale. Mr. Walter's cheque is already in my bank, and I am only waiting for it to be cleared before handing the document over to him."

"Nonsense!" yelled Willie, but he used a much coarser word for it. "Walter hasn't got it yet. I'll give you as much as he gave—and you won't have to return his money. He wouldn't dare go into court and say what he gave it to you for."

The Saint shook his head.

"I don't think," he said virtuously, "that I would break my bargain for less than twenty thousand pounds."

"You're a thief and a crook!" howled Willie.

"So are you," answered the



temporary Mr. Penwick mildly. "By the way, this payment had better be in cash. You can go around to your bank and get it right away. I don't like to have to insist on this, but Mr. Walter said he was coming here in about an hour's time, and if you're going to make your offer in an acceptable form—"

It is only a matter of record that Willie went. It is also on record that he took his departure in a speed and ferment that eclipsed even his arrival; and Simon Templar went to the telephone and called Patricia.

"You must have done a great job, darling," he said. "What did you get out of it?"

"Five hundred pounds," she told him cheerfully. "I got an open cheque and took it straight over to his bank—I'm just pushing out to buy some clothes, as soon as I've washed this paint off my face."

"Buy a puce sweater," said the Saint, "and christen it Willie. I want to keep it for a pet."

Rather less than an hour had passed when the front door bell pealed again; and Simon looked out of the window and beheld the form of Walter Kinsall standing outside. He went to let the caller in himself.

Mr. Walter Kinsall was a little taller and heavier than his brother, but the rat-like mould of his features and his small beady eyes were almost the twins

of his brother's. At that point their external resemblance temporarily ended, for Walter's bearing was not hysterical.

"Well, Mr. Penwick," he said gloatingly, "has my cheque been cleared?"

"It ought to be through by now," said the Saint. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll just call the bank and make sure."

He did so, while the elder Kinsall rubbed his hands. He paused to reflect, with benevolent satisfaction, what a happy chance it was that his first name, while bearing the same initial as his brother's still came first in index sequence, so that this decayed solicitor, searching the telephone directory for putative kin of the late Sir Joseph, had phoned him first. What might have happened had their alphabetical order been different, Walter at that moment hated to think.

"Your cheque has been cleared," said the Saint, returning from the telephone; and Walter beamed.

"Then, Mr. Penwick, you have only to hand me the will—"

Simon knit his brows.

"The situation is rather difficult," he began; and suddenly Walter's face blackened.

"What the devil do you mean—difficult?" he rasped. "You've had your money. Are you trying—"

"You see," Simon explained,



"your brother has been in to see me."

Walter gaped at him apoplectically for a space; and then he took a threatening step forward.

"You filthy double-crossing—"

"Wait a minute," said the Saint. "I think this is Willie coming back."

He pushed past the momentarily paralyzed Walter, and went to open the front door again.

Willie stood on the step, puffing out his lean rat-like cheeks and quivering as if he had just escaped from the paws of a hungry cat. He scrabbled in his pockets, tugged out a thick sheaf of banknotes, and crushed them into the Saint's hands as they went down the hall.

"It's all there, Mr. Penwick," he gasped. "I haven't been long, have I? Now will you give me—"

It was at that instant that he entered the room which Simon Templar had rented for the occasion, and saw his brother; and his failure to complete the sentence was understandable.

For a time there was absolute silence, while the two devoted brothers glared at each other with hideous rigidity. Simon Templar took out his cigarette case and selected a smoke at luxurious leisure, while Willie stared at Walter with red-hot eyes, and Walter glowered at

Willie with specks of foam on his lips.

Then the Saint stroked the cog of his lighter; and at the slight sound, as if invisible strait-jackets which held them immobile had been conjured away, the two men started towards each other with simultaneous detonations of speech.

"You slimy twister!" snarled Walter.

"You greasy shark!" yapped Willie.

And then, as if this scorching interchange of fraternal compliments made them realize that there was a third party present who had not been included, and who might have felt miserably neglected, they checked their murderous advance towards one another and swung round on him together.

Epithets seared through their minds and slavered on their jaws—ruder, unkinder, more malignant words than they had ever shaped into connected order in their lives. And then with one accord, they realized that those words could not be spoken yet; and deprived of that outlet, they simmered in a second torrid silence.

Walter was the first to come out of it. He opened his aching throat and brought forth trembling speech.

"Penwick," he said, "whatever that snivelling squirt has given you, I'll pay twice as much."



"I'll pay three times that," said Willie feverishly. "Four times—five times—I'll give you twenty per cent of anything I get out of the estate—"

"Twenty-five per cent," Walter shrieked wildly. "Twenty-seven and a half—"

The Saint raised his hand. "One minute, boys," he murmured. "Hadn't you better hear the terms of the will first?"

"I know them," barked Walter.

"So do I," bellowed Willie. "Thirty per cent—"

The Saint smiled. He took a large sealed envelope from his breast pocket, and opened it.

"I may have misled you," he said, and held up the document for them to read.

They crowded closer, breathing stertorously, and read:

*I, Joseph Kinsall, hereby give and bequeath everything of*

*which I die possessed, without exception, to the Royal London Hospital, believing that it will be better spent than it would have been by my two worthless sons.*

It was in the late Sir Joseph Kinsall's own hand; and it was properly signed, sealed, and witnessed.

Simon folded it up and put it carefully away again; and Willie looked at Walter, and Walter looked at Willie. For the first time in their lives they found themselves absolutely and unanimously in tune. Their two minds had but a single thought. They drew deep breaths, and turned. . . .

It was unfortunate that neither of them was very athletic. Simon Templar was; and he had promised Mr. Penwick that the will should come to no harm.

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## NEXT MONTH—



Kathleen Norris' THE MADISON MURDER

Dr. Julian Corrington's BAKER STREET WEATHER

Leslie Charteris' THE TREASURE OF TURK'S LANE

E. Phillips Oppenheim's IF THE DUKE SHOULD DIE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

ADVENTURE OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

and THE RIDDLE OF DINAH RAFFLES, a new story by Barry Perowne

—in THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



the  
man  
who  
had  
no  
friends

by . . . *Hugh Pentecost*

Anger was an unusual experience for him. He was never angry in the ring. Now the blood pounded in his temples.

THE news that Barry Brannon was wanted for murder came over the ticket just before lunch on Friday. I couldn't believe it. The night before I had seen him, a national hero of sorts, rich enough never to worry again the rest of his life, in love with a girl who loved him. I remembered thinking, the night before, that there was hardly anyone I knew who wouldn't eagerly change places with Brannon. Now it was another day. Brannon had disappeared and was being hunted by the police. Another person who had smiled and shaken my hand the night before was dead. The Brannon myth, the Brannon security, the Brannon happiness, had all gone down the drain in one moment of violence. He would never be able to get any of it back, no matter how he tried, no matter how genuine his repentance. Brannon was finished.

I didn't want to cover the story. I liked Brannon, and I don't like badgering someone I like. To begin with you have a bias; you don't like to accept facts that will hurt the person

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*Somebody once wrote that Hugh Pentecost, one of the most widely anthologized writers in the field, has never written a poor story. This comes close to being the understatement of the year. Here is the story of Barry Brannon, undefeated light-heavyweight champion, as he grew to know his friends. . . .*

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you like; you keep searching doggedly for something that will make it come out the way you want it to come out instead of taking the facts as they are and writing your stuff as though it were about Mr. X instead of your friend. But I knew that the very reasons I had for wanting to duck it were the ones my managing editor would use for assigning the story to me.

"You know Brannon. You know the people who surround him. It's right up your alley," he said. "It's your dish, kid. Take it away."

I took it away, feeling like a heel. I didn't want to hound Brannon in his hour of trial. I told myself that perhaps they wouldn't find him; perhaps he'd make good his getaway. That was wishful thinking. Brannon had about as much chance of hiding out as Clark Gable would. He was that well known. There was hardly a person in the country who wouldn't recognize Brannon seeing him walking down the street. There was no place in the whole wide world where Brannon could hide for long.

This is Brannon's story, not mine. If I were lecturing to a class in journalism I'd tell them what I did when I took up the story that Friday noon. The documentary approach. But now that I have it all I can tell it in its proper sequence. Nobody

cares what I did—except perhaps at the end. So, for the record, this is it. . . .

Who can say where a story of emotional conflict really begins? Perhaps it began with Brannon as a kid, selling papers on Broadway, fighting other kids for a certain corner. Perhaps it began with Barry's old man beating him with a razor strop because he held out a few pennies from the paper route for himself. Perhaps it began with Celeste Tabor's being born with a silver spoon in her mouth, bought by her father's oil wells. Perhaps it began with Charlie Spendlove's early conviction that the way to get rich is to wheedle other people into working for you. That's where the psychiatrists would begin. But the climax, the thing you can get hold of and look at and evaluate, started a Thursday night before the murder.

It was just dusk that summer night when Barry Brannon walked slowly down Broadway, self-conscious in the white dinner jacket he was wearing with the red carnation in the button-hole to match his maroon tie. He was wondering what some of the boys from his old neighborhood on the East Side would say if they could see him. "Barry's gone lace pants," they would say. Actually, he could have walked down the street in



a sarong and people would still wave a greeting and say "Hi, Champ!" and think to themselves, "There's a great guy."

Fifteen years of professional fighting had left Barry Brannon practically unmarked, which is comment enough on his skill in the ring. There was a scar under one eyebrow that made the hair grow in a kind of shaggy unevenness. That was all. He was a trim, brown, flat-stomached, hard-muscled man of thirty-five, in the prime of life and health. His hair was dark and naturally curly. His eyes were blue, uncommonly sharp at moments, but warm and friendly when he smiled. A man on the crest of the wave, you'd have said.

But Brannon was feeling a little empty inside, a little panicky. The vagaries of his profession had brought him to an odd pass. At thirty-five, when most men are still on the climb toward the top of their particular ladders, Brannon was all through. Just a week ago he'd announced his retirement as undefeated light-heavyweight champion of the world. After fifteen years of living, breathing and thinking nothing but fights, it was all over. Not that there was anything tragic about it. Brannon had made a lot of money in his time, and Charlie Spendlove, his manager, had invested it for him. And there was Celeste Tabor! At last the time had come when he

could think of marriage, could assume the responsibilities of a home. It was something he'd always dreamed of, especially during the last eight months since Celeste had come into his life. Celeste had, in fact, hastened his decision to call it a day. She couldn't wait forever. Brannon knew that from bitter experience. Once long ago there had been a girl who couldn't wait. Brannon had turned his back on the possibility of romance until now, when Celeste had finally bowled him over. The fulfilment of his dream was just around the corner ahead of him. But the interim was nervous-making. There was no roadwork, no training, no fight coming up, no strategy to map, no campaign to plan. There'd be new interests, of course. The restaurant, for example.

He stopped and looked up at the huge red-and-blue neon sign: The Champ's Corner. There it was! His place! And on Broadway, his street, where his kind were. Charlie Spendlove had felt it was a solid investment and Charlie was never wrong about money. Everyone said the Corner was a gold mine.

Celeste was the reason for the dinner jacket that evening. Charlie had asked Brannon to stop in at the Corner for a minute to discuss a minor matter of business. Celeste was to meet him there and, after Charlie was



through with him, they'd do the town.

"Just think, darling. I can see for the first time what a little champagne does for you," Celeste had said. "We'll get all dressed up and cover the town from one end to the other."

The phrase "all dressed up," as applied to Celeste, was ambiguous. When Celeste got "all dressed up" the theory was apparently to wear as little as possible. She was one of the few women who looked as though she'd been poured into one of those off-the-shoulder evening gowns. She had a beautiful back and a beautiful front. Her hair was naturally red, but of such a startling henna shade that other women said "it *must* be dyed." She made the animal in most men rise up on its haunches and howl. It wasn't her looks alone, but a curious quality of expectant excitement. Her eyes, a sort of smokey gray, seemed always to be asking the question "What next?" She didn't belong in Brannon's world to begin with. Papa's oil wells had provided a Park Avenue triplex, a summer home at East Hampton, a simple little thirty-five-room place, including cabanas, at Palm Beach, when they got tired of the northern winters. When Celeste first showed up on the Brannon scene we figured she was slumming. But she stuck, and pretty soon it was clear she was really in love

with the Champ. And why not? Maybe he didn't drink tea with his little pinky sticking out. Maybe he couldn't give a detailed literary criticism of the works of Marcel Proust. Maybe he had taken a correspondence-school course to improve his speech. Maybe he still enjoyed the Coney Island midway or a 42nd Street flea-circus, which might be considered rather low taste. But he was a decent, honest, warm guy who wouldn't hold back anything from any woman he loved. The prospective union between Park Avenue and Jacob's Beach began to appear less of a paradox than it had in the beginning.

It was an odd courtship. During training periods Celeste stayed away except for an hour or two once a week when Charlie Spendlove gave her the green light. She was always at the fights, in a front row ringside, screaming at the top of her lungs for Brannon to "murder" his opponent. After the fights there'd be a party. Celeste was always there. But how she and Brannon spent the brief interludes between bouts and training periods no one knew. The gossip columnist boys may have tried to find out, but if they did, they drew a blank.

Now that was all over and Brannon and Celeste could have a life. That's what Brannon was thinking when he walked in the Corner that night. Celeste hadn't arrived. In fact the place was un-



usually quiet. Brannon spoke to Eddie, the bartender.

"What's the matter? Have people given up eating for the summer?"

Eddie shrugged. "Just one of those things," he said. "Charlie's in the private ballroom. He wants you should go up there."

Brannon walked up the carpeted stairway to the second floor, opened the door to the ballroom, and went in. The place was suddenly flooded with light. An orchestra struck a chord and several hundred voices rose in "He's a jolly good fellow." Brannon stood there, blinking, bewildered. A great horseshoe table filled the room. At the head of it stood Charlie Spendlove, looking particularly pink and white in his dark blue dinner jacket, clapping his chubby hands. Beside him was Celeste, in vivid green. The rest of the room was filled with all of Brannon's friends, including sportswriters like Grant Rice, Powers, Parker, Red Smith, Van Every, Baer and others. From the look on Brannon's face it was obvious this had been the best-kept secret since the date for D-Day.

Charlie Spendlove came over and led him to the head of the table. Celeste stretched up on tiptoe and kissed him on the mouth. Somebody began shouting "Speech, speech!" The room got still as Brannon stood there, looking around him. Then they

all saw the tears running down his cheeks. He finally spoke.

"When I was eight years old," he said, in an unsteady voice, "my old man used to beat me up for holding out a few cents from my paper route. He seemed to get pleasure out of my crying. I told myself I'd never bawl again, no matter what happened to me, and I never have—until now. But—this is different . . ."

Then he sat down abruptly, and you couldn't hear yourself think for the applause. . . .

That dinner moved Brannon as much as it did because it bore evidence to the fact that these people liked him for himself. The sportswriters had to cover the fights and the training camps. They didn't have to come to this dinner.

"They're all here—every one of them," he said to Celeste.

"Foolish! Of course they're here," she said. "You're the Champ, aren't you?"

"I *was* the Champ," he said. "They didn't have to come."

Charlie Spendlove leaned forward and spoke across Celeste. "Great turnout," he said. "Great tribute to you, Barry."

"It's wonderful," Brannon said.

"I suppose there'll be endless speeches," Celeste said.

"No speeches," Charlie said. "That was the deal. Just a little drinking and eating and saying hello."



"Then we'll still be able to do the town as we planned," Celeste said. "Why don't you join us, Charlie?"

Brannon felt his stomach muscles tighten anxiously as he waited for Charlie's answer.

"Not me," Charlie said. "I'm in the restaurant business now. Got to stay close these first few weeks."

"Suit yourself," Celeste said.

Charlie grinned at her. "I can't," he said. "If I were to suit myself . . ."

"What?" Celeste asked, turning those expectant gray eyes on him.

"Let a man have his dreams," Charlie said.

"I never dream," Celeste said. "Give me a cigarette, Charlie."

"Sure." He passed her his silver case and then snapped on his lighter. As he held it for her he leaned close to her. She kept her gray eyes focused on him, slightly narrowed, speculative. It was as if she were saying, "Why don't you start something and see what happens?"

Charlie laughed. "If I had your dough, baby, I wouldn't bother to dream either."

"He just likes me for my money, Barry," Celeste said.

Brannon had never been good at light conversation. He tried to think of something bright to say. It wouldn't come. "I doubt that," he said, "Nobody could think about money or anything else

when he looks at you, Celeste."

"Pardon me, modom, while Sir Walter Raleigh puts down his cloak for you," Charlie said.

"You never say anything nice to me, Charlie," Celeste said.

"I don't have to," Charlie said, looking straight at her. "I'm not hooked."

"You're a cheap little louse," Celeste said. "I don't know how I've stood you all these months."

"The pleasure is mutual," Charlie said, grinning. "Hey, there's Red Riley!" He waved.

Red Riley is the famous Broadway cop. He knows more about what goes on from Times Square to Columbus Circle, and from Sixth to Eighth Avenues, than a mother knows about her own child. Red Riley kept the peace because he had a way of knowing what was going to happen before it took place. He was a quiet, sad-eyed Irishman who could be tougher than a squad of Marines when the occasion called for it.

Riley sauntered up to the head of the table. He just nodded to Charlie and Celeste, but he put his hand on Brannon's shoulder.

"This makes me feel kind of sad, Barry," he said.

"What's the matter, Red? Aren't you having a good time?" Charlie asked.

"I never had a good time at a wake," Riley said, "even when the baked meats are as good as they are tonight. We're going to miss you, Barry. The air along



Jacob's Beach isn't going to be quite as fresh as it has been."

"I'm not dead yet, Red," Brannon said.

"When you go to a fight, it's nice to be sure someone's on the level," Riley said. "You always gave me that, Barry. Thanks. And now what's for you?"

"Why, he gets married and lives happily ever after," Charlie said.

Riley's eyebrows lifted. "Is that so?" he said. "Who's the lucky girl?"

Charlie laughed. "You're a great kidder, Red," he said.

"I'm not kidding," Riley said. "I just asked a simple question."

"Well, there's a rumor around . . ." Charlie began.

Celeste looked up at Riley. "I think he's talking about me," she said. "But I'll let you in on a secret. I haven't been asked."

"Celeste!" Brannon said.

"Well, have you asked me?" Celeste said.

Brannon's voice was so low he could scarcely be heard. "Every minute of every hour of every day since I met you," he said.

"Hey, Champ, you ought to turn your hand to poetry," Charlie said.

Red Riley's angular face looked grim. "Good luck to both of you," he said. There was no trace of warmth in the words . . .

The dinner broke up about ten-thirty. Brannon and Celeste

started to leave, but they couldn't get past the door. Everyone wanted to shake hands with Brannon and wish him luck, and they were hemmed in there while the guests filed past them, like people at a wedding reception.

Mary Malone, a cute little trick who was Charlie Spendlove's secretary, was somewhere near the end of the line. When Brannon saw her he gave her a friendly smile.

"I didn't know you were here," he said. "I didn't see you."

"Too many celebrities," she said. "Good luck to you, Barry. The very best."

"I'm going to miss seeing you around," he said.

"I'm still working for Charlie," she said.

"But I'm not," he said. "I'm among the unemployed."

Charlie, who was standing at Brannon's elbow, laughed. "You're an employer now," he said. "You're in the restaurant business."

"Silent-partner type," Brannon said. "I'm just the window dressing." His smile seemed to freeze. "I wonder how long people will remember or care?"

"Stop kidding," Charlie said.

Mary was still standing in front of Brannon. "No one ever forgets a really good guy, Barry," she said.

"For heaven's sake, Barry, let's get out of here," Celeste said.



They finally got away and down onto the street where Brannon hailed a cab. Celeste mentioned one of the fancier night clubs and they headed for it.

The driver didn't want to take the fare when they got there. He insisted it was "on the house" for the Champ. The headwaiter found them a ringside table, although he'd been turning down people for the last half-hour. When the waiter came over to them Celeste ordered.

"Two double champagne-cocktails," she said.

"Just one," Brannon said, automatically, "I'll have . . ."

"Hey, remember?" Celeste said. "You've retired. You don't have to stay in training anymore. You promised me . . ."

Brannon laughed. "I guess it won't do any harm," he said. "I'll try it." Then, when the waiter had left, "I suppose I ought to talk to your father right away, Celeste."

"Talk to my father about what?" she asked.

"Us."

She threw back her head and laughed. "How old-fashioned can you get?" she asked. "I live my own life, Barry, and I do what I please. I don't even know where my family is. They're away on a trip somewhere."

"Then I suppose we'll have to wait till . . ."

Celeste turned her gray eyes directly on him. "We don't have

to wait for anything," she said.

He felt his heart pounding. "We could drive to Connecticut tomorrow and get a license," he said. "Then, in three days . . ."

"My goodness," she said. "how daring can we get?"

The waiter brought the champagne-cocktails and put them down on the table. Celeste raised her glass. "Here's to crime," she said.

"Here's to us," Brannon said. He tasted the champagne—the first drink he'd had in nearly fifteen years. He liked the taste. He put it down on the table. Celeste's was half gone.

"We'll never get anywhere at that rate of speed," she said. "Drink up."

"There's no hurry," he said.

"I'm always in a hurry," Celeste said. She drained her glass and beckoned to the waiter.

"Good," Brannon said. "Then we'll go to Connecticut tomorrow and . . ."

"Oh my God!" Celeste said.

She had three cocktails to Brannon's one. Then she announced she wanted to move on. They went to three other places. Brannon felt pleasantly dizzy after the third drink.

Suddenly Celeste decided she was sick of people and noise. "I want to go home," she said.

They took a taxi to her Park Avenue address. Brannon helped her out of the cab.

"What time can I pick you



up tomorrow?" he asked her. "We'll drive to Greenwich or Stamford and . . ."

"Do we have to talk about it on the sidewalk?" Celeste asked. "Come on up with me."

"It's pretty late," he said.

"How often do I have to remind you that you've retired?" Celeste said. "You don't have to be anywhere in the morning. Come on."

She turned and walked into the building.

He paid the taxi and followed her into the self-service elevator. Celeste unlocked the door into the foyer of the Tabor apartment. She dropped her wrap on a table in the hall and led him into the living room.

"You wait here," she said. "I'll make some drinks. The maid's gone to bed."

He sat down on the couch, leaned his head back, and closed his eyes. The room seemed to spin gently. He wondered if that was the sensation people enjoyed from so much drinking.

Celeste was gone for quite a long time and when she came back she had changed from her evening dress to a flame-colored house-coat. She put a silver tray, with ice bucket, glasses, and liquor down on the side table. Then she stood in front of Brannon, looking down at him. The switch in clothes, the low-cut housecoat, was as corny as a Grade-C movie, but Bran-

non didn't realize that. All he thought was that Celeste was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen and that in three days she could be his wife.

"My dear Barry," Celeste said, and there was acid in her voice. "There is no one else in the apartment. We are on the sixth floor so no one can peek in through the windows. I think it might be relatively safe for you to kiss me."

He got quickly to his feet and took her in his arms. She clung to him fiercely, pressuring her mouth against his so hard he tasted the sudden salty flavor of blood. He pushed her away from him.

"I think I—I'd better go," he said, shakily. "I'll stop for you tomorrow morning. Would eleven be too early?"

Her gray eyes were shot with lightning. "You driveling idiot!" she said. "Does everything have to be blueprinted for you? I've told you, we're alone here. I've told you, we don't have to wait for anything."

"Celeste!"

"Celeste!" she said, in vicious mimicry. "You've retired, Barry. You don't have to be America's Number-One Boy Scout hero any longer. For God's sake, wake up!"

The room was spinning at an intolerable rate of speed now. "Darling," he said, "I know how you feel. I—I feel the same way.



But we'd regret it later, and it'll only be three days. I . . ."

"Get out!" Celeste shrieked at the top of her lungs. "Get out! *Get out!*"

It was all some kind of crazy mistake induced by drinking, he told himself. He turned and stumbled out toward the foyer. As he stood there, holding his finger on the elevator button, he could hear Celeste laughing. It was a harsh, frightening sound. Suddenly she was still. Then, just as the elevator door opened, he heard the sound of the telephone dial being used to call a number . . .

Brannon walked back to his hotel, suffering from a kind of numb horror. Long before he got there he'd begun the process of rationalizing the whole situation. He'd been drinking. He'd done no drinking before for fifteen years. It must have been *his* fault! He must have drawn a blank about something he'd said or done. He must have misunderstood Celeste. She couldn't have invited him to stay, because that was out of character for the woman he loved. Foggy from the champagne, he must have misunderstood the whole thing and the reason for her anger. She'd been angry because he *had* misunderstood. It wasn't hard to convince himself of this, because that's the way he wanted it to be. He would explain to *her* in the

morning, apologize. She'd understand.

He couldn't sleep for a long time. About three A.M. he called the bell captain and ordered two dozen roses sent to Celeste as soon as the florist opened. After that he slept, restlessly, for a few hours.

Then he got up, shaved and dressed, ate some breakfast, packed a bag and headed for the Champ's corner. He had to see Charlie Spendlove. It was about ten when he got there.

Mary Malone looked up from her typewriter in the outer office. "Hi, there," she said. "I figured you'd be sleeping off your first binge this morning."

Brannon grinned at her. She was a cute kid. Always made him feel good. "It didn't take much to put me in the bag," he said, "so it didn't take long to sleep it off." He glanced over at the hatrack in the corner and saw Charlie's fawn-colored summer felt hanging in its accustomed place. "I've got to see Charlie," he said.

"He said he was out to everyone this morning," Mary said, "but I guess that doesn't mean you. I'll tell him you're here."

Brannon waited, whistled softly to himself. Celeste must have the roses by now, and when he saw her in a little while everything would be all right. The waiting room was lined with pictures, mostly of Brannon, from his early days as a club



fighter down through his long reign as champion.

Charlie had had other fighters during that time, but Brannon had been the cornerstone of an empire.

Mary came back from the inner office. She was frowning slightly. "Charlie wants to know if you could possibly make it later in the day, Barry?"

"I'm sorry," Brannon said. "It's got to be now. Tell him I have an appointment at eleven, so I won't be keeping him long." His smile broadened. "This isn't for publication, Mary, but I'm going to be married."

"Oh!" she said.

"Well, aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"Of course," she said, "Congratulations. I'll tell Charlie it has to be now." She went away again, and then in a moment beckoned Brannon into Charlie's office.

Charlie was sitting behind his desk in his shirt sleeves, a cigarette between his lips. It bobbed up and down when he spoke. "I didn't mean to put you off, Barry. Only I'm up to my neck and I thought if it wasn't important . . ."

"That's all right," Brannon said. "I won't take a minute. I just want some dough."

Charlie took the cigarette out of his mouth and snubbed it out in the silver ash tray on his desk. "How much?"

"About five thousand," Brannon said.

"Five thousand!"

"You see, Celeste and I are getting married," Brannon said. "I need the dough for a trip and stuff."

"Oh," Charlie said.

"Why does everyone say 'Oh' that way when I tell them I'm getting married?" Brannon asked.

"I didn't realize it was going to happen so soon," Charlie said.

"I was surprised, that's all." He reached for a fresh cigarette in the cedar-lined box on the desk.

"About the dough," Brannon said. "Write me a check and I'll be on my way."

Charlie tapped the cigarette on the back of his chubby hand. "Five grand doesn't grow on trees," he said.

"I know," Brannon said. "It's in our bank account."

"Oh, there's money in the account," Charlie said. He snapped on his lighter and got the cigarette going.

"Give," Brannon said. "I've got to deposit it in my account and be at Celeste's by eleven."

Charlie took a deep drag on the cigarette. "Look, Champ," he said, "I don't think you understand quite how things are."

"What things?" Brannon asked.

"Our financial picture," Charlie said. "It cost us nearly a hundred grand to set up this restaurant."



Brannon grinned. "You mean it cost *me* nearly a hundred grand."

"That's one way of putting it," Charlie said.

"What other way is there?" Brannon sounded impatient. "Look, just write me a check and . . ."

"I'm afraid it's not that easy," Charlie said.

"What do you mean?"

"We drew up an agreement at the time we started the restaurant," Charlie said.

"I know all about the agreement," Brannon said, sharply.

"I'm afraid you don't understand it," Charlie said. "It was agreed that we'd only draw against profits."

"But we're running at a profit!" Brannon said.

"It'll be a couple of years before there's any profit on the original investment," Charlie said.

"Now, look . . ." Brannon said.

"You were to draw a hundred dollars a week for the use of your name," Charlie said. "That comes under the head of expenses and you're entitled to draw it—a hundred dollars a week. But you can't draw against profits until there are profits."

"But you said yourself we'd made a clear profit of twenty thousand bucks the first month!" Brannon protested.

"That's over current expenses," Charlie said, inhaling

on his cigarette. "But under the contract it calls for profits over and above the investment. It'll be a long time before there's a clear profit on the investment."

"But you keep drawing for yourself!" Brannon said.

"That's expenses," Charlie said. "We have to exploit the place, I'm the publicity man—public relations, you know."

"Now, look," Brannon said, "I need five grand. It's my money to begin with. I . . ."

Charlie pressed the buzzer on his desk and Mary came into the office. "Will you bring up a copy of the contract on the restaurant, Mary?" Charlie said. When she was gone he turned back to Brannon. "There's no point in arguing about this, Champ. We'll just look at the agreement. Naturally, if you want a few hundred in advance on the 'use-of-your-name' clause I'd be glad to let you have it out of my own pocket."

"That's generous of you," Brannon said. "Every damn cent invested in this place is mine. I earned it. I took the punches. Now you're trying to tell me . . ."

"I'm not trying to tell you anything," Charlie said. "You signed the agreement. You read it through."

"I didn't! I took your word for it!" Brannon said, his voice angry now.

"Why should you get mad?"



Charlie said. "You signed the agreement. There's nothing hidden about it. Here—bring it over here, Mary."

Mary came over to the desk. She was pale and she stood there after she'd delivered the contract. Charlie opened it up and handed it to Brannon. "See for yourself," he said. "Clause 3A."

The paper shook in Brannon's hands as he picked it up and read. "I don't understand legal language," he said. "I don't know if it means what I thought it did or what you say it does."

Charlie shrugged. "Call a lawyer—any lawyer you like," he said.

Brannon drew a deep breath. "What it amounts to is that I can't draw any of my own money, but you can!"

"For business reasons," Charlie said. "The whole thing was set up to protect you, Champ. You know what happens to washed-up athletes if someone doesn't look out for their dough."

Brannon stood there for a moment, balanced on his toes, a muscle rippling along the ridge of his jaw. Then suddenly he turned and walked out of the office . . .

Anger was an unusual experience for Brannon. He never got angry in the ring. Fighting had always been a business, and one of the things that had made him

great was the cool, calculated science of his fighting. Instinctively he knew that the pounding blood in his temples put him at a disadvantage with Charlie.

He went into a lunchroom and ordered a cup of coffee he didn't want. He'd have to think this out—figure exactly what to do.

"Barry!"

He looked up and saw Mary Malone standing by his table.

"I followed you," she said. "I hardly know what to say, Barry. It's a rotten mess."

"It's a technicality," Brannon said. "It won't stand up."

"I'm afraid it will. Charlie doesn't miss any bets when they count for him." She sat down opposite him.

Brannon spoke out of a deep inner panic. "What am I going to do about Celeste?"

"Marry her," Mary said.

"I'm in a hell of a hole," he said. "I haven't any money."

"People have been broke before," Mary said. "I never heard that it made them less lovable."

"I'm a washed-up fighter. I've no way to earn a living now," Brannon said.

"You're a man with a reputation for integrity and a million friends," Mary said. "What more can anyone ask?"

"The Champ had friends," Brannon said. "I'm not the Champ anymore."

"That's absurd," Mary said.



"Did Celeste fall in love with you because you were the champ? It stood in her way, for heaven's sake! Go to her. Tell her exactly what's happened. She'll come through for you. You'll see."

Brannon sighed. "Well, I've got to tell her, that's certain. I hope you're right, Mary. And—thanks for the fight talk."

He took a taxi to Celeste's apartment house and went up in the self-service elevator to the sixth floor. He rang the doorbell and waited. No one answered. Panic hit him again, and he held his finger on the button. Suppose Celeste had gone away! Suppose he couldn't find her.

At last he heard someone coming. The door opened and he found himself facing Martha, Celeste's maid. She looked ill to Brannon, but he thought perhaps it was the odd light in the foyer.

"Miss Celeste isn't here!" Martha said.

"Then I'd like to come in and leave her a note."

"No!" Martha said, so sharply it startled him.

"It won't take a minute. I'll just write it at the desk in the living room and leave it where she'll find it." He moved forward.

"No! No! No!" Martha cried. She put her hands against his chest, trying to hold him back.

"Martha! What is it?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"Don't blame Martha." It was Celeste's voice, cold and hostile. She appeared in the doorway behind the frightened maid. "How blunt does one have to be with you, Barry? I'm out—to you. Isn't that clear?"

"Celeste! I've got to talk to you," Brannon said. He wasn't conscious that Martha had slipped away.

"I should have thought that it would be quite clear, after last night, that we had nothing to talk about," Celeste said. She was wearing a white sport dress that revealed the golden tan on her back and shoulders.

"It was all my fault," he said. "I was stupid. It—it must have been the champagne. I . . ."

"There is nothing to talk about," Celeste said. "Please go away."

"But, Celeste! It was a misunderstanding. You've got to give me a chance to . . ." The words froze in his mouth. For the first time he noticed the hat on the hall table—a fawn-colored summer felt. Brannon swallowed hard. "Is Charlie here?" he asked softly.

Celeste had seen his eyes fixed on the hat. "Do I have to ask your permission to receive guests in my own home?" she demanded.

"Has he told you what he's done to me?" Brannon asked.

Celeste's lips parted and then she threw back her head and



laughed. "You sap!" she said. "You incredible sap."

"Where is he?" Brannon asked. The blood was suddenly pounding inside his head like thunder. He pushed past Celeste and into the living room. Charlie was there—Charlie wiping a smear of lipstick off his mouth with a handkerchief. Charlie tried to smile.

"Hello, Champ," he said.

Brannon made an odd gesture with the back of his hand across his eyes as though he thought he could obliterate the scene.

"So now you know," Celeste said from behind him.

He shook his head, trying to clear it. He had only felt this once before, the time Bat Stallings had caught him with a lucky haymaker.

Celeste might have let it ride there and he might have left, but that was out of character for Celeste, as anyone who had ever looked into those excitement-hungry, expectant gray eyes should have known.

"What do you think I've been doing all these months," she asked, still chuckling. "Living off your Boy Scout code of honor? I've hung around you, listening to your silly nobilities, for Charlie's sake. That's the only blessed reason why. You were Charlie's meal ticket. Now we've squeezed you dry and to hell with you, Mr. Brannon."

Brannon drew his breath in

with a kind of whistling sound. "All this time you and Charlie . . . ?"

"All this time," Celeste said. "Charlie is a man, not a machine with a gold star pasted on it for being a good boy. Do you think I could just stop living for months?"

Brannon shook his head again, trying to make it make sense. Why had she wanted to wreck him? What had she wanted with his money? He couldn't find the answer, yet it was there in her face, in the expectant gray eyes. This was a new sensation! This was a fly, impaled, senselessly, on the point of a pin, squirming for its life. This was Celeste's kind of fun!

"You did this to me, too," he said to Charlie.

Charlie fumbled for the package of cigarettes in his shirt pocket. His smile widened but it had a sickly cast to it. "Don't blame me, Champ. It was tossed in my lap."

"I trusted you," Brannon said, "with my money, with my life, with my future. I took the punches and it turns out you took everything else."

"It just happened that way," Charlie said. "It just got tossed in my lap and I did what anyone else would have done"

"I took all the punches up till now," Brannon said. His voice shook. "Up till now!" He took one quick step toward Charlie.



"Barry!" Celeste screamed.

I can only imagine what the next five minutes was like, but I saw the room afterwards and I saw Charlie afterwards and I heard the hysterical accounts of it from Celeste and Martha.

Brannon could hit like a pile driver from six inches away. He didn't need to wind up. The first punch was a left that caught Charlie in the stomach and doubled him forward. The second was a right to the chin that straightened him up and lifted him over the back of the couch where he fell in the debris of a splintered coffee table and a shattered lamp.

Celeste grabbed the nearest thing she could find—the brass base of a lamp. Screaming like a Comanche she swarmed over Brannon from behind, smashing at his head. She might have been a buzzing mosquito for all the effect it had. Brannon vaulted over the couch and yanked Charlie to his feet. He held him up with one hand at his throat and pounded his face into a pulp with the other. He kept punching long after Charlie's head lolled over to one side and his mouth fell open revealing blood-stained, broken teeth. He kept punching through the shrill sound of Celeste's voice as she called the police—through the sound of the word "Murder!" screamed repeatedly into the phone's black mouthpiece. Final-

ly he picked Charlie up bodily and heaved him into the corner of the room.

Brannon must have looked like a wounded bull as he stood there, blood streaming from his own head where Celeste had beaten him with the base of the lamp. He seemed to decide that Charlie was done. He turned toward Celeste. She sprang at him, spewing out obscenities, tearing at his face with her sharp fingernails. He took it, defenseless for a moment. Then he knocked her down and out with a right to the jaw. He stood over her unconscious figure, staring at her in a bewildered way.

"Don't use those words," he said. "Don't ever use those words."

Martha reported that last speech, Martha crouching terrified in the foyer. He didn't even see her as he stalked out. She waited till he was gone before she ran into the hall, screaming for help . . .

So Brannon had disappeared and there was a citywide search on for him, with men watching airports, railroad and bus terminals. It was an open-and-shut job. Charlie Spendlove was dead, and there were two eyewitnesses to the killing, Celeste and Martha, the maid. Celeste was hard as nails when the cops questioned her. She told the story, without regard to how it made her look.



The result was that there wasn't even a crack through which Brannon might hope to escape. He couldn't claim self-defense, or the unwritten law, if there is such a thing. He had killed a man, been seen at it, and taken a powder.

I stopped off at the medical examiner's office for the official report on the cause of the death. Charlie had been wrecked—jaw broken in several places, a fractured skull, "specks of brass from the base of the lamp which had been used to smash in his head lodged in the wound."

I remember looking at that last statement. I spoke to the guy in charge. "This last," I said, "about the specks of brass."

"That's what killed him, in all probability," the doc said. "He might have survived the other injuries, but it was the final slug-ging with the lamp base that finished him off."

"Celeste Tabor didn't mention that in her account," I said.

The doc shrugged. "He knocked her unconscious. She didn't see it all."

"The maid didn't say anything about his using the lamp base," I said.

"Look, I just did the autopsy, friend. I'm not a cop," the doc said.

I had been looking for something, and even though it wasn't much I hung on to it. I went to

see Lieutenant Mason, the homicide man.

"I know how you feel," he said. "I have a warm spot for the Champ too. But it's no use. Both women saw it happen."

"They saw Brannon slug Charlie with the lamp base?" "The Tabor girl was out cold. Nice clean-cut type she is! The maid, Martha, was hysterical—hiding in the foyer. She says she couldn't bear to watch. She just heard most of it—and she didn't stir till Brannon left."

"What about fingerprints?"

"Smeared badly—except for one clear print of Celeste Tabor's. We know she used the lamp to sock Brannon."

"Maybe she polished off Charlie after Brannon left?"

"Why?" Mason asked, in a flat voice. "He was her boy."

"I don't know why. She's a screwpot. Maybe she doesn't have a reason."

Mason shook his head. "I wish I could go along with you," he said. "I'm like I said, fond of Brannon too."

I knew he was on the level. I knew he felt badly about having to run Brannon in. I knew he felt outraged, as I did, about the treatment Brannon had got from his friends. But it was all pretty clear. As they say—open and shut.

I went back to the office and wrote my piece for the morning edition. Then I went out on the



town, frankly, to get drunk. I headed for the Champ's Corner. Brannon's friends would be there.

Any crazy gossip, any rumors about where Brannon might be hiding, would turn up there. The first person I noticed, sitting alone at a corner table, was Red Riley, the Broadway cop. He was drinking, which meant he was off duty.

"Mind if I join you?" I asked him.

He raised his bloodshot eyes. "If you're not too far behind me," he said. There were six glasses in his table, four of them empty, one of them half-full, and one untouched.

"I can work on catching up," I said.

Riley didn't say anything more till he'd finished the next to last drink. "If I wasn't a cop, I could find him in ten minutes," he said.

"Brannon?"

"Who else?" he said. "Nobody's looking for Charley Ross."

"How could you find him if you weren't a cop?"

"Or a newspaper man," he said. "We're outsiders, Jack. But it's in the air. Somebody's hiding him. I can smell it."

"Got any idea who?"

"Any one of ten thousand along the street who love him," Riley said.

"So they hide him out," I said. "It can't last forever."

"No," he said. "And Mason's

got him cold when he does show. Two witnesses for God's sake!"

"Maybe a good lawyer could twist 'em up a little," I said. "If a witness doesn't see one thing, you can sometimes shake him on the rest of the things he thinks he saw."

Riley turned his eyes my way. "What do you mean—didn't see one thing?"

"Neither Celeste nor the maid finally saw Brannon polish Charlie off with the base of the lamp."

"What are you talking about?" Riley asked, sharply.

"The 'M.E.'s report," I said. "Specks of brass from the lamp were embedded in Charlie's head. Brannon finished him off with the lamp base."

Riley put his drink down on the table. "Never!" he said.

I felt a faint tingle of excitement along the base of my skull. "Here's a copy of the report," I said, and shoved it over to him, suddenly hopeful.

Riley pushed his last drink away from him. His eyes, which had been heavy-lidded and blurred, were suddenly clear and bright. "Brannon never hit anybody with a lamp," he said. "He never hit anybody with anything but his fists."

"How do you know?"

"Not in character," Riley said.

"Can you prove it?"

"No," he said. "Juries don't pay much attention to character



references. But we know something now, chum."

"What?"

"Somebody else finished off Charlie."

"Celeste," I said.

"Maybe," Riley said. "I hope so. I hate her guts." He stood up. "Can you walk?"

"Where are we going?" I said. I was cold sober.

"I want to look at that contract Charlie made with Brannon," he said. He started toward the office.

"There won't be anyone there now," I said.

"Mary Malone's there," he said. "Been answering calls from Brannon's friends all night."

Mary was in the office. She looked all in. "They keep calling and calling for news of him," she said. "I never felt so awful in my life."

"You liked him, too," I said.

"Yes. And I sent him there! I urged him to go see Celeste and straighten things out with her. I never dreamed. . . ." She didn't finish. She just sat there, her head in her hands.

"I'd like to look at that contract, if it's around," Riley said.

She got it from out of the files. He sat down, hat pushed back, cigarette between his lips, to read it. The phone rang. Mary went into the weary routine of telling someone there was no news.

Riley looked up from the contract. "Charlie had him trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey,"

he said. "Who was the lawyer?"

"I don't know if there was a lawyer," Mary said. "Charlie may have consulted someone. But he dictated the contract."

"To you?" Riley asked.

She nodded.

Riley took a drag on his cigarette. "Then you've known for months that Charlie had the Champ over a barrel?"

Her eyes widened. "I don't understand legal stuff," she said.

"I just. . . ."

"You can't very well say you didn't read the small print," Riley said. "You typed it!"

"But I. . . ."

"So you've known for months that this was going to happen. How come, since you were so fond of Brannon, you didn't warn him?"

"I—I. . . ."

"How much did Charlie pay you to keep your mouth shut?"

"Nothing!"

"That's the way I figured it," Riley said. "He didn't pay you anything. But he promised you something."

"No!"

"He promised you himself," Riley said, softly. "When the showdown came you were scared. If Brannon made too much trouble, you and Charlie might find yourselves behind the eight-ball. You knew how crazy in love Brannon was with Celeste. You figured if he straightened things out with her he might not holler



too loud. So you sent him to her."

"I did send him to her, but . . ."

"And because you wanted to make sure you and Charlie were safe, you followed him there."

"No!"

"You followed him there, and you found out that Charlie had been giving you the doublecross with Celeste."

I saw it happen—the change that came over Mary Malone's face. It seemed to cloud and go out of focus.

"You saw Brannon beat him up, you saw him knock Celeste out, and you saw the maid run for help, and then you went into action!" Riley said. "You went over to Charlie. He wasn't dead. Maybe he spoke to you. Then you blew your top and beat him to death with the base of the lamp."

"No!" Mary said. It was a sibilant whisper.

"There's no use kidding around," Riley said, calmly. "They know he was killed with the lamp. Your fingerprints are on it. They. . . ."

"I was wearing gloves!" she cried. "There couldn't be. . . ."

She clapped a hand over her mouth. There was a long silence. Then Riley stood up. "Okay, let's go," he said. . . .

There isn't much more. About an hour later, after Mary'd been turned over to Mason, Riley and

I were back on Broadway. Riley stopped a little lame guy who sold papers outside of Lindy's.

"It's okay to tell now."

"Tell what, Red?" the lame guy said.

"Where the Champ is. They've arrested the murderer."

The lame guy's mouth tightened.

"Did I ever lie to you?" Riley asked him. "There's a confession in. It's all over. The Champ's in the clear."

The lame guy's mouth relaxed into a wide grin. "Now ain't that something," he said. "Benny's place, Red. That's where he is."

Benny's place was an Eighth Avenue saloon three blocks away. Riley had to go through the same routine again with Benny. Benny, dark and swarthy, looked like a man who's just had a pardon from the governor.

"It's been an awful strain having him here, Red," he said. "Shorty picked him up—not ten minutes after it happened. He was walking along the street, talking to himself like he had rocks in his head. From what he said, Shorty knew things were bad and he brought him here. He's been off his trolley till about an hour ago."

Benny took us to Brannon. He was lying on a bed in an upstairs room, his face turned to the wall. He rolled over when we walked in. He looked relieved.



"I'm glad you found me, Red," he said. "The boys shouldn't have hidden me. I would have come to you when I got hold of myself."

Riley sat down on the edge of the bed. "It's all over, Champ," he said. "You didn't kill him."

Brannon pushed himself up to a sitting position. "What's that?"

"It was Mary Malone," Riley said. "She was in with Charlie on that contract. She was Charlie's girl. Then she found out about Charlie and Celeste when she followed you there. She polished him off after you'd left."

Brannon lowered himself slowly back onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling. "Everyone I thought was my friend—the ones I really counted on."

"Things are pretty good for you," Red said. "One thing Charlie left on the level in that contract was a partnership clause which turned everything over to the surviving partner if one of you died. Charlie was the kind who figured he'd never die before anyone else. You've got your money back. You've got your

place back. You're in okay shape, Champ."

"Celeste, and Charlie and Mary—the ones I counted on," Brannon said again.

"There's a few left," Riley said. "Shorty and Benny and Jack and me."

"Hey, Red! Look!" Benny said. He was at the window.

Red went over. He looked out and then turned to the Champ. "Come over here," he said.

Brannon got up, slowly, painfully from the bed and joined us at the window. There were two or three hundred people down on the street, milling around Benny's place.

"The news must have got out," Benny said. "They're waiting for you to show, Champ."

There were men and women down there—and kids.

"Hell, Brannon, you're rich," Red Riley said.

I glanced at the Champ. For the second time in two days he had broken a life-long vow. There were tears running down his cheeks, and I figured they were not for the lost Celeste.





persons  
or  
things  
unknown

*by . . . Carter Dickson*

Vanning was half lying, half crouching against the wall, his face like oiled paper as he stared at them, eyes blank.

"AFTER ALL," said our host, "it's Christmas. Why not let the skeleton out of the bag?"

"Or the cat out of the closet," said the historian, who likes to be precise even about *clichés*. "Are you serious?"

"Yes," said our host. "I want to know whether it's safe for anyone to sleep in that little room at the head of the stairs."

He had just bought the place. This party was in the nature of a house-warming, and I had already decided privately that the place needed one. It was a long, damp, high-windowed house, hidden behind a hill in Sussex. The drawing-room, where a group of us had gathered round the fire after dinner, was much too long and much too draughty. It had fine panelling—a rich brown where the firelight was always finding new gleams—and a hundred little reflections trembled down its length, as in so many small gloomy mirrors. But it remained draughty.

Of course, we all liked the house. It had the most modern of lighting and heating arrange-

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*Carter Dickson, who is equally well known as John Dickson Carr, has long been interested in the similarities between the crimes of yesterday and today. In the present story, the precursor of several historical novels he later wrote, he takes up the question of what really did happen in the little room at the head of the stairs, back in the days of Charles II.*

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ments, though the plumbing sent ghostly noises and clanks far down into its interior whenever you turned on a tap. But the smell of the past was in it; and you could not get over the idea that somebody was following you about. Now, at the host's flat mention of a certain possibility, we all looked at our wives.

"But you never told us," said the historian's wife, rather shocked, "you never told us you had a ghost here!"

"I don't know that I have," replied our host quite seriously. "All I have is a bundle of evidence about something queer that once happened. It's all right, I haven't put anyone in that little room at the head of the stairs. So you can drop the discussion, if you'd rather."

"You know we can't," said the inspector who, as a matter of strict fact, is an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. He smoked a large cigar, and contemplated ghosts with satisfaction. "This is exactly the time and place to hear about it. What is it?"

"It's rather in your line," our host told him slowly. Then he looked at the historian. "And in your line, too. It's a historical story. I suppose you'd call it a historical romance."

"I probably should. What is the date?"

"The date is the year sixteen hundred and sixty."

"That's Charles the Second, isn't it, Will?" demanded the historian's wife; she annoys him sometimes by asking these questions. "I'm terribly fond of them. I hope it has lots of big names in it. You know: Charles the Second and Buckingham and the rest of them. I remember, when I was a little girl, going to see"—she mentioned a great actor—"play David Garrick. I was looking forward to it. I expected to see the program and the cast of characters positively bristling with people like Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith, and Burke and Gibbon and Reynolds, going in and out every minute. There wasn't a single one of them in it, and I felt swindled before the play had begun."

The trouble was that she spoke without conviction. The historian looked sceptically over his pince-nez.

"I warn you," he said, "if this is something you claim to have found in a drawer, in a crabbed old handwriting and all the rest of it, I'm going to be all over you professionally. Let me hear one anachronism—"

But he spoke without conviction, too. Our host was so serious that there was a slight, uneasy silence, in the group.

"No. I didn't find it in a drawer; the parson gave it to me. And the handwriting isn't particularly crabbed. I can't show it to you, because it's being typed, but it's



a diary, a great, hefty mass of stuff. Most of it is rather dull, though I'm steeped in the seventeenth century, and I confess I enjoy it. The diary was begun in the summer of '60—just after the Restoration—and goes on to the end of '64. It was kept by Mr. Everard Poynter, who owned Manfred Manor (that's six or seven miles from here) when it was a farm.

"I know that fellow," he added, looking thoughtfully at the fire. "I know about him and his sciatica and his views on mutton and politics. I know why he went up to London to dance on Oliver Cromwell's grave, and I can guess who stole two sacks of malt out of his brew-house while he was away. I see him as half a Hat; the old boy had a beaver hat he wore on his wedding day, and I'll bet he wore it to his death. It's out of all this that I got the details about people. The actual facts I got from the report of the coroner's inquest, which the parson lent me."

"Hold on!" said the Inspector, sitting up straight. "Did this fellow Poynter see the ghost and die?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. But he was one of the witnesses. He saw a man hacked to death, with thirteen stab-wounds in his body, from a hand that wasn't there and a weapon that didn't exist."

There was a silence.

"A murder?" asked the Inspector.

"A murder."

"Where?"

"In that little room at the head of the stairs. It used to be called the Ladies' Withdrawing Room."

Now, it is all very well to sit in your well-lighted flat in town and say you were hypnotized by an atmosphere. You can hear motor cars crashing their gears, or curse somebody's wireless. You did not sit in that house, with a great wind rushing up off the downs, and a wall of darkness built up for three miles around you, knowing that at a certain hour you would have to retire to your room and put out the light, completing the wall.

"I regret to say," went on our host, "that there are no great names. These people were no more concerned with the Court of Charles the Second—with one exception—than we are concerned with the Court of George the Sixth. They lived in a little, busy, possibly ignorant world. They were fierce, fire-eating Royalists, most of them, who cut the Stuart arms over their chimney pieces again and only made a gala trip to town to see the regicides executed in October of '60. Poynter's diary is crowded with them. Among others there is Squire Radlow, who owned this house then and was a great friend of Poynter. There was



Squire Radlow's wife, Martha, and his daughter Mary.

"Mistress Mary Radlow was seventeen years old. She was not one of your fainting girls. Poynter—used to giving details—records that she was five feet tall, and thirty-two inches round the bust. 'Pretty and delicate,' Poynter says, with hazel eyes and a small mouth. But she could spin flax against any woman in the county; she once drained a pint of wine at a draught, for a wager; and she took eager pleasure in any good spectacle, like a bear-baiting or a hanging. I don't say that flippantly, but as a plain matter of fact. She was also fond of fine clothes, and danced well.

"In the summer of '60 Mistress Mary was engaged to be married to Richard Oakley, of Rawndene. Nobody seems to have known much about Oakley. There are any number of references to him in the diary, but Poynter gives up trying to make him out. Oakley was older than the girl, of genial disposition, though he wore his hair like a Puritan, and a great reader of books. He had a good estate at Rawndene, which he managed well, but his candle burned late over his books, and he wandered abroad in all weathers, summer or frost, in as black a study as the Black Man.

"You might have thought that Mistress Mary would have preferred somebody livelier. But

Oakley was good enough company, by all accounts, and he suited her exactly—they tell me that wives understand this.

"And here is where the trouble enters. At the Restoration, Oakley was looking a little white. Not that his loyalty was exactly suspect, but he had bought his estate under the Commonwealth. If sales made under the Commonwealth were now declared null and void by the new Government, it meant ruin for Oakley, and also, under the business-like standards of the time, it meant the end of his prospective marriage to Mistress Mary.

"Then Gerald Vanning appeared.

"Hoy, what a blaze he must have made! He was fresh and oiled from Versailles, from Cologne, from Bruges, from Brussels, from Breda, from everywhere he had gone in the train of the formerly exiled king. Vanning was one of those 'confident young men' about whom we hear so much complaint from old-style Cavaliers in the early years of the Restoration. His family had been very powerful in Kent before the Civil Wars. Everybody knew he would be well rewarded, as he was.

"If this were a romance, I could now tell you how Mistress Mary fell in love with the handsome young Cavalier, and forgot about Oakley. But the truth seems to be that she never liked



Vanning. Vanning disgusted Poynter by a habit of bowing, and curveting, with a superior smile, every time he made a remark. It is probable that Mistress Mary understood him no better than Poynter did.

"There is a description in the diary of a dinner Squire Radlow gave to welcome him here at this house.

"Vanning came over in a coach, despite the appalling state of the roads, with a dozen lackeys in attendance. This helped to impress the Squire, though nothing had as yet been settled on him by the new regime. Vanning already wore his hair long, whereas the others were just growing theirs. They must have looked odd and patchy, like men beginning to grow beards, and rustic enough to amuse him.

"But Mistress Mary was there. Vanning took one look at her, clapped his hand on the back of a chair, bowed, rolled up his eyes, and began to lay siege to her in the full-dress style of the French king taking a town. He slid *bons mots* on his tongue like sweetmeats, he hiccoughed, he strutted, he directed killing ogles. Squire Radlow and his wife were enraptured. They liked Oakley of Rawndene, but it was possible that Oakley might be penniless in a month. Whereas Vanning was to be heaped with preferences, a matter of which he made no secret. Throughout this din-

ner Richard Oakley looked unhappy, and 'shifted his eyes.'

"When the men got drunk after dinner, Vanning spoke frankly to Squire Radlow. Oakley staggered out to get some air under the apple trees; what between liquor and crowding misfortunes, he did not feel well. Together among the fumes, Vanning and Squire Radlow shouted friendship at each other, and wept. Vanning swore he would never wed anybody but Mistress Mary, not if his soul rotted deep in hell as Oliver's. The Squire was stern, but not too stern. 'Sir,' said the Squire, 'you abuse my hospitality; my daughter is pledged to the gentleman who has just left us; but it may be that we must speak of this presently.' Poynter, though he saw the justice of the argument, went home disturbed.

"Now, Gerald Vanning was not a fool. I have seen his portrait, painted a few years later when periwigs came into fashion. It is a shiny, shrewd, razorish kind of face. He had some genuine classical learning, and a smattering of scientific monkey-tricks, the new toy of the time. But, above all, he had foresight. In the first place, he was genuinely smitten with hazel eyes and other charms. In the second place, Mistress Mary Radlow was a catch. When awarding bounty to the faithful, doubtless the King and Sir Edward Hyde would not for-



get Vanning of Mellingford; on the other hand, it was just possible they might.

"During the next three weeks it was almost taken for granted that Vanning should eventually become the Squire's son-in-law. Nothing was said or done, of course. But Vanning dined a dozen times here, drank with the Squire, and gave to the Squire's wife a brooch once owned by Charles the First. Mistress Mary spoke of it furiously to Poynter.

"Then the unexpected news came.

"Oakley was safe in his house and lands. An Act had been passed to confirm sales and leases of property since the Civil Wars. It meant that Oakley was once more the well-to-do son-in-law, and the Squire could no longer object to his bargain.

"I have here an account of how this news was received at the manor. I did not get it from Poynter's diary. I got it from the records of the coroner's inquest. What astonishes us when we read these chronicles is the blunt directness, the violence, like a wind, or a pistol clapped to the head, with which people set about getting what they wanted. For, just two months afterwards, there was murder done."

Our host paused. The room was full of the reflections of fire-light. He glanced at the ceiling; what we heard up there was

merely the sound of a servant walking overhead.

"Vanning," he went on, "seems to have taken the fact quietly enough. He was here at the manor when Oakley arrived with the news. It was five or six o'clock in the afternoon. Mistress Mary, the Squire, the Squire's wife, and Vanning were sitting in the Ladies' Withdrawing Room. This was (and is) the room at the head of the stairs—a little square place, with two 'panel' windows that would not open. It was furnished with chairs of oak and brocade, a needle-work-frame, and a side-board chastely bearing a plate of oranges, a glass jug of water, and some glasses.

"There was only one candle burning, at some distance from Vanning, so that nobody had a good view of his face. He sat in his riding-coat, with his sword across his lap. When Oakley came in with the news, he was observed to put his hand on his sword, but afterwards he 'made a leg' and left without more words.

"The wedding had originally been set for the end of November; both Oakley and Mistress Mary claimed this date. It was accepted with all the more cheerfulness by the Squire, since, in the intervening months, Vanning had not yet received any dazzling benefits. True, he had been awarded £500 a year by the



Healing and Blessed Parliament. But he was little better off than Oakley; a bargain was a bargain, said the Squire, and Oakley was his own dear son. Nobody seems to know what Vanning did in the interim, except that he settled down quietly at Mallingsford.

"But from this time curious rumors began to go about the countryside. They all centered round Richard Oakley. Poynter records some of them, at first evidently not even realizing their direction. They were as light as dandelion-clock blown off, but they floated and settled.

"Who was Oakley? What did anybody know about him, except that he had come here and bought land under Oliver? He had vast learning, and above a hundred books in his house; what need did he have of that? What had he been? A parson? A doctor of letters of physics? Or letters of a more unnatural kind? Why did he go for long walks in the wood, particularly after dusk?

"Oakley, if questioned, said that this was his nature. But an honest man, meaning an ordinary man, could understand no such nature. A wood was thick; you could not tell what might be in it after nightfall; an honest man preferred the tavern. Such wispers were all the more rapid-moving because of the troubled times. The broken bones of a Revolution are not easily healed. Then there was the unnatural

state of the weather. In winter with no cold at all, the roads dusty, a swarm full of flies, and the rose-bushes full of leaves into the following January.

"Oakley heard none of the rumors, or pretended to hear none. It was Jamy Achen, a lad of weak mind and therefore afraid of nothing, who saw something following Richard Oakley through Gallows Copse. The boy said he had not got a good look at it, since the time was after dusk. But he heard it rustle behind the trees, peering out at intervals after Mr. Oakley. He said that it seemed human, but that he was not sure it was alive.

"On the night of Friday, the 26th November, Gerald Vanning rode over to this house alone. It was seven o'clock, a late hour for the country. He was admitted to the lower hall by Kitts, the Squire's steward, and he asked for Mr. Oakley. Kitts told him that Mr. Oakley was above-stairs with Mistress Mary, and that the Squire was asleep over supper with Mr. Poynter.

It is certain that Vanning was wearing no sword. Kitts held the candle high and looked at him narrowly, for he seemed on a wire of apprehension and kept glancing over his shoulder as he pulled off his gloves. He wore jack-boots, a riding-coat half buttoned, a lace bank at the neck, and a flat-crowned beaver hat



with a gold band. Under his sharp nose there was a little edge of moustache, and he was sweating.

"'Mr. Oakley has brought a friend with him, I think,' says Vanning.

"'No, sir,' says Kitts, 'he is alone.'

"'But I am sure his friend has followed him,' says Vanning, again twitching his head round and looking over his shoulder. He also jumped as though something had touched him, and kept turning round and round and looking sharply into corners as though he were playing hide-and-seek.

"'Well!' says Mr. Vanning, with a whistle of breath through his nose. 'Take me to Mistress Mary. Stop! First fetch two or three brisk lads from the kitchen, and you shall go with me.'

"The steward was alarmed, and asked what was the matter. Vanning would not tell him, but instructed him to see that the servants carried cudgels and lights. Four of them went above stairs. Vanning knocked at the door of the Withdrawing Room, and was bidden to enter. The servants remained outside, and both the lights and the cudgels trembled in their hands: later they did not know why.

As the door opened and closed, Kitts caught a glimpse of Mistress Mary sitting by the table in the rose brocade dress

she reserved usually for Sundays, and Oakley sitting on the edge of the table beside her. Both looked round as though surprised.

"Presently Kitts heard voices talking low, but so low he could not make out what was said. The voices spoke more rapidly; then there was a sound of moving about. The next thing to which Kitts could testify was a noise as though a candlestick had been knocked over. There was a thud, a high-pitched kind of noise, muffled breathing sounds and a sort of thrashing on the floor, and Mistress Mary suddenly beginning to scream over it.

"Kitts and his three followers laid hold of the door, but someone had bolted it. They attacked the door in a way that roused the Squire in the dining-room below, but it held. Inside, after a silence, someone was heard to stumble and grope towards the door. Squire Radlow and Mr. Poynter came running up the stairs just as the door was unbolted from inside.

"Mistress Mary was standing there, panting, with her eyes wide and staring. She was holding up one edge of her full skirt, where it was stained with blood as though someone had scoured and polished a weapon there. She cried to them to bring lights; and one of the servants held up a lantern in the doorway.

"Vanning was half-lying, half-crouching over against the far



wall, with a face like oiled paper as he lifted round his head to look at them. But they were looking at Oakley, or what was left of Oakley. He had fallen near the table, with the candle smashed beside him. They could not tell how many wounds there were in Oakley's neck and body; above a dozen, Poynter thought, and he was right. Vanning stumbled over and tried to lift him up, but of course it was too late. Now listen to Poynter's own words:

"'Mr. Radlow ran to Mr. Vanning and laid hold of him, crying: 'You are a murderer! You have murdered him!'" Mr. Vanning cried to him: "By God and His mercy, I have not touched him! I have no sword or dagger by me!" And indeed, this was true. For he was flung down on the floor by this bloody work, and ordered to be searched, but not so much as a pin was there in his clothes.

"'I had observed by the nature of the wide, gaping wounds that some such blade as a broad knife had inflicted them, or the like. But what had done this was a puzzle, for every inch of the room did we search, high, low and turnover; and still not so much as a pin in crack or crevice.

"'Mr. Vanning deposed that as he was speaking with Mr. Oakley, something struck out the light and overthrew Mr. Oakley, and knelt on his chest. But who or what this was, or where it had

gone when the light was brought, he could not say.'"

Bending close to the firelight, our host finished reading the notes from the sheet of paper in his hands. He folded up the paper, put it back in his pocket and looked at us.

The historian's wife, who had drawn closer to her husband, shifted uneasily. "I wish you wouldn't tell us these things," she complained. "But tell us, anyway. I still don't understand. What was the man killed with, then?"

"That," said our host, lighting his pipe, "is the question. If you accept natural laws as governing this world, there isn't anything that could have killed him. Look here a moment!" (For we were all looking at the ceiling.)

"The Squire begged Mistress Mary to tell him what had happened. First she began to whimper a little, and for the first time in her life she fainted. The Squire wanted to throw some water over her, but Vanning carried her downstairs and they forced brandy between her teeth. When she recovered she was a trifle wandering, with no story at all.

"Something had put out the light. There had been a sound like a fall and a scuffling. Then the noise of moving about, and the smell of blood in a close, confined room. Something seem-



ed to be plucking or pulling at her skirts. She does not appear to have remembered anything more.

"Of course, Vanning was put under restraint, and a magistrate sent for. They gathered in this room, which was a good deal bleaker and barer than it is today, but they pinned Vanning in the chimney-corner of that fireplace. The Squire drew his sword and attempted to run Vanning through, while both of them wept, as the fashion was. But Poynter ordered two of the lads to hold the Squire back, quoting himself as saying: 'This must be done in good order.'

"Now, what I want to impress on you is that these people were no fools. They had possibly a cruder turn of thought and speech; but they were used to dealing with realities like wood and beef and leather. Here was a reality. Oakley's wounds were six inches deep and an inch wide, from a thick flat blade that in places had scraped the bone. But there wasn't any such blade, and they knew it.

"Four men stood in the door and held lights while they searched for that knife (if there was such a thing) and they didn't find it. They pulled the room to pieces and they didn't find it. Nobody could have whisked it out, past the men in the door. The windows didn't open, being set into the wall like panels, so nobody could have got rid of the

knife there. There was only one door, outside which the servants had been standing. Something had cut a man to pieces, yet it simply wasn't there.

"Vanning, pale but calmer, repeated his account. Questioned as to why he had come to the house that night, he answered that there had been a matter to settle with Oakley. Asked what it was, he said he had not liked the conditions in his own home for the past month; he would beg Mr. Oakley to mend them. He had done Mr. Oakley no harm, beyond trying to take a bride from him, and therefore he would ask Mr. Oakley to call off his dogs. What dogs? Vanning explained that he did not precisely mean dogs. He meant something that had got into his bedroom cupboard, but was only there at night; and he had reasons for thinking Mr. Oakley had whistled it there. It had been there only since he had been paying attentions to Mistress Mary.

"These men were only human. Poynter ordered the steward to go up and search the little room again—and the steward wouldn't go.

"That little seed of terror had begun to grow like a mango-tree under a cloth, and push up the cloth to stir out tentacles. It was easy to forget the broad, smiling face of Richard Oakley, and to remember the curious 'shifting' of his eyes. When you recalled



that, after all, Oakley was twice Mistress Mary's age, you might begin to wonder just whom you had been entertaining at bread and meat.

"Even Squire Radlow did not care to go upstairs again in his own house. Vanning, sweating and squirming in the chimney-corner, plucked up courage as a confident young man and volunteered to go. They let him. But no sooner had he got into the little room than the door clapped again, and he came running. It was touch-and-go whether they were of a mind to desert the house in a body."

Again our host paused. In the silence it was the Inspector who spoke, examining his cigar and speaking with some skepticism. He had a common-sense voice, which restored reasonable values.

"Look here," he said, "are you telling us local boggy-tales, or are you seriously putting this forward as evidence?"

"As evidence given at a coroner's inquest."

"Reliable evidence?"

"I believe so."

"I don't," returned the Inspector, drawing the air through a hollow tooth. "After all, I suppose we've got to admit that a man was murdered since there was an inquest. But if he died of being hacked or slashed with thirteen wounds, some instrument made those wounds. What happened to that weapon? You

say it wasn't in the room; but how do we know it wasn't hidden away somewhere, and they simply couldn't find it?"

"I think I can give you my word," said our host slowly, "that no weapon was hidden there."

"Then what the devil happened to it? A knife at least six inches in the blade, and an inch broad—"

"Yes. But the fact is, nobody could see it."

"It wasn't hidden anywhere, and yet nobody could see it?"

"That's right."

"An invisible weapon?"

"Yes," answered our host, with a curious shining in his eyes. "A quite literally invisible weapon."

"How do you know?" demanded his wife abruptly.

Hitherto she had taken no part in the conversation. But she had been studying him in an odd way, sitting on a hassock; and, as he hesitated, she rose at him in a glory of accusation.

"You villain!" she cried. "Ooh, you unutterable villain! You've been making it all up! Just to make everybody afraid to go to bed, and because I didn't know anything about the place, you've been telling us a pack of lies—"

But he stopped her.

"No. If I had been making it up, I should have told you it was a story." Again, he hesitated,



almost biting his nails. "I'll admit that I may have been trying to mystify you a bit. That's reasonable, because I honestly don't know the truth myself. I can make a guess at it, that's all. I can make a guess at how those wounds came there. But that isn't the real problem. That isn't what bothers me, don't you see?"

Here the historian intervened. "A wide acquaintance with sensational fiction," he said, "gives me the line on which you're working. I submit that the victim was stabbed with an icicle, as in several tales I could mention. Afterwards the ice melted—and was, in consequence, an invisible weapon."

"No," said our host.

"I mean," he went on, "that it's not feasible. You would hardly find an icicle in such unnaturally warm weather as they were having. And icicles are brittle—you wouldn't get a flat, broad icicle of such steel-strength and sharpness that thirteen stabs could be made and the bone scraped in some of them. And an icicle isn't invisible. Under the circumstances, this knife was invisible, despite its size."

"Bosh!" said the historian's wife. "There's no such thing."

"There is if you come to think about it. Of course, it's only an idea of mine, and it may be all wrong. Also, as I say, it's not the real problem, though it's so close-

ly associated with the real problem that—

"But you haven't heard the rest of the story. Shall I conclude it?"

"By all means."

"I am afraid there are no great alarms or sensations," our host went on, "though the every name of Richard Oakley became a nightmare to keep people indoors at night. Oakley's 'friend' became a local synonym for anything that might get you if you didn't look sharp. One or two people saw him walking in the woods afterwards, his head was on one side and the stab-wounds were still there.

"A grand jury of Sussex gentlemen, headed by Sir Benedict Skene, completely exonerated Gerald Vanning. The coroner's jury had already said 'persons or things unknown,' and added words of sympathy with Mistress Mary to the effect that she was luckily quit of a dangerous bargain. It may not surprise you to hear that eighteen months after Oakley's death she married Vanning.

"She was completely docile, though her old vivacity had gone. In those days young ladies did not remain spinsters through choice. She smiled, nodded, and made the proper responses, though it seems probable that she never got over what had happened.



"Matters became settled, even humdrum. Vanning waxed prosperous and respectable. His subsequent career I have had to look up in other sources, since Poynter's diary breaks off at the end of '64. But a grateful Government made him Sir Gerald Vanning, Bart. He became a leading member of the Royal Society, tinkering with the toys of science. His cheeks filled out, the slyness left his eyes, a periwig adorned his head, and four flanders mares drew his coach to Gresham House. At home he often chose this house to live in when Squire Radlow died; he moved between here and Mallingford with the soberest grace. The little room, once such a cause of terror, he seldom visited, but its door was not locked.

"His wife saw to it that these flagstones were kept scrubbed, and every stick of wood shining. She was a good wife. He for his part was a good husband; he treated her well and drank only for his thirst, though she often pressed him to drink more than he did. It is at this pitch of domesticity that we get the record of another coroner's inquest.

"Vanning's throat was cut on the night of the 5th of October '67.

"On an evening of high winds, he and his wife came here from Mallingford. He was in unusually good spirits, having just done a profitable piece of business.

They had supper together, and Vanning drank a great deal. His wife kept him company at it. (Didn't I tell you she once drank off a pint of wine at a draught, for a wager?) She said it would make him sleep soundly, for it seems to be true that he sometimes talked in his sleep. At eight o'clock, she tells us, she went up to bed, leaving him still at the table. At what time he went upstairs we do not know, and neither do the servants. Kitts, the steward, thought he heard him stumbling up that staircase out there at a very late hour. Kitts also thought he heard someone crying out, but a high October gale was blowing and he could not be sure.

"On the morning of the 6th of October, a cowherd named Coates was coming round the side of this house in a sodden daybreak from which the storm had just cleared. He was on his way to the west meadow, and stopped to drink at a rain-water barrel under the eaves just below the little room at the head of the stairs. As he was about to drink, he noticed a curious color in the water. Looking up to find out how it had come there, he saw Sir Gerald Vanning's face looking down at him under the shadow of the yellow trees. Sir Gerald's head was sticking out of the window, and did not move; neither did the eyes. Some of the glass in the window was still in-



tact, though his head had been run through it, and . . . ”

It was at this point that the Inspector uttered an exclamation.

It was an exclamation of enlightenment. Our host looked at him with a certain grimness, and nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “You know the truth now, don’t you?”

“The truth?” repeated the historian’s wife, almost screaming with perplexity. “The truth about what?”

“About the murder of Oakley,” said our host. “About the trick Vanning used to murder Oakley seven years before.

“I’m fairly sure he did it,” our host went on, nodding reflectively. “Nothing delighted the people of that time so much as tricks and gadgets of that very sort. A clock that ran by rolling bullets down an inclined plane, a diving-bell, a burglar-alarm, the Royal Society played with all of them. And Vanning (study his portrait one day) profited by the monkey-tricks he learned in exile. He invented an invisible knife.”

“But see here—” protested the historian.

“Of course he planned the whole thing against Oakley. Oakley was no more a necromancer or a consorter with devils than I am. All these rumors about him were started with a definite purpose by Vanning himself. A crop of whispers, a weak-mind-

ed lad to be bribed, the whole power of suggestion set going, and Vanning was ready for business.

“On the given night he rode over to this house, alone, with a certain kind of knife in his pocket. He made a great show of pretending he was chased by imaginary monsters, and he alarmed the steward. With the servants for witnesses he went upstairs to see Oakley and Mistress Mary. He bolted the door. He spoke pleasantly to them. When he had managed to distract the girl’s attention, he knocked out the light, tripped up Oakley, and set upon him with that certain kind of knife. There had to be many wounds and much blood, so he could later account for blood on himself. The girl was too terrified to move. He had only to clean his knife on a soft but stiff-brocaded gown, and then put down the knife in full view. Nobody noticed it.”

The historian blinked. “Admirable!” he said. “Nobody noticed it, eh? Can you tell me the sort of blade that can be placed in full view without anybody noticing it?”

“Yes,” said our host. “A blade made of ordinary plain glass, placed in the large glass jug full of water standing on a sideboard table.”

“I told you about that glass water jug. It was a familiar fixture. Nobody examines a trans-



parent jug of water. Vanning could have made a glass knife with the crudest of cutting tools; and glass is murderous stuff—strong, flat, sharp-edged, and as sharp-pointed as you want to make it.

"And there was only candle-light, remember. Any minute traces of blood that might be left on the glass knife would sink as sediment in the water, while everybody looked straight at the weapon in the water and never noticed it. But Vanning (you also remember?) prevented Squire Radlow from throwing water on the girl when she fainted. Instead he carried her downstairs. Afterwards he told an admirable series of horror-tales; he found an excuse to go back to the room again alone, slip the knife into his sleeve, and get rid of it in the confusion."

The Inspector frowned thoughtfully. "But the real problem—" he said.

"Yes. If that was the way it was done, did the wife know?

Vanning talked in his sleep, remember."

We looked at each other. The historian's wife, after a glance round, asked the question that was in our minds.

"And what was the verdict of that inquest?"

"Oh, that was simple," said our host. "Death by misadventure, from falling through a window while drunk and cutting his throat on the glass. Somebody observed that there were marks of heels on the board floor as though he might have been dragged there, but this wasn't insisted on. Mistress Mary lived on in complete happiness, and died at the ripe age of eighty-six, full of benevolence and sleep. These are natural explanations. Everything is natural. There's nothing wrong with that little room at the head of the stairs. It's been turned into a bedroom now; I assure you it's comfortable; and anyone who cares to sleep there is free to do so. But at the same time . . ."

"Quite," we said.

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While Simon Templar and Mr. Vernon Winlass both believed in getting things done, there the similarity ended—as Mr. Winlass discovers in

## THE TREASURE OF TURK'S LANE,

a Saint Story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the next SAINT



# beggar's ride

by . . . *Miriam-Ann Hagen*

**Why did it have to be him?  
Why couldn't the other have  
died? There was no justice  
in the world—no justice!**

"IF WISHES were horses, then beggars could ride."

The words came to Helen Larkin's lips automatically and the wry grimace that accompanied them was also automatic. She had been saying those words too long and too often. She was past thinking of their meaning. It was Mary's postcard that brought the words to her lips. Mary was always sending postcards, lots of them, and the cards always carried the same message—"Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here." Helen had never even tried to keep count of how many of those postcards there had been, how many times she had inspected a picture of St. Petersburg palm trees, how many times turned a card over, recognized Mary's signature, read through the never-changing message, made her own never-changing comment.

This time it wasn't St. Petersburg. It was Palma de Mallorca, quite as nice and so much cheaper, but that didn't make any difference. There were palm trees in the picture and Mary's signature was the same, and the

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*Miriam-Ann Hagen, author of several Crime Club novels and sister of Aaron Marc Stein, writes about a very bitter woman who has brooded for a long time over what happened so long ago—twelve years and two months ago—and her decision to finally alter the pattern of the life she leads.*

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message was the same. Accordingly Helen Larkin's comment was the same. Actually there was nothing different about the whole thing unless it was that this time the stamp was foreign, but Helen Larkin had never been a philatelist and it was hardly possible that it should be a postage stamp that would touch her off.

If it was anything, it was attrition. One postcard was nothing. It was the unending stream of postcards. They were like drops of water. If it went on long enough, a person went crazy with it or died of it or something. It was torture.

"Heaven knows, it's gone on long enough," Helen told herself.

She knew exactly how long, even to the month and the day. Twelve years, two months, seventeen days. It had been a Friday. She remembered it as though it were yesterday but she knew with the bitterest knowledge just by how much it wasn't yesterday—by twelve years, two months, and sixteen days. They'd had the house at the shore, as they'd always had summers. When the men took their vacations, there would be the four of them and the rest of the summer the men came for week ends.

That had been nice, but all of it had been nice. Looking back on it now, it seemed to Helen that the nicest times might even have

been those mid-week days when the men weren't there. Then there had been time for things—movies in the village, having one's hair and nails done, bridge parties. Those had been the loveliest bridge parties. Nobody had ever been forced to say: "Last rubber, girls. I have to get home and fix Harry's supper." Helen tried to remember whether there had been any postcards then. She knew she had never sent any and she couldn't remember that Mary had.

"Maybe it was because that was just the shore," she thought. "It wasn't anything wonderful and far away like St. Petersburg or Palma de Mallorca."

Wearily Helen rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes. She'd had one of those nights. Harry's spine had been painful and she had been up again and again rubbing his back. She didn't have the strength for it any more, not at her age. But it wasn't any good thinking that way. She had to have the strength for it. There wasn't anyone else.

She thought back to that Friday instead. It had been the State Troopers who had come to break the news. Nice boys, they had been so sweet about it, at once so strong and so gentle. Even now she could still hear the way Mary had taken on and she could remember how she had pitied Mary. That was a laugh. She



hadn't even resented it when Mary had kept saying that same awful thing over and over again.

"Why my Bert?" Mary had kept saying. "Why did it have to be my Bert?"

Helen remembered how understanding she had been, how she had told herself that Mary didn't know what she was saying, that she didn't realize that she was asking why it couldn't have been Helen's Harry instead.

Why, indeed? They had been in the car together. It had been like any other Friday, coming down to the shore to join the girls for the week end. That Friday, though, there had been the accident and Bert had been killed outright. Harry had only been injured. Helen Larkin turned that "only" over and over in her mind. Every time she looked at it, it seemed a sillier word.

They had been twin brothers, so much alike in everything. It wasn't that they had looked so much alike but rather that they had always done things together and had always done things in the same way. They'd been in business together. They'd had the same golf handicap. They had gone courting together and they had courted sisters—Mary and herself. It had even been a double wedding; and, after that, every summer the house at the shore taken together.

There had been too much of this togetherness, too much of

the likeness. They had carried it to extremes and then, when it had counted, it had been her Harry who had to be different. Anybody would have known that they would have taken out identical life insurance policies and taken them out at the same time. Helen asked herself how Harry could have been such a fool. Only a fool would have saddled them with that idiotic insurance—straight life, double indemnity for death by accident, nothing in case of disability.

Only that one time they had done things differently and it had been just Helen's luck that it had been Bert and not her Harry that time who had gone the right way. Bert had been killed and it was the only decent thing a man could do under the circumstances. She had learned that over the years. At first she had pitied Mary because Bert was dead and Harry had only been injured, but that had been before Mary had started gallivanting around on that double indemnity and before Harry had run out of doctors and run out of clinics and had settled down to never having the use of his legs again.

Helen was trying to remember how long this had been going on. Twelve years, two months, and seventeen days—she knew that, but this other hadn't happened with the same suddenness. This other had been creeping up on them gradually. It was twelve



years, two months, and seventeen days since Harry had last had the use of his legs. Try as she might, however, she could never pin down the day when Harry had last had the use of his head.

"If he had the use of his head even at the beginning," she muttered, as she dragged herself to the stove to put his milk to warm.

She was wondering if he had ever had the use of his head. That crazy insurance policy with the premiums going on to pay and pay and pay all these years and nothing for disability. The brothers had been so much alike in everything they did. Why was it that Bert should have been the smart one that single Friday evening when it counted? Double indemnity for death by accident, that was a laugh. What chance was there for a man to have an accident when he would be living the rest of his life between his wheelchair and his bed?

The milk warmed and then it boiled and finally it boiled over while she sat by trying to think up some chances of accident. The house could burn down. That would be an accident and they would both be dead in the burning house. The kitchen filled with the sickeningly caramelly smell of the scorching milk, and Helen came to herself. She snatched the saucepan from the stove.

That would have to soak for hours if she was ever to get it

clean again. She was too tired now even to put it to soak. She was too tired to scour the scorched milk off the stove. She took another saucepan, poured milk into it and set it to heat. Acrid smoke curled up from the milk that had boiled over on the burner. The smoke made her eyes smart and the tears ran down her face. She was too tired even to wipe them away.

He could still have an accident, she was thinking. Anyone could, but he could never have one now that wouldn't be hers as well. She was tied to him, tied that closely and forever, tied by his helplessness and always tied the more by his fading mind.

This time she was watching the milk. She took it off the flame just short of the boil and she poured it into his cup. Setting the cup and saucer on the little tray, she put Mary's card alongside and, carrying the tray, she dragged herself up the stairs to their room. Harry was in bed, even from the stairs she could hear his snoring. All through the night when people should be getting their sleep, he hadn't slept. He'd had her up again and again, rubbing his back. Now in the morning, when all was to do, he was sleeping but she could go on till she dropped.

"The fool would probably go on paying on that insurance even after I was gone," she muttered.

She went into the room and



stood over him a moment before waking him to give him his milk. He had dribbled down his chin and it was all sticky. She didn't wake him. This was something new. She couldn't understand it. Or perhaps she could. It had been like this all along. She would tell herself that this was the bottom. Certainly there could be no more, there could be nothing worse, but there always could, worse and worse and worse. There was no end to it, no bottom.

He was lying half across the bed, more on her side of it than his own. Her gaze flickered to the far side of the bed, to her bedside table. At first glance she saw it and she knew. Her throat lozenges, those sweet and sticky ones, the box was empty. They had been there for years, always a box of them on her table. She had to keep them handy because there were all those times during the night when she would wake with the awful tickling in her throat and, if she coughed or even tried to clear her throat, he would wake and then she would have to be up and rubbing his back. She always kept the lozenges handy. She never coughed in the night.

So now it would be this. Anything he could get into his hands, he would stuff in his mouth. It would be like the way he talked, saying the same thing over again, again and again, until he got so tired he dropped off to sleep. She

had seen it all along, ever since his mind had been failing. He would repeat the same words, the same acts, over and over.

It was lucky it hadn't been his sleeping pills he could reach, she thought. That would have been a fine accident. The first she knew that her hand was shaking was when she heard the rattle of the cup against the saucer. Carefully she set the tray down. Carefully she walked around to her side of the bed, picked up the bottle of sleeping pills, and moved them across the table, setting them down right beside the empty lozenge box.

Then she went out to the bathroom and came back with a wet washrag and a pan. Vigorously she washed the sticky mess off his chin. He woke and blinked at her.

"We have a card from Mary," she said. "From Palma de Mallorca."

"Poor Mary," he said. "Poor Mary."

He kept on saying it. He had been saying it ever since he regained consciousness that Friday night and they had told him about Bert. Helen was swabbing at his mouth and over and over he mumbled into the washcloth—"Poor Mary."

"She says she's having a wonderful time," Helen said firmly. "She wishes we were there."

She knew it was no use but she couldn't help trying. If only



this once he would listen, if only this once he would switch to saying something else, she wouldn't do it; but she knew he wouldn't listen.

"Poor Mary," he mumbled, again and again.

Helen picked up the tray with the untouched milk on it and she took it out to the hall and set it down there. She took the washcloth and the basin out to the bathroom and rinsed them out well. She went back to the hall and watched him through the crack of the half-closed door.

It seemed forever that he lay there mumbling to himself. She didn't bother to listen. She had heard the "Poor Mary" refrain too much and too often. She just watched him and when his hand went out to her table, she held her breath. His fingers dipped into the empty box and explored. She was ready to turn away, but then his hand moved and she held her breath again. Now his hand had found the bottle. He picked it up and looked at it. For a while he fumbled at the stopper. That was all right. She knew his persistence. Finally he had it open. He put two of the pills in his mouth and swallowed them. Now that he had something else to do with his tongue and his lips he stopped repeating "Poor Mary." He swallowed the two and then another and another. She watched through the crack in the door while he went

through the whole bottle. Again he was slobbering down his chin and again it looked sticky. This time it would be the gelatin from the capsule coatings.

Helen watched till he had swallowed the last of them. Then she turned away. She picked up the tray and carried it back down to the kitchen. She was ready to drop with weariness, but she clenched her hands, driving her fingernails into her palms. She had things to do. If her knees would only behave, if they would stop going rubbery under her, she could do what she must.

Clinging to the sink with one hand, she most carefully emptied the milk out of the cup and most carefully washed the cup and saucer and that second, unscorched saucepan. She put them away. Then she put the scorched pan back on the now cold burner. That was it. She had done everything she had to do. She staggered out to the living room and lay down on the sofa. She didn't even know she was shaking.

"Wishes are horses," she whispered. "Wishes are horses. I'm going to have a wonderful time."

She was smiling faintly when she fell asleep. The insistent ringing of the doorbell woke her but that was hours later and she had slept heavily. The smile had faded out sometime during her nap. It was the doctor at the door.



She let him in and she wondered why he was giving her such an intent look. She looked down at herself and with sudden embarrassment she saw her rumpled housedress and her stained apron. Her hand went to her hair. Small wonder he was looking at her. He had never seen her like this. She always put on a neat dress and did her hair for his coming. He always admired her for it. It kept up her morale and Harry's, he always said.

"Do you have something cooking, Helen?" the doctor said.

She shook her head stupidly. "Cooking?" she mumbled, echoing him.

"I smell something burning," he said.

She sniffed. The caramelly smell of the scorched milk had spread out through the close rooms. She recognized it and remembered.

"Oh," she said. "That was first thing this morning." She glanced at her watch. "One o'clock," she gasped. "This is shameful."

The doctor smiled at her kindly. "Been having a bad time?" he asked.

"The usual. He had a bad night. I was up most of the time rubbing him."

Shamefacedly she admitted her weakness. She had gone down to the kitchen that morning, blind with weariness, and she had fallen asleep at the

kitchen table while his milk had been heating. It had boiled over and scorched and the smoke had wakened her.

"I was just able to drag myself up and turn the light off under the scorched pot," she said. "I knew I had to fix him some fresh milk and I knew I had to soak the saucepan and scour it but I was dead on my feet. I dragged out to the living room and I was going to lie down on the sofa for just a few minutes, just so I could go on. I slept the whole morning and Harry not even gotten ready for the day."

The doctor consoled her. It didn't matter. She would be better for having had a little rest. Harry must have been resting, too, or he would have pounded on the floor to bring her upstairs. People had to get sleep some time. There was no shame in sleeping a morning away when you hadn't slept all night.

Upstairs he followed her into the bedroom, but they were hardly in the door before he had her out of there again and took her downstairs. Then he was even more gentle. It was lovely. Nothing could have been lovelier. They put her to bed and they waited on her. They even rubbed her back and everybody was just as kind as could be. Even the men who came from the insurance company were kind, or at least they were at first. It was a little later that they got nasty and



tried to make it that it wasn't an accident at all. They said it was suicide and the policy had a suicide clause in it. She wouldn't get a cent if it was suicide.

The doctor brought her a lawyer and the lawyer was most kind. She never did quite understand how it was worked out but there was a compromise or something like that. She didn't have to go into court at all and she did get the insurance, but not the double indemnity. It was all beyond her; but, once it was settled, the insurance men were kind again, so she took what she got and was glad to be out of it.

It was only a matter of weeks before it was all settled. She sold the house and the furniture. She did just as Mary had done with hers after that Friday. In a little more than a month she was ready and she had everything fixed just as it had been fixed for Mary. The money was all invested and the income would be coming to her every month. At first she had thought she would have only half as much as Mary had, but it wasn't as bad as that. Property had gone up in value tremendously in more than twelve years. She had gotten so much more for her house than Mary had gotten for hers that it almost made up for the double indemnity.

Flying the ocean was exciting and having the young men in the pretty uniforms make much of

her because she was flying and alone and for the first time and not at all afraid at her age—that was lovely. She wasn't even tired when she left the plane at Barcelona. She had an hour's wait at the Barcelona airport. It was pretty there. The sun was so bright and the sky so blue, but after a few minutes she began to feel that the sun was much too hot and the blueness of the sky was so bright it hurt her eyes. She had to move inside and there it was crowded and there was a bar and people were drinking things that had strange names to them. She wanted something and she asked for coffee and when it came she wanted to cry because it wasn't like coffee at all. It was as black as tar and it came in a cup so tiny that it was like a cup she had in a doll's tea set when she was a little girl. It was very bitter and when she put the sugar into it, the lump was almost bigger than the cup and with the sugar in it, it was still too bitter—too bitter and too sweet at the same time.

She couldn't drink it and she did cry a little because she was frightened and the cup had reminded her of that doll's set of dishes and she hadn't thought about those dishes for more than sixty years and it was sad that it should have been so long.

The plane across to Palma was terrifying. It was so small and so shabby and so dirty and the



pressure hurt her ears. Then there was also that sign that came on and said "fasten your seat belt" and her seat belt had a broken buckle and wouldn't fasten at all or else she didn't know how to manage it. At Palma Mary met her at the airport and then they could cry together. They cried for Harry and they went back all those years and cried again for Bert. It was a good cry and it made Helen feel much better.

When she woke the next morning, she felt light and happy. This was going to be like the old days at the shore. There was the smell of salt in the air and outside her window she could see the sea. It was bluer than it had been at the shore, but it was the sea.

For a few days it was exciting and wonderful. Everything was so cheap and so bright and so pretty. Living in a hotel was so restful. The little Spanish maids did everything for her. She felt certain that they would even have rubbed her back for her if she had known Spanish and could ask them.

And Mary took her around to the wonderful little dressmaker who charged almost nothing and who did custom-made copies of French originals. When the dress was finished, however, she had to keep reminding herself that it was a Dior model and that 520 pesetas was only \$13 in the money she knew. That was the

way Mary thought about it and Mary was quite happy with the dress she'd had made. Helen tried to be happy with hers but for Helen it didn't work. Dior or not, she felt silly in it, unsuitable.

Quickly their days fell into a pattern. They didn't go to the beach because they would have to take a taxi and it was fourteen kilometers out and fourteen back and it cost 100 pesetas which they couldn't afford just to go to the beach. Helen remembered how it had been at the shore with Harry and Bert driving down for the week ends and then they would have the car and would go everywhere. Even during the weekdays there was always someone who did have a car and they could have a ride. She asked Mary why no one ever offered to take them anywhere, someone who had a car.

Mary explained it to her. European cars were never any bigger than they had to be. There was just enough room for people to crowd themselves in, never any spare space for guests. Cars were like the coffee cups, toy size. Since they couldn't go to the beach, they did the next best thing. They walked along the Paseo Maritimo and looked at the harbor. They walked around to the de luxe hotels, the ones that had swimming pools, and they would sit by the pool and watch the young people enjoy themselves. They couldn't just



sit, not being guests of the hotel, so they would order tea. It wasn't very good tea and it cost twice as much as tea at their own hotel but it came with a plate of sweet and sticky little cakes and Helen would sit and watch Mary eat the little cakes. Mechanically Mary stuffed them in her mouth, one and then another and then another, never stopping till the plate was clean, and Helen tried not to watch her, but she found that she couldn't keep her eyes away.

It was about a week after she had first come that they quarreled. It was a brilliant blue afternoon, but all the afternoons were brilliant and blue with nerve wracking monotony. They had gone around to the Bahia Palace where the teas were most particularly expensive and the young people were most sleek and most sun bronzed and most arrogantly preoccupied with their pleasures. As always, Mary sat by the edge of the pool and stuffed the little cakes.

Quite suddenly, and Helen could never explain why she said it, she turned on Mary savagely and told her to wipe her chin. Mary didn't wipe her chin. She brought out her compact and ex-

amined her chin in the mirror. It obviously needed no wiping. They quarreled over that and even while she was trying to apologize to Mary, Helen kept fighting down the impulse to lash out at her sister again, to tell her again to wipe her chin.

She did fight it down that time and when the quarrel was over, they had a talk.

"Mary?" she asked. "You've had such wonderful times. What did you do here before I came?"

"Just what we've been doing together."

"And nothing else?"

"Nothing else." Mary hesitated a moment, remembering. "Nothing except that I used to go into the town and take walks along the Paseo Generalissimo and up and down Jaime Segundo shopping postcards. I used to buy postcards and write them and mail them out."

"Why don't we send some postcards?" Helen asked.

"I don't know. We haven't anyone to send them to. I used to send them to you."

Helen's eyes widened. She stared fixedly at Mary's mouth.

"Wipe your chin," she snarled.

She said it over and over again and this time she never stopped saying it.



# assassin

by . . . *Burnham Carter*

**Murder can be unpleasant in any language, specially if murder coming from nowhere with the killer your friend.**

ALONG the Rue Catinat in Saigon the mid-morning crowd moved sluggishly in the steamy heat. There were diminutive, brown Annamite policemen with white conical helmets and white batons, tall black Senegalese soldiers, Foreign Legionnaires, French officers of the *Service Forestiere* in green and gold uniforms, British and American civilians in khaki shorts or, more formally, in tan linens, European women in flowered dresses and parasols and Asiatic women in vivid slit skirts and silk pajamas, bare-legged Arabs and blue-gowned Chinese and turbaned Indians. The humbler members of this horde overflowed the sidewalks on to the street itself, indifferent to the cries of half-naked coolie cyclists and rickshaw drivers, or the horn-blowing of ancient taxis, or the shouts of peddlers pushing their ungreased, screeching carts and barrows.

Above this tumult on the third floor of the Bureau de Surêté, Philippe R i m b a u d , Deputy Chief, sat in an air-conditioned office, discussing with his as-

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*Burnham Carter retired from business some years ago to write, but complains that the outdoor life is much too distracting for a writer. A former member of the New Hampshire Legislature and past Chairman of its Committee on Education, Carter has lived in Cuba and traveled widely.*

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sistant Cho Sing the many recent assassinations of French and Viet Nam officials by Communist agents, which had created a reign of terror in the city.

Rimbaud was a young man for his high position in the Bureau—35 years old—rather tall, not handsome, but attractive, with a big nose and wide mouth, light brown hair and intelligent gray eyes. He had served with distinction as a Military Intelligence officer for the Free French Army under General LeClere during the war. Except for his hazardous office—he was certain to be shot at or bombed at some day—he was regarded by Saigon society, or what remained of it, as one of its most eligible bachelors. His desk was set in an inside corner of his office, and the windows were screened with heavy wire netting to discourage the lobbing of grenades.

Rimbaud held in his hand a typewritten list of killings, with a brief summary of each—21 French, and over 400 Indo-Chinese. It was an appalling record. "Behind it all there is one man who plans it with care," he said. "These are not haphazard shootings. See, he schedules these attacks in the right places, at the right times, and in the right way. And he is someone who knows what we do."

"Those we have caught, we have questioned, Sir," Cho Sing answered. "But they know

nothing." He was a stocky, shrewd Chinese from Tonkin, who had been in the Bureau for many years and who spoke excellent French in a respectful manner; but beneath the manner Rimbaud sometimes thought he detected a faint derision at the spectacle of a Westerner struggling with the complexities of the Oriental mind.

"No, they know nothing except the order which some intermediary has given them. But I am wondering if we could not persuade one or two of them to find out for us who is the Spider that sits at the center of this web."

"I have tried to persuade them, Sir." A spasm, probably intended to be a grin, twitched Cho Sing's broad, emotionless face. The word persuasion did not mean the same thing to him that it did to Rimbaud.

"There is an American saying that one catches more flies with syrup than with vinegar," Rimbaud observed. He was interrupted by the entrance of his secretary, a Siamese, who bowed to him and murmured: "Excuse me, Sir. Mrs. Fanelle is here by appointment."

"Yes, I will see her." He nodded to Cho Sing. "We will talk again."

Cho Sing left by a side door as Marjorie Fanelle entered by the front one. She was a blonde, still in her twenties, very pretty



and with a graceful figure. Born an American, she had married a Frenchman who had been with the French Colonial service in Indo-China, and who had died during the Japanese occupation in World War II. In order to draw the pension due her as his widow, she had to remain on French territory, so she had stayed on in Saigon, working half a day as translator in the French Consulate General. She was well-liked in the foreign colony, but lived quietly. Philippe Rimbaud had met her occasionally at dinner parties and on each occasion was surprised at himself for not having made an effort to know her better.

She wore a print dress with a color scheme of gray and pink, and a white straw hat and gloves. It was remarkable how her appearance brightened Rimbaud's drab masculine office. He made a remark to that effect.

"I'm glad of that," she replied, "because you may not think me so bright, Philippe, after you hear what I have to say! It may sound foolish,—but with all these assassins and spies in Saigon, I think we should be as careful as possible."

"Yes, indeed."

"So I thought I would just tell you this—every so often I visit Emile's—my husband's—grave in the West Cemetery, to tend the flowers. I go very early, leaving at 5:00 in the morning, while

it is still cool. I have to walk past the mausoleum M. Salabar built for his wife—The House of Angels—you know what I mean?"

"Yes." Salabar was a Portuguese trader, who, as a neutral, had made a great deal of money during the Japanese occupation when most of his competition was suppressed. His wife had died three years ago, and he had built for her a mausoleum which cost over \$150,000 and was the talk of the town—black polished marble with massive bronze doors, sculptured with two life-size angels.

"Twice I noticed the fresh marks of a car or a truck on the grass in front of the Mausoleum," Marjorie Fanelle continued, "and one time I saw M. Salabar there. He was just emerging, and when he saw me, he pulled the bronze door shut. But it moves slowly, and I saw some boxes piled up inside." She paused. "It seemed strange, and the more I thought about it, the more I thought it should be investigated, particularly in view of M. Salabar's reputation. A mausoleum would be a good place to hide things that were illegal, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would."

"Well, that's all the story I have to tell. Maybe, you think I'm silly."

"No. I'm glad you told me. We shall certainly have it investigated."



She rose, and Philippe Rimbaud regretted that the interview should be so short and business-like. He decided quickly to resume it at a more propitious moment. His somewhat stern official features relaxed in a boyish grin.

"I'll promise to tell you the result of our investigation on one condition."

She smiled. "Naturally I'm very curious, and I shall promise to keep quiet, if that's what you mean."

"No. I mean, on condition that you'll have dinner with me some time soon."

"Thank you. I would enjoy it," she answered simply.

After he had escorted her to the door, he went to the window and gazed down at the teeming street. She was the kind of woman he liked—friendly without being coquettish, stylish without being formal. He watched her emerge from the building and move coolly through the crowd, a bright immaculate spot in the bobbing human mass. She passed out of sight.

A Chinese youth, pushing a cart piled high with golden mangos, covered with sacking at one end, paused at the curb directly under the window. But he would not be allowed to stop there in front of the Bureau de Surêté. Rimbaud waited for the policeman, always stationed at

the building, to order the peddler on; but, at that moment, without the slightest warning, the skies opened and the monsoon rain poured down with a loud hiss and splatter. In a minute the street was empty, except for the half-naked cyclists who did not care how wet they were.

Along with others, the mango peddler had disappeared into the vestibule of the building. The downpour was heavy, lasting for fifteen minutes; it stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The gutters gushed with water, and the little two-wheeled mango cart, its front end supported by a stake, suddenly tilted with the weight of the water inside it. The pile of mangos toppled, and began to spill, knocking off the sacking that lay across one end of the cart. The Chinese peddler shot out to rescue his wares, but, before the sacking was replaced, Philippe Rimbaud saw two oval brown objects, the same size as the mangos, lying in the midst of the fruit. His mouth compressed grimly. He pressed the button on his desk. From the side door Cho Sing entered.

"There are two grenades in the mango cart outside the building," Rimbaud said. "Arrest the peddler. Bring him up here. I want to talk to him."

A few minutes later Cho Sing reappeared with the peddler, handcuffed. The latter was young and thin. He wore a dirty blue



cotton blouse and pants. At Rimbaud's order, Cho Sing took off the handcuffs, but the prisoner sat in apathy. He was going to die, either with or without torture, and it was better to let his senses grow dull.

"Where do you come from?" Rimbaud asked.

"Cholon." Cholon was the industrial Chinese city four miles down the river.

"What is your name?"

"Chen."

"Why did you come here, Chen?"

"To sell mangos."

"And these, too?" Rimbaud held up the two corrugated iron grenades, which Cho Sing had handed to him.

Chen was silent. Rimbaud studied him a moment. The boy was half-starved, not a coolie nor a peasant, but probably a shopkeeper's son. His face was sullen, not vicious.

"Listen, Chen. You will not be tortured. You will not even be put to death, although that is the penalty for carrying grenades. But if you will answer my questions, you may go free. You came here to murder someone. Who was it?"

After a moment the boy said: "I do not know who it was."

"Then how could you murder him?"

"It was some Government official. I was to be told when he appeared."

"It was someone from the Bureau de Surêté?"

"It might have been."

"It was myself?"

After another pause the boy said, raising his eyes to Rimbaud's for the first time: "Yes."

"Ah!" exclaimed Philippe Rimbaud softly. "So many questions for a simple answer! Why would you murder me, Chen? You have nothing against me. And I do not believe you are a Communist."

"No, I am not a Communist."

"Why, then?"

Chen answered harshly: "Because I and my family are starving. The Communists say: 'Here are 100 piasters for throwing one little grenade.' And they add: 'If you do not throw it, you will be killed.'"

Rimbaud nodded sympathetically. This was what most of them said, and it was undoubtedly true. "Throwing bombs is a poor way to earn a living," he said. "But if we can have order here, and peace, then we can have trade, the farmers can grow their rice, you and I can come and go without fear. To achieve that, I need to know who is the Number One of this terror—who gives the order for you to kill, and for me to be killed. If you can find that out for me, I will give you a thousand piasters."

Chen looked at the floor.

"You do not have to answer me. Here are ten piasters for



your cart. Go back to him who sent you and say the cart was seized by the police for parking illegally, but you escaped. Then try to find out, in time, what I want to know; and come to me." Rimbaud turned to Cho Sing. "Set this man free immediately," he said.

The lips parted over Cho Sing's teeth in a look of ferocity that vanished so quickly as to cast doubt upon its appearance at all. He rose, opened the door, and jerked his thumb for Chen to precede him. As Cho Sing started to follow, Rimbaud called him back.

"Close the door," Rimbaud said.

"Sir, should we not have someone trail him so at least we know where he goes?"

"No. Leave him alone."

"Yes, Sir. Will not others be encouraged to throw grenades when this one tells how easily he was released?"

"He will not tell. If he did, the Communists would distrust him and would kill him. No, it is worth the chance. He may help us. And what would we gain by putting him to death? There are a thousand like him—miserable and desperate, waiting for some one to direct them. But if, by his help, we catch this Spider, then the web is broken and will not be spun again." Philippe Rimbaud made a gesture dismissing the topic. "Cho Sing, you know

of the trader Salabar and his Mausoleum?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I have a report that he is storing boxes there. Perhaps it is nothing, but I should like to know why a man stores boxes in his wife's grave. Get a key from the Cemetery Custodian and see what is there. Do this yourself—discreetly. Salabar is powerful."

"Yes, Sir."

That afternoon Cho Sing came to report. "The Cemetery Custodian has no key to the Salabar Mausoleum, Sir. He says only Salabar himself has the key."

"So."

"I have examined the lock myself: it would be difficult to pick it. Also, the doors are of heavy bronze and could not be forced."

"No, we don't want to force them. Have him followed, Cho Sing. He will go there—probably at night—either to bring something or take it away."

"Yes, Sir."

After the Chinese had left, Rimbaud deliberated for a moment; then with a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth he decided to telephone to Marjorie Fanelle.

"I have a report for you," he told her, in his husky, but pleasing voice.

"Oh." Her voice rose a little in excitement. "That's quick



work. Did you find out anything interesting?"

"I told you I would give you the report on one condition—do you remember?"

She laughed. "Yes, I remember."

"Could you possibly have dinner with me tonight?"

"Yes, I could."

They arranged to meet at 9:00 in the lobby of the Pagoda, one of the most fashionable of Saigon's hotels. When Rimbaud arrived there, he saw Cho Sing at a far corner of the bar sipping a fruit drink. The eyes of the two men met and passed over each other without expression. This was a hang-out of Salabar's, and Cho Sing was probably waiting for him.

Rimbaud sat down in the lobby next to his chief, M. de Novay, a wizened man of 70. Rimbaud had had no previous opportunity to tell him of the episode of Chen and his grenade, and he did so now. M. de Novay approved Rimbaud's disposition of the matter.

"I suppose it is a compliment to you that the fellow was assigned to murder you and not me," de Novay observed.

"Not necessarily. You probably merit a more experienced man."

"Ah, perhaps. That is a comforting thought." M. de Novay's faded eyes twinkled for a moment. "I have been thinking,

Philippe—you have been here three years and you are young, and it would be too bad for the French Republic to lose your services too soon. I believe I can arrange a transfer to some area that is—I will not say, safe—where is there safety in this world?—but an area that is less crowded with death. What would you think of that?"

"I am gratified for your thought," Rimbaud replied, "but I don't want to leave before the job is finished."

"That does you credit. Are you engaged for dinner? If not, will you join my wife and myself?"

"Thank you—I do have an engagement—with Mrs. Fanelle. There she is now." Rimbaud rose. "No, I really like the work. It has compensations for its dangers."

M. de Novay was eyeing with a connoisseur's approval the blonde girl with the pretty shoulders in the blue silk dinner-dress entering the lobby. "I see what you mean," he murmured.

As Rimbaud sat beside Margorie at the candle-lit table in the dining room, he was wondering why he had never noticed before how sweet was the curve of her lips in profile.

"I think I should do this more often," he observed, his gray eyes on her.

"Do what?"

"Have dinner with you."



"Oh. Why?"

"It transfers my attention from the ugly to the beautiful."

"Thank you. Naturally, I'm glad to be part of that process," Marjorie Fanelle murmured. "But you haven't given me your report on the mystery of the mausoleum. I'm consumed with curiosity."

"Ah, it was locked," Rimbaud replied regretfully. "And the custodian had no key."

"You mean you didn't get in?" she expostulated, smiling. "Philippe, you surprise me! I didn't think the secret police ever used keys, anyhow—they use a hairpin, or they run delicate fingers over the lock or they blast a hole somewhere with nitroglycerin."

"All obsolete," Philippe assured her. "We now wait for a key."

"But you mean you have nothing at all to tell me?"

He grinned. "Not about that."

"Your invitation to dinner was issued under false pretenses," Marjorie Fanelle declared firmly. But she did not seem to resent it. They sat for some time over coffee and brandy. The de Novays, who had come in after them, left before they did; and Philippe was about to propose to take Marjorie home—when the quiet of the evening was demolished by a shout and three explosions on the street, followed by a moment of intense

stillness, and then an uproar of voices.

Rimbaud excused himself from the table, walked swiftly through the lobby, and ran down the steps to the street, already jamming with people. On the sidewalk two bodies were lying—M. and Mme. de Novay—the blood collecting around them. They were both dead. It was reported that, as they emerged from the hotel, a delivery truck, waiting nearby, roared into motion, and a brown arm tossed three grenades.

His evening of pleasure all too quickly ended, Rimbaud explained what had happened to Marjorie Fanelle and sent her home in a taxi. Then he took charge of the disaster.

As acting Chief of the Bureau, Philippe Rimbaud was now busier than ever. The guards for Government officials were doubled; but Rimbaud wasn't sure whether this lessened or increased the danger. As he remarked to Cho Sing, he no longer knew who could be trusted and who couldn't.

"It is best not to go to public places, sir," Cho Sing said. "There are too many people, and too much traffic."

"Perhaps—but one cannot live like a hermit. What report do you have on M. Salabar?"

"He has not gone to the Mausoleum, Sir. But he is active



in many ventures. I am of the opinion that he may be of great interest to us."

"It is more than likely that he trades with the Communists just as he used to trade with the Japs," Rimbaud said. "That's what I hope to find."

"We may find more than that, Sir—much, much more."

"What do you mean?"

"Is it not possible, Sir, that he is the one who plans these killings?"

Rimbaud stared in surprise and a faint irritation. He thought the suggestion foolish, and unworthy of Cho Sing's shrewd police mind. "Why?"

"Because of what you yourself implied, Sir—he makes no money out of peace. He makes—millions of money—by dealings that are against the law. He does not wish the situation stabilized. He wishes to maintain the terror."

Rimbaud shook his head. "He is a fat greedy little smuggler—nothing more," he replied shortly. "He doesn't have the guts to be anything more."

"Yes, Sir."

But Cho Sing's suggestion stayed in Rimbaud's mind—not because he believed it, but precisely because he didn't. Why would Cho Sing suggest anything so implausible? It bothered him.

Rimbaud was planning to ask Marjorie Fanelle to meet him

at the Sportsman's Club for dinner at the end of the week. But Cho Sing's warning against appearing in public places and Rimbaud's own awareness of the dangers surrounding him made him hesitate: perhaps it was unfair to her. On the other hand, if he did not ask her to a public restaurant, he could hardly ask her to his apartment—at least, not in Saigon; and he could not ask himself to hers. Yet the alternative of not seeing her at all was highly disagreeable. He debated the matter for a day and finally telephoned her.

"I want very much to ask you to dine with me Friday, but I don't know whether I should," he said.

"How can I help you to make up your mind?" Marjorie inquired brightly.

"Well, you see—under present conditions I'm a dangerous man to be with."

"I'm sure that has always been true."

He chuckled. "No, seriously, Marjorie, I don't know whether you should run the risk of dining with me in a public place."

"Well, then, why don't you come here and have dinner with me?"

He accepted with flattering alacrity.

On Monday night he gave Cho Sing Marjorie's telephone number, so that he could be



reached, if necessary, but he did not disclose her name and address. However, he had no doubt that Cho Sing promptly looked those items up in the police cross-directory.

Rimbaud dressed with care for the occasion. His white dinner coat and black dress trousers fitted him perfectly. The black cummerbund emphasized the flatness of his waistline. He looked and felt young. The only signs of his official responsibilities were an occasional tenseness about his strong jaw, and the automatic pistol carried, as always, in a shoulder holster under his coat. As he drove, by a circuitous route, to Marjorie's address in the residential district, he hummed a dance-tune (some years old) and ran lightly as a schoolboy up the steps of Marjorie's small brown-stucco house.

Marjorie was wearing a green silk evening dress, with gold shoes. "They're brand new," she said and spread her skirt against her pretty legs, so that he might see the shoes better. Philippe agreed that they were beautiful, hoped that they would carry her always to enchanted places, expressed a desire to be her companion. She replied that it was too soon to tell about the shoes.

During dinner, served in her small enclosed garden, he came to the conclusion that she was much too desirable not to be kissed that very evening; and he

faced the challenge of this resolution with good cheer. At first, the conversation ran inevitably to the bombings in the city, and he told her about Cheng, the mango-peddler with the grenades, who had been released in the hope that he would help them.

"Yes, I think it was worth the risk, to let him go," she said. "The Bible says that he who casts his bread upon the waters will get it back again."

But that world of harshness and hate seemed far away from this garden where the candlelight wavered in the pale gold wine, and the fragrance of the gardenia bushes drifted over them. Philippe talked as charmingly as in the old carefree days before the war when more than one lovely lady had wondered if these words were really meant for her. Dinner was finished, and the little maid had cleared the table and vanished, and they were standing near the gardenia bushes marveling at the almost luminous quality of the white blossoms. The moment was at hand, and Philippe Rimbaud was bending earnestly toward her—when the telephone rang. "Damn!" he exclaimed, frankly.

She laughed at him and said: "It's late for anyone to call," and went inside.

He had a premonition that the call was for him, and so it was. Cho Sing reported: "Sir, we have the man Salabar in custody at



the Mausoleum. Perhaps you would care to inspect the premises."

"I shall be there in a few minutes," Rimbaud told him.

When he explained to Marjorie, she said: "I am going, too."

"It's against the rules."

"You're Acting Chief, so you can make a new rule. After all, Philippe, you wouldn't have known anything about this mystery if I had not told you! I'll stay in the car if you like, where no one can see me."

With his resolution still unrelinquished and still unfulfilled, it was not hard for Philippe to find this argument convincing.

They drove to the Cemetery, stopping behind Cho Sing's car on a dirt lane in front of the Mausoleum. Another car—Salabar's—a big sedan with gold-plated trimmings was backed to the great bronze doors, with its trunk open. Cho Sing's waving flashlight disclosed Salabar squatted on the ground, handcuffed, his fat, swarthy face scowling.

"We caught him just as he finished his delivery, Sir," Cho Sing said.

Rimbaud gave the Portuguese a contemptuous glance. Whatever evidence the tomb might hold, he did not think that this lump of flesh could be King of the Terror. He stepped inside

the open bronze door, as Cho Sing held the flashlight for him. The vast once empty tomb was piled high with wooden boxes—stacks of them—with only an aisle left to the sarcophagus of Salabar's wife. The air was faintly acrid. Rimbaud lifted one of the boxes, which had a broken corner, and examined it with care. Then he swore softly, raised his eyes to Cho Sing's black opaque ones and exclaimed: "Pepper!"

"Yes, Sir."

Rimbaud shook his head in awe. There must be a thousand pounds here, hoarded for high prices against the shortages currently developing in London and New York. The boxes bore no duty stamp, so they had been smuggled in, probably on junks operating from the Malay Peninsula. The hoarding itself was also illegal. But Salabar would have made a handsome profit on this deal.

"He has a sharp nose for money, that one," Rimbaud said, "but do you still hold, Cho Sing, that he may be connected with the bombings?"

As he finished speaking, the flashlight went out, there was a faint click and thud, and the tomb was plunged into an impenetrable blackness. Rimbaud wheeled, his hand snatching his automatic. He waited a moment.

"Cho Sing," he called softly.

His words dropped, unac-



knowledge, into the darkness.

The blackness and stillness of the tomb were vast—like enormous tangible masses that began to move toward him, helpless in their center. Even though he was long accustomed to peril, he had to fight against a momentary panic. He was trapped—perhaps by Cho Sing; or, perhaps by Salabar who might have slugged Cho Sing from behind. But he was undoubtedly trapped. He ran his fingers over the bronze doors. Their surface was smooth. There was no way of opening them from the inside. The bronze was five inches thick. He could beat his hands against the five-inch-thick bronze until the flesh fell from his bones, and the doors would not even rattle. The walls, too, slippery beneath his fingertips from the eternal dark and damp, were made of three-foot blocks of marble, with no opening. Unless there was help from outside, he was lost.

Unless there was help from outside . . . unless Marjorie could do something for him. . . .

In his mind he saw her as she stood beside him in the garden, lifting her shapely golden head toward him above the star-colored flowers, her lips so sweetly parted—and now in this moment, when perhaps he had lost her, he understood that she was not one to touch and let go, but one to hold forever.

There was a little clicking

noise, the bronze door opened, and Cho Sing stood before him with the flashlight, breathing hard and somewhat disheveled.

"Thank you," Philippe Rimbaud said coolly and stepped out beneath the open sky.

Salabar was lying on his face, motionless.

"He struck me from behind, Sir," Cho Sing said, "with a rock in his two hands. But I was able to keep my consciousness. I trust you were not concerned."

"I hoped you would be back," Rimbaud answered drily. "Is he dead?"

"No, Sir."

Rimbaud stepped around Salabar's sedan and stopped short. His own car was gone. "Where is my car?" he snapped.

Cho Sing came beside him and peered into the darkness. "Was there anyone in it, Sir?"

"Yes—Mrs. Fanelle."

"She must have driven away, Sir. I had no chance to notice. Perhaps she was frightened."

Rimbaud could not be sure whether there was an overtone of disapproval in the even tenor of Cho Sing's voice. He frowned. It was all extremely confusing. Of course, Marjorie might have heard Cho Sing's struggle with Salabar and gone for help; but there was more to these happenings than appeared on the surface. Anyway he wanted to make sure, first of all, that she was all right.



"Lock the tomb," he directed. "We shall carry this fat thief to your car and drive into the city."

They had driven nearly to the cemetery exit when they met, entering, a limousine flying the French tricolor, a French reconnaissance car with three M. P.'s, and a police patrol car. Rimbaud got out and approached the limousine, where he could see, in the pale greenish light of the false dawn, the French Consul-General and Marjorie. The Consul-General was an elderly, stout gentleman with a gray beard. His face wore an expression of mingled relief and exasperation.

"My dear Philippe!" he exclaimed. "How happy I am to find you so well! This charming lady was concerned for your health."

"O, I'm in good shape," Rimbaud answered. "We had a spot of trouble, but it's over. We caught M. Salabar in the act of cornering the pepper market."

"Ah, indeed. I congratulate you."

"And I am grateful to you, Sir, for your kindness in coming to help me."

"It's not my favorite hour for rising," the Consul-General admitted.

When they reached Rimbaud's car—which had been left at the Consulate—Rimbaud sent Cho Sing on with the prisoner, and drove Marjorie to her home. In view of the stress of their re-

cent experience, it was natural for him to hold her hand. The distance was short, and they talked little until they were seated in her small living room and drinking coffee.

"I'm sorry if I've acted like a fool," she said, "stirring up all that excitement at the Consulate."

"You didn't act like a fool. As things looked to you, it was the right thing to do."

"I still don't understand it all. There were two other men there—Salabar and the man with the flashlight—"

"Cho Sing, my assistant."

"That is what I assumed. I saw you enter the Mausoleum. Then, there was darkness, and I thought the door closed. And this is the important thing I have to tell you—I'm sure I heard some one say—fiercely in French—'I've shut him inside. I'll make a deal with you'. I was frightened and decided I should go for help before I was caught myself." She turned to Philippe. He had been thinking how lovely her face was, under the light and shadow of her expression, but he had become suddenly attentive to her last few sentences. "But when I returned with the Consul-General, there you were with your assistant and Salabar!" she concluded. "So what I overheard made no sense!"

"Yes, it makes sense," Philippe replied slowly, "In fact,



it confirms a hitherto vague suspicion of mine and solves a very important riddle. Cho Sing planned to dispose of me—to bury me alive in that tomb. Salabar would agree to say nothing, in return for being released. Who else would ever know? And then you drove off, and Cho Sing, who had not known you were there, realized that you would talk, and he would be caught. So he pretended Salabar had slugged him, and then he rescued me." Philippe rose. "If you will excuse me, I shall use your telephone. I think we have found Number One in Saigon's terror, and we had better pick him up now." He went to the telephone, and gave directions to someone in a low, but hard, clipped voice that she had never heard him use before. But when he returned, his homely, but attractive face was smiling, and his voice was as it had always been with her.

"I have something important to tell *you*," he said.

She was standing by the table, rearranging the flowers, and she turned to him inquiringly.

"The moment I saw you to-night, so beautiful in that green dress and gold slippers, I made a resolution that I would kiss you."

"Indeed!" she replied with a small frown. "What gave you that idea?"

"I guess I've fallen in love with you—" He stopped short as

the screen was kicked open. A Chinese boy in soiled blue cotton stood there, his face compressed—it was Chen, the mango-peddler—his arm jerked, and he was gone. Two gray-brown blobs struck the tile floor. Rimbaud's first instinct was to throw himself down, then to throw her down, and third—the three racing after each other in a second of time—that anything was too late. His stomach flattened against his spine in anticipation of agony and of death in the narrow room. One grenade rolled to his feet, the other swerved off a little behind them. There was a dreadful suspended moment of silence.

Philippe Rimbaud took a deep breath. Marjorie was motionless, her hands clasped to her breast. "It is all right," he assured her. He stooped and picked up the grenades. The firing pin had not been pulled in either one. "The bread I cast on the waters has come back," he said. "That was Chen, the boy I released. Cho Sing undoubtedly sent an order that Chen should try again—and he did so, but in a way that would not harm me." He laughed, pleased that the boy had kept faith with him. He put the grenades down, and came toward her and took her hands, as she looked up at him expectantly.

"Now, as I was saying—" he murmured.



# ceremony slightly delayed

by . . . B. Traven

What was the secret of this man who had disappeared in Central America? Why hadn't he let them know he was alive?

"Is THAT really you, Powster, or is it your spirit?"

"Me. In the flesh. And if I'm not mistaken you're Bill Ranks. Quilt Ranks. Wasn't it that we used to call you at the club?"

"I never liked that name and you knew it."

"Yes, I do remember you didn't like it, but I did."

"You look thin, Powster, but otherwise strong and healthy like a colt. I envy that tan of yours. Where did you lay it on?"

"Honduras. In Central America to be exact."

"Yes-yes-I see. So! Now wait a minute. Comes back to me. All of us believed you dead for years. That's why I wasn't sure it was you. Now let me see. How was it? Oh, yes, a passenger plane crashed, with everybody on it killed. And your name was on the list."

Powster laughed. "Right. My name was on the list. Only I wasn't on the plane. Not when it happened. I had been on it all right. Before the accident. I don't know much of what the papers back home wrote. The plane caught fire somehow and

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*We have probably all known men like Powster, who returns from the dead in this story by B. Traven, author of THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE. Traven's identity remains a mystery though Time, in 1948, did say he was Berrick Traven Torsvan, a Swedish-American who'd lived in Mexico since 1913.*

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everybody in it was trapped. It was only natural that general opinion should have it that I was among the dead."

"Yet you weren't, or you couldn't be here." Ranks shook his head as if still in doubt that the man he was talking to on the sidewalk was indeed the friend he had thought dead for three years. "How did it happen that you alone were spared? Sort of miracle, I should say."

"No miracle. No miracle at all. Was like this. On the way to Tegucigalpa we'd motor trouble. Cylinders missing or something. The pilots made an emergency landing to locate the trouble and fix it. They picked a pasture between mountain ridges and we landed all right. As it turned out, a rocker arm was broken and a few spark plugs burnt out. At least that's what the pilots told us. Examining the engine, the pilots concluded that they easily would remedy the trouble inside of about four hours as they had the tools and necessary spare parts right with them. We were six passengers, all businessmen. So we made ourselves as comfortable as could be under the circumstances while the two pilots worked at the motor."

"I don't see any relation to the accident as yet," Ranks interrupted.

"Wait a minute, man, I'm coming to that."

While talking thus, both had stepped into a café to have an early lunch. Being told that the regular lunch wouldn't be ready for another ten minutes, they said they would wait for it and have a cocktail before. The cocktails were served.

"As I was saying," Ranks repeated, "in the papers nothing was mentioned about any emergency landing."

"How would that have been possible with nobody surviving the smash-up?"

"But you survived. Didn't you? Come on, let's have the next chapter."

"Call it foolishness or providence or just plain dumb luck. But so it was. As the pilots were working and since they'd assured us that they wouldn't be ready to hop off for the next four or five hours, I thought I might as well take a walk to the little town which I saw in the distance and which seemed not farther away than two and a half miles. You know, knocking about in strange, partly still unexplored places one may, by sheer toddling along, tumble over a hole full of diamonds or—"

"—or drop into a lake of oil," Ranks joked.

Powster looked up and grinned. "You said it, Quilt. One easily might. Things like that have happened before and may happen again any odd day. Well, I hiked on. But what I had



thought to be two and a half miles turned out to be five, partly owing to the rugged country, partly owing to the fact—then unknown to me—that in the tropics you're easily misled as to the exact distances. This error by itself wouldn't have had any consequences of importance. Only, when I noticed that I couldn't make the round trip inside four hours, I realized that I had lost my way and could not find the field again. I've never been a woodsman nor a scout, you know that. From peasants I later learned that the pilots had waited for me, searching the whole surrounding area in the hope to locate me, until the passengers would wait no longer, since the airport was lacking even a primitive lighting system, insisting to be taken to their destination before night would set in. I saw the plane circling as if still looking out for me. I waved my arms frantically to attract their attention, yelling like mad at the same time. It seems they couldn't see me, and so the plane passed out of sight."

"Then what?"

"More patience, Quilt, more patience. You know, you learn that out there where 'mañana' is the most frequent answer you receive in connection with time."

"This I've heard before or read somewhere."

"Maybe. Well, presently I met a pack-mule train and marching

with it, I reached that town at last. Now it may seem strange to you, but plain fact is, that town happened to be the very place to which my firm had sent me to establish an agency for that district. Had it not been for that emergency landing, I would not have arrived at this particular town inside the next six days for there was no railroad and what the people down there call high-ways or camino real are mere trails."

"That's some story, old man. A great story. Only what I can't get is this: Why didn't you write your firm or let anybody else know that you were alive?"

"And why should I? You don't know the inside story, Quilt. Well, all right, be it Bill, since you like that better. You see, Bill, Mr. Lickens of our firm, our export manager, had warned me that this trip would be my last chance. If I wouldn't make good on that final chance I was to find me another position, or in good plain lingo, be fired, kicked out. They were ready to throw me over soon as they could. So why shouldn't I fire them before they could fire me?"

"Sounds plausible to me."

"And plausible it was. I didn't report that I'd arrived at the town I was sent to. Who else should I've written and what for? Fact was I didn't know that the plane had crashed, not until



two months had passed. By that time I said to myself: "Let 'em back home think me dead and see who'll mourn and what'll happen, some day I'll pop up and get the laugh of my life."

"Seems you'll get that laugh all right," Ranks said.

"And we can make that laugh bigger still, and how." Powster's face was a grin. "Tell you, what we'll do. Tonight, when nearly everybody is at the club, at ten sharp let's say, I'll come in silently and remain standing in the door, just looking at them, not saying a single word. You know like sort of an apparition. What say. Bill?"

"It will be tough on the boys, and one or the other who is not very sure about his heart might bump. But, well, if that's your idea of a practical joke, okay by me. You'd do it anyway whether I like it or not."

The joke had no fatal consequences. At least not at the time when it was put over. The fellows at the club admitted that rarely had they had so much fun than on that particular occasion. Perhaps they meant it.

Ranks and Powster left the club late that night and together. Ranks drove Powster to his hotel, saying that it was on his way anyway and therefore no trouble at all.

"Listen, Quilt, I mean Bill of course, listen, why don't you

come up to my room for a friendly get-together-again chat. I've got a terribly good drink up there, the kind you can't buy with gold around here. What say?"

Ranks locked his car and followed Powster into the hotel elevator.

Both seated comfortably in easy chairs and having had several drinks, Powster, who was the one that talked most the time, suddenly changed his conversational tone and said bluntly: "By the way, Quilt, what has become of Thessa, Thessa Shyler I mean? You remember I was engaged to her. It was on account of that prospective marriage that I accepted that ugly job out there in Honduras, trying to build up a position that might hold for a lifetime."

Ranks changed color slightly and looked down upon the carpet-covered floor.

Presently he picked up his glass. Emptied it at one jerky gulp. Then he stared again at the floor, avoiding the eyes of Powster.

Powster, having filled up the glasses once more, placed the bottle on the table and said: "Of course, old man, you must remember her. You know who I'm referring to. She was a peach of a girl. Intelligent too. And so very jolly. Ah, the Lord knows, I'm still going strong for her. Have had her in my imagination



all those years down there in that howling wilderness with no decent person to talk to. Wonder what has become of her?"

Ranks looked him straight in the face now. "I was afraid of that."

"Afraid of what?"

"That you'd ask me that very question. Because — well — to make it short, I'm going to marry her. Wedding is set for Wednesday coming week."

"You don't say." Powster laughed out loud as though he had heard a good joke. "So that's why I couldn't get a peep at her. Perhaps busy all day long, upholstering the sweet little love-nest?"

"Perhaps. How would I know? What business are you in, down there in Honduras I mean?"

"Now, Quilt, don't you change the issue. I don't mean to stab you in the back. Not my idea of getting what I want. Anyway, I tell you frankly and right here and now, that most likely the date of the wedding will not be postponed. That day suits me all right. Nothing wrong about the date. Well arranged. Only it won't be you who will be wedded to Thessa on that particular day."

Ranks felt himself shrink in his seat and become very small.

Powster shot down another drink. "But, say, old man, since you've perhaps gone into high

expenses for a well tailored suit already, well, it'll be okay by me, you can be the best man."

"I think Thessa will have a word to say about this too; what do you think?" Ranks spoke timidly, his voice sounding empty, hopeless and without color.

"Of course, she will. Don't you worry. Before I even see her and talk to her I can tell you her answer. She knows who her man is. And you're out, Quilt, out, forgotten, thrown into the garbage can."

"Your mistake. She's made up her mind, and very firmly has she made it up. When you left her she was pretty down, I can tell you that, and worse she was when she heard that you'd been killed. Five weeks she was laid up in the hospital, suffering from a nervous breakdown, the doctors practically giving her up. She finally pulled through and I can proudly say that I helped her to see life in a new way."

"I'm sure of that. Easy it was to do that. She knew that you had been my best pal. Only because of that it was that she confided in you and not in anybody else. Mean trick of yours, using friendship to betray me! Betray your best pal, and win the bride. What a pal."

"Now, you shouldn't say that," Ranks protested. "It isn't just. She turned to me. And why shouldn't I accept her trust in me? I was free, and as you were



dead and buried, she was free also."

"But I was alive as you can see."

"Correct. But who knew it? Besides, if it comes to talking of being mean, what about yourself? If you had really cared about Thessa the way she believed you did, the first thing for you to do would've been to wire her or drop her a line. In all these three years you never wrote a word to anybody. You never let anybody here know that you still walked the earth. Explain that to Thessa and we'll see how you fare with her."

"Do you know, Quilt, why I've come back here at all?"

"How would I? Perhaps you came here only to stand like a ghost in the door of our club to scare the guts out of the boys and afterwards get a special kick out of roasting them for the cold sweat they had shown on their foreheads. Cheap trick of a cheap comedian, that's what I think of it."

"Which only proves that you still don't know me as you think you do. Do you earnestly believe that I'd just for that silly little bit of a joke go that high in expenses, making that very costly trip and take all the other risks that might go with it—" Here Powster stopped abruptly as though he had been saying too much, at least more than he had meant to say. He shook his head

and fumbled at his collar which suddenly seemed choking him. "It must be the likker that makes me clatter nonsense!"

"Nothing wrong with you," Ranks assured him, "you can hold a lot more than you've taken so far. Go on, tell it then, why did you come here if you felt so swell down there? As you were dead officially and wiped out, nobody did expect you."

"Nobody expected me? Wrong again, Quilt. Tomorrow you'll see at least one person who'll be the happiest thing under heaven at seeing me alive, expected or not expected. And now, since you seem so highly interested to know why I returned just for a few days, I may just as well tell you right here and now, the reason *was* Thessa. I came here for no other aim but to marry her, take her with me down to Honduras and there give her the rich life she deserves, the kind you can never give her. That I bumped into you today was by sheer accident. I didn't look for you, I'm sure of that. Plain fact is, I had not in mind to meet or see anybody here outside Thessa, marry her on the spot and carry her off by special plane half an hour after the ceremony was over. That's why I came, see. Now eat that and beware of a bad digestion."

Driving home, Ranks felt sick at heart and mind. He loved



Thessa. He had loved her since the day he had met her for the first time, five years ago. She was Powster's girl then already despite her being only seventeen. He began courting her about three months after Powster had disappeared.

Two years later they were engaged to be married, and he felt a very happy man.

This evening his happiness had come to a sudden end. Well he realized that Powster would win her back the first hour they would see each other again. He knew he could never compete with a highflyer like Powster. Powster, with that cock-sureness about him which women adore in men, would come out victorious in their fight for Thessa. The more so as Thessa was still romantic enough to believe in knights who battle the Turks in the Holy Land for no other reason but to win a fair lady waiting for his return home.

Ranks was not sure whom he ought to pity more, himself or Thessa. He was positive that he could make her happy in a regular way and without needing the moon specially made for them. Yet he had his doubts as to how she would fare with his rival. The fact that Powster had never written her, telling her that he was alive, did not look much like true love. She had no money. So it couldn't be money he might be after. And she was no social-

ite either. Just the regular, fairly well educated, fairly intelligent girl who had to work for her living.

In his whirlpool of thoughts Ranks came to believe, that, had he not mentioned Thessa and said that he was engaged to her Powster might not have been interested in her at all. Now it was too late. Anyway, Powster would have learned of their engagement within two or three days at all events.

Locking the garage, Ranks recalled that strange incident when Powster, in the course of his chat, had stopped the flow of his eloquence as though he had let out something which he had preferred not to mention. He had said something about taking risks in coming back for a short visit. What risks might he have thought of? Perhaps somebody whom he had left in charge with his possessions might make off with his money and Powster on returning might find himself broke. That was it.

Powster had told Ranks in their conversation that he, down there in Honduras, was worth around a quarter of a million. Asked by Ranks how he, who had had no money of his own, got his start, Powster had explained it without difficulty. An elderly British gentleman who had taken a liking to him, staked him to a huge loan with which he had speculated very success-



fully in landed property, especially in cocoa, coffee, sugar and tobacco plantations. It couldn't have been the law of which Powster had been thinking when talking of certain risks. If the law were after him, he would not go back to Honduras as he had said he would right after he had married Thessa. Anyway, there are scores of risks a man may fear to have to take because of a certain action as that of leaving the country when he has made his home.

First thing in the morning, as always, Ranks phoned Thessa, bid her Good Morning and asked her how she was.

"I'm feeling fine, honey, and you?"

"Fine, too. Guess who I met yesterday, Thessa?"

"I give up."

"You'd better, because you'd never guess. I wanted to tell you yesterday, but your mother said you'd not be in until after eleven and I didn't wish to disturb you that late. Well, to make it short, it concerns somebody who practically has returned from the grave."

"Powster. You don't mean him—or do you?"

"The very one. He's thick in the fat, too. I'm positive he'll call you up this morning. Only wanted to warn you as to keep you from getting a shock. Well, honey, that's about all the news

I got for you at the present. Kiss. By, by, until later."

About six in the afternoon Thessa was on the phone.

"Listen, Bill dear, I got to talk to you. It's urgent. In fact it's very, very, urgent. I wanted you to come up to our place. On second thought I decided not to have you here. Mother is around. I called up Philly. We can have her apartment all evening and all to ourselves. She'll not be in until two in the morning. I'll wait for you then. Yes, at Philly's. By nine. Will it be all right, Bill?"

"Quite. Only, please, make it half past nine. I've got some deal to attend to about eight and I'm afraid I can't make it at nine sharp."

"All right, Bill. Should you be late, don't worry. I'll wait for you." She hung up.

It was not necessary to tell Ranks what had happened since he had called Thessa in the morning. Powster had won.

Philly had been home for two hours and had gone to bed long ago when Ranks drove Thessa home.

During the long hours of that night all the talk had come from Thessa. Also all the explanations, all the excuses, all the forgive-me-pleases, and all the I-am-so-sorries.

From him, at measured intervals, only: "I see" . . . "Oh,



I do understand, Thessa" . . . "Don't mention it" . . . "Of course, of course" . . . "Oh, never mind me" . . . "I'll be all right, don't you worry" . . . "Don't you worry a bit" . . . "Why, naturally, I'll find me another girl soon, no doubt."

How could he have expected that he might win against a Powster. If Powster had never been believed romantic by Thessa before, now he was. In her eyes he was the most romantic, the most heroic man on Earth. A Prince Charming in Shining Armor, having come to carry off his lady love. A man who had been dead had returned from the beyond for no other reason but to marry her.

What was more, in less than three years he had made a fortune. "Who had ever done that before and in so short a time, too? All the rich and most beautiful señoritas of the noblest and oldest Spanish families in that exotic country—what's its name, oh, yes, Honduras,—well, as I was saying and as he told me, all these rich and dark-eyed and sensuous señoritas he could have had if he wanted, yes, man." But no, he had come back to marry her, her, who had only three hundred seventy dollars to her name and whose father had never been anything higher but an honest bank cashier who had to bring up his family on his fixed salary.

Who was she after all that she would resist the man who would be a front-page affair during the next six days as the man risen from the dead and made a fortune besides just like that? And how she loved to go to that wild virgin country with its uncountable possibilities. "The tropics, just think of that, the tropics with all its wonders and mysteries, all its lush beauties, its easy-going, its never-ending-romance." That meant life to Thessa.

That was life. That was the most wonderful dream of a girl come true.

The night before, when Ranks had been on his way to Philly's apartment, he had decided to fight and not give her up. He was engaged to her. Had the license ready. Also the ring. The date of their wedding was set. The house had been rented. He might appeal to her honesty. Asking for a square deal. Wasn't he in his rights to demand of her to keep her promise? It might even turn out that by insisting on his rights and holding Thessa by her word, he might perhaps save her from an ill fate. Perhaps.

He had had in mind to bring up a hundred arguments. What did she know? What did anybody know how Powster had spent his life since he left this country? He may have been a



convict down there. He may have married in Honduras and have children and be now ready to commit bigamy. Who knew the exact truth of how he had made so much money in so short a time? He might somehow be connected with some illegal sort of business, drugs, white slavery, espionage, rackets.

Why, Thessa, before taking a definite step in that direction, ought to write or wire the American Consul first for information about Powster, or better still wire the police in that exotic country. He might do anything to her in that foreign country and nobody at home here would ever know.

Ranks had worked out many plans, ideas and arguments in his head by which he hoped to convince Thessa that she should be extremely careful before marrying Powster.

Yet, facing Thessa who was all aglow with excitement, Ranks thought of all his warnings and protests as being silly and petty. There was no doubt that she was deeply in love again with Powster and his arguments would have had no effect. Seeing her so happy, so excited, he could not say one single word in his own favor, just accepting defeat without any fight.

He had listened to her only ten minutes when he became convinced that, in case he should insist on her sticking by her

promise, they would never be happy together.

All her life she would think and dream of that romantic Powster. In her imagination he would be the great hero, the melancholic lover slowly dying of a broken heart. And poor Ranks might, perhaps ten times every day, be fed with "Watcha kickin' 'bout? I married you, didn't I?"

By that sort of married life Ranks, who was but an ordinary businessman, not in the least romantic, would have become smaller every day until finding himself shrunk so much that the most unpretentious mirror would refuse to reflect what personality was still left of him.

Thessa had expected to find in the papers a long and sensational story of Powster's return to life. Yet to her surprise the papers mentioned Powster only in their lodge news sections as having visited his club after an unusually long absence from town. She did not know that Powster had called at the papers, asking them, please, to suspend that story until after his wedding, for his fiancé and her family, with all the preparation for the wedding on their hands, would dislike such publicity at this particular time. Once the wedding over, they might make the story as hot as the paper it was printed on would bear without burning up,



and it would then be better stuff still, what with the bride following her husband into the wilds of the tropics. The editors were agreed and parked the story to bring it on the morning after the wedding.

Wednesday.

When Ranks got up that morning he thought to himself that he could not remember any Wednesday in his life which had arrived so quickly as this one.

After a long hesitation, he finally had given in to Thessa's begging to be best man.

The party consisted of Mrs. Shyler, Thessa's mother and a Bank clerk with his wife, both friends of Mrs. Shyler's. Following Powster's wish, the wedding was to be as simple as possible. No invitations whatever.

Assembled now in the church, they were waiting for the bridegroom to show up. The ceremony was to take place at twelve-thirty sharp; it was twelve-twenty-five now.

The party, in particular Thessa, became nervous and still more and more so when Ranks, waiting outside by the door, popped in every other minute, shrugging his shoulders.

Fifteen minutes to one.

And no Powster in sight.

Ranks phoned the hotel at which Powster stopped.

"Mr. Powster? Oh, yes, yes, well, he has checked out. . . .

Left here about eleven. . . . All dressed up for a wedding. . . . Telling that he was to go to Henry's barber shop for a trim. . . . You're welcome."

The barber said over the wire: "Long ago, mister. Left before eleven-thirty. . . . No, mister, he was okay. . . . Nothing wrong, not that I noted anything wrong 'bout him. . . . No, he said to the girl at the cash that he was goin' to a florist. . . . Sorry, mister, I can't say which one. . . . Oh, that's perfectly okay by me. Drop in some time. Always service with a smile. And we shave in deep silence if our patrons want us to. By, by, I'll be seein' you."

Two florists, called up, answered that nobody dolled up as if for a wedding party had dropped in during the whole morning.

Ranks phoned a certain saloon of which he knew that Powster frequented it daily since his arrival.

"Yes? . . . Who you say you want? . . . What does he look like, the mug? . . . Oh, I see, you mean that swell oily gent from South America with the many silver mines on hand and plenty dough, eh? . . . Yes, he was in all right. . . . Less than a' hour back I should say. . . . Had a couple straight. Scotch it was, genewine We only serve genewine, mister. Drop in some time, pal, and try us. . . . No,



he came in alone, rang up somebody. . . . We don't listen in when our patrons talk over the phone. But well, as far as I figured it was somepin' about a plane to be ready in no time. . . . Oh, yes, I just forgot to mention. After a few minutes or so he was joined by 'nother guy who seemed to know'm purty well, 'cause they talked secretly I should say. . . . Yes, buddy, they left together, in a friendly way if you ask me. . . . You're welcome sure enough."

The minister stepped up. "Well, friends, seems to me that we'll have a slight delay of our ceremony. What's your decision, pray, may I ask? If you wish to postpone it, say so, please. If you wish to wait, well, I'll be here. You'll find me in the vestry. I'm not leaving anyhow until half past four. I'm working on my sermon for next Sunday. So never mind. Any hour you are ready."

"Thanks, Reverend, I think we'll wait," Mrs. Shyler said in a low quivering voice.

Bill had stepped out once more. Now he was back, shrugged and muttered: "No Powster anywhere around."

Thessa took out her handkerchief. Cry though she did not. Not yet. But it looked as if tears were not very far off. Not tears for a bridegroom probably lost, but tears for her wounded pride.

And all of a sudden, by a very resolute jerk she straightened up her whole body so much so that she seemed to grow three inches in her height and in one second.

Turning round, taking off her handkerchief from her face, she stared Ranks firmly in his face, keeping her glance fixed on his eyes for almost a quarter of a minute.

Ranks caught that stare. Returned it with unflinching eyes. But when Thessa's eyes kept boring into his for such a tantalizing length of time, he took on an expression of boyish despair and helplessness. He shrugged ever so lightly, then slowly shaking his head as if he, by that gesture wanted to say: "Thessa, dear, I feel so very sorry, if only I could do something for you to get you out of the unbearable situation."

Thessa, her stare unceasingly upon Ranks' face now stepped up to him, very close.

"Billy, do you still want me?"

"More than ever, Thessa, you know that."

"Do you still love me as you did before?"

"No change, Thessa, and there never will be any change not as long as I live."

"Will you marry me, Bill Ranks, marry me right here and now at this very minute?"

"Will I? Nothing better." His voice trembled with excitement and was hardly audible.



"Mother!" Thessa called.

"Yes, child, what is it?"

"I've had enough now. I'm through with that damn brag-gart. I'm going to marry Billy. And I'm going to marry him this very minute."

Mrs. Shyler leaped to her feet as though being stung in her back. "That's the best thing you ever said, daughter. I didn't wish to interfere in your affairs. But now I suppose I can tell you that I never liked that adventurer, and I'm sure enough glad he didn't show up at this wedding."

In a hurry as if afraid that Thessa might change her mind, Mrs. Shyler ran to the vestry.

Ranks shuffled. He cocked his head toward Thessa and said: "I'll look out just once more. His last chance. I won't rob of his last chance even the man who tried to steal you from me. It'll be ten seconds only."

"All right, Bill, do as you wish. But I tell you, it's your last chance, too, and if you don't hurry I'm all set to throw over every male on Earth, for you men can make me sick as nothing else can."

Ranks was back in the flicker of an eyelash to see the minister waiting and hear the little organ playing.

Standing now at Thessa's side, Ranks fumbled in his coat pocket, looked at her from one corner of his eyes and whispered

into her ear: "Good thing I didn't destroy the license as was my intention day before yesterday. And the ring, too, is right here in my vestpocket."

Only once during the ceremony Ranks had a spell; of uneasiness. It happened when the minister asked: "If any man can show just cause why this man and this woman should not be bound together . . ." This challenge sounded to Ranks as if he were listening to the trumpets on Judgment Day. He could not help turning his head half way round, expecting to hear Powster yell desperately: "Stop. You hear me? Stop that wedding, I say."

When the little party was outside the church, still standing on the narrow lawn, Ranks, apparently not fully believing as yet that he actually was married to the only woman he had wanted, broke into a giggle which was partly silly, partly carried a touch of hysterical joy.

Thessa poked him in his ribs. He came to and said jovially: "well, folks, of course, well, of course you know, well, what I mean to say, of course, you're all invited for lunch, and if I say lunch I mean to say of course the biggest and swellest wedding lunch you've ever seen or heard or read about." He hailed a cab and gave the driver an address.

Thessa had sipped her first glass of wine, the party was wait-



ing for the second dish to be placed before them, Ranks was filling up the glasses again, and when everybody had his glass full once more, Thessa lifted hers:

"Our health, honey," she said, drank, set the glass down and whispered into Ranks' ear, "Listen, hubby, I've got to confess a sin."

"So soon after our wedding?" He grinned at her. "Or should I ask, why didn't you confess your sin before our wedding and give papa a chance to say No. Be careful, woman, there is still a loop-hole that this marriage might be annulled and legally too. So you'd better lie and not tell hubby the truth."

"No lying necessary, honey. But it's a sin all right. Only you see I couldn't tell you before the wedding because I committed it only a few minutes before mother called the minister and I couldn't have been that impolite keeping that poor little old man on the run chasing back and forth all the time."

"Now you make me really curious. And don't, please, talk that loud and yell about your sins to the whole world. Sins have to be confessed in a very low whisper."

"What do I care whether the whole world hears it. At least everybody at the table, so I think, has a legitimate right to know about my sin."

"Out with it," the bank clerk said, "we'll forgive you every sin today, whether we would be that lenient tomorrow still that might be open to argument."

"It's like this, honey," Thessa explained, lowering her voice, "when you came back after having been out for the last time to look for that reptile and you shrugged, indicating that my fiancéé was not in sight, I decided in my mind, that if you should answer my questioning eyes with a grin or with only a shred of irony because I had been jilted once more by that same man, I would slap your face left and right and inside the church too, then run out, take an overland bus and forget all about it, especially all about you, Bill Ranks. Yet you did not grin. You did not even venture a thin smile. You only looked so very sorry, so very sad because you could not bring me good news. Your sad look made me cry inside. Never in all my life will I ever forget that moment and forget that look of yours, no matter how our marriage may turn out, good or bad. At that moment I began to really love you and love you for the first time since I knew you. For I must tell you that I did not love you before Powster had returned, despite that I had promised to marry you. I liked you, yes, and I could not think of



anybody better who I'd have liked for a husband. But love you I did not. So now you know everything. My conscience is perfectly clear."

Ranks stared at her for a while in silence, then gazed at the others at the table as somebody will who has been told a joke of which he cannot get the point. Presently he found his words again. "Only, honey, I can't quite see where the sin is coming in, the sin you were talking about."

"Easy to see. I had been positive that you'd grin at me, perhaps even say to me, that it only serves me right to be flipped again by that fourflusher who I thought such a big guy. You had every right and reason to ridicule me, for it was true I had done you wrong. Still you did nothing of the kind. You were just sad for me and for the tough luck I had. And my great sin was that I should've known you better and should've had more confidence in you."

Mrs. Shyler, picking up the salt shaker, put both her elbows on the table and, playing unconsciously with that thing, obviously not knowing what to do with it and why she had picked it up at all, said: "I only wonder what the dickens has become of that good-for . . ."

"Oh, please, mother, leave him alone. Don't ever mention him again in my presence. I hope

to hear he has hanged himself or jumped into the lake. What do I care?"

"Anyway, I think a rat is stinking somewhere." And with that she handed the salt shaker to her son-in-law who had not asked for it.

A small boy, red of face, red of hair, red of shirt darted into the restaurant, panting, and yelling as if he were still on the street: "Uxtry! Uxtry! Read all about the most sensational arrest of the century. Uxtry! Uxtry!"

"Come here, you Irish mickey mouse," Mrs. Shyler called. "There's your coins."

"Thanks, missus. Uxtry! Uxtry! Read all about . . ."

Mrs. Shyler, having shot only a very quick glance at the front-page, immediately broke into such a laughter that the dishes on the table went dancing.

"Didn't I just hear you say, child, that you won't like to hear his name mentioned again? Well, I'm afraid your wish has not come true. Seems to me that we're going to hear a lot about him for the next few weeks at least. He is on the front page all right as you wanted him and as he had said he would. He's there all right, only in a different way as you had expected.

"Just listen to this: Max Powster, supposed to be a rich plantation owner in a Central American republic was arrested today



by G-men sent here for just this purpose. He is held on suspicion, believed to be or to have been in unlawful possession of a gold shipment sent by the Melrod National Bank to the Banco de la Republica de Panama. The shipment was lost in the destruction by fire of a southward bound passenger plane about three years ago.

"That precious cargo had been insured and was fully covered by the Midland Insurance Company, Inc.

"The charge is, as authoritative information has it, enough to warrant Powster's arrest. Most likely the charge will be revised to one of first degree murder, willfully setting fire to a plane whereby five passengers, the pilot and the co-pilot, altogether seven persons, all U. S. citizens, were killed.

"Further development of the case may bring about also half a dozen other charges including that of robbery of the U. S. mail. We are told that, even should the prosecution fail in establishing his guilt in deliberately setting fire to that plane with the intention to steal the gold shipment, the other charges carry penitentiary terms in federal prisons of no less than from fifteen to twenty-five years.

"Whereas officially the airplane disaster had been accepted as an accident, the insurance company and also the F.C.I.D.

each had had two special agents working permanently on the case during the last three years, because both the insurance company as well as the Federal Criminal Investigation Department had on file testimony of eyewitnesses such as agricultural workers and muleteers of the region where the disaster happened. The fact that there was no sign of the gold shipment, packed away in special steel-lined cases, in the remains made the insurance company which stood for the loss believe that the disaster was the result of a criminal act.

"Powster was arrested this morning, on his way to his wedding to a young, charming lady of this city, when he had stepped into a saloon for a few hard drinks to stiffen him up for the ceremony. The lady whose name is of no concern to our readers has every right to call herself lucky in that the arrest occurred before the wedding and not after. While this goes to press Powster is grilled at police headquarters by G-men. Federal agents had the case against him ready five months ago. Yet an arrest was impossible because Powster was, then, living in Honduras where, with the proceeds of his criminal acts, he had become the owner of several large plantations. As extradition laws are still very defective in many cases, he might easily,



since he is worth nearly half a million dollars, have avoided extradition or fought it indefinitely. Therefore federal agents, using a few tricks not yet revealed, caused him to come back to this country voluntarily so that his arrest could be made here. He had, among other things, been made to believe he could not be arrested in the U. S. for crimes committed in a foreign country, which of course is not so in certain cases, and his is one of those cases.

"His arrest here would have been effected earlier. But as he had come by special plane, agents had lost track of him after his leaving Honduras. Only yesterday they received word that he might be in this city for very personal reasons. He was to leave this afternoon, right after his wedding, by chartered plane, and it was his phone call from the saloon to the airfield, telling the pilot to be ready at one-fifteen sharp, which brought about his arrest as he was all dressed up for his wedding."

While Mrs. Shyler had been reading, everybody at the table had been too much excited to think of their lunch which by

now had turned cold and was sent back to the kitchen to be warmed up.

Hearing a sob at the table, Mrs. Shyler stopped reading and on looking up, she saw Thessa with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Why, child dear, I had not the slightest notion that you would take it that hard. I read only what is printed here in the paper. I didn't make no comments of my own. But he's a criminal, or is he?"

"Oh, ma, I'm not crying about him. To hell with him."

"Than what are you howling for if it isn't for that mass murderer?"

"Let me cry, ma. I'm crying for my own sake. Because I'm so very, very happy that Bill had the great idea to ask me again to marry him when that mail robber didn't show up and I felt like a lost kitten in the woods at night. That was so very fine and noble of Billy to ask me, don't you think so, mother?"

"Of course it was fine of him and that's why you got him. But now, please, for heaven's sake, forget it and let's have our lunch."





# THE saint's RATINGS

## *Feast or famine*

*Seems to apply just as aptly to the publishers in the paper-back field as to their brothers in the more expensive hard-back media. We don't always expect champagne and caviar and most of the time will settle for good corn-beef and cabbage and gladly recommend it to you. This month we have little of the former to offer and the beef and the cabbage have been left out of the corn.*

### OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- ○ ○ Three haloes:  
Outstanding
- ○ Two haloes:  
Above average
- One halo:  
Passable reading
- ‡ A pitchfork:  
For the ashean

## **KILLER IN THE HOUSE, by Borden Deal (Signet, 25¢)**

Intense and exciting plot. Plausible and well written by a writer who manages to handle his characters as believable human beings with individuality and true personality.

○ ○ ○

## **THREE'S A SHROUD, by Richard S. Prather (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Shell Scott, one of the least objectionable denizens of the popular dream world of muggs and mansfields, copes with three fairly routine rhubarbs and we forget how many accommodating dolls.

○ ○

## **ASSIGNMENT STELLA MARNI, by Edward S. Aarons (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Sam Durrell back again in another unbelievable adventure of a CIA agent. We thought by now, with a few assignments behind him, Sam might have learnt something about his job. But live and learn doesn't seem to work with Sam. May appeal to his fans.

○

## **DEATH TAKES THE BUS, by Lionel White (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

About everything else takes it too. Rape, murder, suicide, and a rupturing appendix, all ending with the faint strains of hearts and flowers.

○

## **SO I'M A HEEL, by Mike Heller (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

And the cobbler couldn't have done a worse job.

‡



# the doctor calls it murder

*by . . . George Harmon Coxe*

Lt. Ballard cut him off with a growl. He'd worked with him enough to respect the shrewdness that'd broken other murders.

IF IT had not been for the initiative of Lieutenant Ballard, of the central office, and the usual amount of luck so essential to the successful solution of any homicide, it is unlikely that anyone would have associated the murder of Max Pell, private detective, with the death of James Cooper, aristocrat, who died in bed from apparently natural causes.

Not even Dr. Standish would have known, though he was the medical examiner and had inspected the body of Pell which had been found slumped over his office desk with two bullets in his chest. For the autopsy confirmed the cause of death, and when a copy of his report had been duly sent to the District Attorney, Standish anticipated no further connection with the case.

Until the following noon, when, after two solid hours of ministering to office patients, Mary Hayward, his nurse, opened the door, closed it quietly and leaned against it. She brushed a wisp of medium-blond hair

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*George Harmon Coxe, author of ONE MINUTE PAST EIGHT, to be published next month by Knopf, and the recent MURDER ON THEIR MINDS (Knopf), writes about Paul Standish, young medical examiner, who shares Lieutenant Ballard's suspicion that there is something very wrong about the death of the old man.*

---



back from her young forehead and fixed narrowed green eyes upon him.

"Lieutenant Ballard is here," she said in a voice that relegated the lieutenant to the ranks of undesirable visitors. "I told him he'd have to wait."

Standish gave her a crooked grin because he recognized the tone and the censure it implied. In the year that Mary had served him as nurse, secretary, and Girl Friday she had made plain her disapproval of his work as medical examiner and she resented especially the demands Lieutenant Ballard made upon his time.

"He said it was about the Max Pell case," she said. "Shall I tell Mrs. Taylor to come in?"

"Mrs. Taylor?" Standish said with some annoyance. "She had no appointment."

"She came before the lieutenant." Mary's smile was smug. "Also she is wealthy. She has rich friends."

Standish sighed aloud, but Mary was gone, and so he smiled for Mrs. Taylor, who was a plump forty and very chic, and prepared himself for a story he often heard from women who had too much money and too much leisure. But while he listened politely with his ears he thought mostly about Lieutenant Ballard and Max Pell, and when he had ushered his patient to the door after prescribing certain mild dietary changes, he pressed

the buzzer to summon Mary. She came in a moment later with Ballard, a solid-looking man in his late thirties with a neat and well-dressed look about him and keen gray eyes that were seldom still.

Usually he kidded a little with Mary, knowing how she felt about him; this time, however, he looked a little worried. He made no reply when Mary pointedly reminded Standish that this was his afternoon for golf, but waited patiently for her to leave.

"What about Pell?" Standish said when Ballard sat down. "I thought you'd have that one all wrapped up by now."

"Hah!" said Ballard with feeling. "I got one lousy lead, and I'm sort of afraid of that. I got it this morning when I go to Pell's bank to check on his finances and they tell me a deposit has come in by mail. It's postmarked six P.M. last night and is a check for four hundred and some dollars made out to Pell and signed by James Cooper."

Standish sat up slowly, dark eyes thoughtful as he considered this name, which had been synonymous with the growth and prosperity of the city since its earliest days. "The West Side Cooper?" he said, still a little incredulous and knowing now why Ballard looked worried. "Did you ask him about the check?"



"I went out there."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say." Ballard tipped one hand, let it fall. "He's dead. Died between eight and ten this morning, the doc says. From spontaneous cerebral hemorrhage."

"What doctor?"

"Lanning. A young guy. About your age."

Standish did not know Lanning, but he had heard of him. He knew also that James Cooper was close to seventy, had nearly died a few months back from a stroke or heart attack—he could not remember which—and was considered a semi-invalid whose death at any time would surprise no one.

"Was Lanning with him when he died?"

"No." Ballard shook his head. "But he's been attending the old man for months. There were two grandsons," he said, as though this was important. "One's still in Germany with the occupation forces; the other was lost in the Pacific. His widow, Louise, has been living with the old man. Also a guy named Dwight Morley, a nephew."

Ballard put a slip of paper on the desk, added a smaller slip. The larger of these was a statement from Max Pell and as Standish glanced at it he saw that it represented seven days' work at twenty-five dollars a day, a four-day hotel bill with the word

"Greene" in parentheses beside it, and an item for a hundred and forty-odd dollars for railroad, Pullman, meals and tips.

"I found the bill in Cooper's desk while I was nosing around," Ballard said. "This thing"—he touched the small slip, a Pullman stub from Chicago to New York—"I found in Pell's pocket last night."

"No one at the house knows anything about it?" Standish watched Ballard shake his head. "And what do you want me to do?"

"Well — I thought maybe you'd want to do a p.m."

Paul Standish lit a cigarette and one hand continued to play with his lighter, snapping the little arm that covered the wick up and down. He didn't know he was doing it, for this was a habit he practiced when he was thinking hard, or when his thoughts were a long way off.

"I doubt it, Tom," he said. "From what I've heard old Cooper was overdue."

Ballard combed his sandy hair with his fingers and watched Standish somberly, finding him a lean, hard-boiled man with good bones in his jaw and a way of holding himself that suggested an innate competence and a nice co-ordination of mind and muscle. He had an easy, unaffected manner, providing you did not try to push him around, and Ballard, having no desire to



do so, cleared his throat and said, "Well, will you go out to the house with me and have a look?"

"Is the body still there?"

"Lanning had signed the death certificate but I asked him not to move the old man until I'd talked to you." Ballard stood up. "He didn't like it much, Lanning, I mean."

Standish thought regretfully of the afternoon of golf he was not going to get. He rose, knowing what he was going to do would prove unpleasant for everyone, but recognizing also an obligation of his own. "Yes," he said. "I'll have a look."

The Cooper home stood well back on a two-acre plot, a Tudor-type structure of stone and timber, much of it vine-covered, and a colored houseman in a linen coat took Ballard and Standish to a second-floor suite where Dr. Lanning and a dark-haired young woman were waiting.

Lanning was tall, blond, and efficient looking. He introduced himself to Standish, his annoyance at Ballard clearly demonstrated by the way he ignored the lieutenant, and then presented the woman, who was Louise Cooper and the widow of the grandson lost in the war, a slenderly rounded girl of twenty-five or so with black hair and a clear ivory skin.

"In here, Doctor," Lanning

said before Standish could more than glance about the book-lined room. "It's utter nonsense, of course, but if the lieutenant wants to be difficult we might as well get it over."

Standish stepped into the adjoining bedroom, Ballard following, his face pink, but saying nothing. Lanning picked up a manila folder containing his history of the case and gave it to Standish. "As you will see from that," he said, "Mr. Cooper's death was merely a question of time. He had an enlarged heart, high blood pressure, an arteriosclerotic condition . . ."

Standish did not hear the rest of it because he was verifying the statement from the records. When he had satisfied himself, he pulled down the sheet and made a cursory inspection of the body, finding no mark or sign of violence upon it. Covering it he glanced at the bedside table and noticed the sleeping pills. Lanning, as though reading his mind, said, "If you're wondering about an overdose, the answer is no. I brought that bottle of fifty the day before yesterday, and only two are gone, one for last night and one for the night before." He eyed Ballard with disdain. "As for anyone committing a murder—and that's what you're suggesting, isn't it?—when the man had no more than a few months to live, if that, it's ridiculous."



Standish intervened by asking Lanning the facts of Cooper's death and what he learned did not help Ballard's theory. Cooper had taken his sleeping pill at nine-thirty the night before as was his custom. At eight that morning the houseman came in to raise the shades and on doing so had heard Cooper mumble something and thought he was talking in his sleep. Since he was under orders to leave after raising the shades and let Cooper get up, when he felt like it, the houseman had gone out and not until ten o'clock, when he came back to see why Cooper hadn't ordered breakfast, did he discover that the man was dead.

Standish nodded and returned to the sitting room. When Louise Cooper did not glance up from her chair but continued to stare listlessly out the window, he examined the room, noticing now that the books which lined the nearby wall were nearly all detective stories. There were some reference volumes on the bottom shelf, books on criminology, legal medicine, police practice and toxicology; and because he still could not make up his mind about Cooper and wanted time to think, he spoke about them.

"He must have been quite a detective-story fan."

"He was," Louise Cooper said. "It was about the only pleasure he had left."

She glanced from Lanning to

Ballard, and Standish had a moment to study her and see how very attractive she was in spite of the tired lines about her mouth and eyes. Then, as she seemed about to continue, the door opened and a man entered, a slim, thin-faced man of thirty five or so, with sparse brown hair and glasses. When he was introduced as Dwight Morley, Standish knew this was the nephew Ballard had spoken about.

If Morley was at all upset by what had happened he gave no sign of it, but glanced casually at Standish and asked bluntly, if there was to be an autopsy. When Standish said he did not know, Morley shrugged and his mouth was thin.

"It's a lot of nonsense," he said. "The old boy simply died in his sleep and anyone who says different is crazy—not that he didn't pick a good time for it."

He was staring at Lanning as he spoke and Standish, seeing that look and the way the woman's mouth tightened, felt a sudden tension in the room where none had been before. Ballard too, sensed the undertone of animosity and resentment in the words, for he said, "A good time for who, Mr. Morley?"

"I was thinking of Dr. Lanning," Morley said. "Mr. Cooper was about to make a change. He was dissatisfied with the doctor's work."



"That's a lie," said Lanning, his blond face flushing.

"Possibly a good time for Louise, too," Morley said, as though he had not heard. He took off his glasses to clean them and blinked pale, myopic eyes. "Cooper didn't approve of the Doctor's relations with Louise," he said.

"And what were those relations?" Ballard asked.

"We were in love," the girl said simply. Then, her head up and sparks in her eyes, she faced Morley. "You should be ashamed," she said. "Not once did you try to make things pleasant for him, not once would you read to him or . . ."

"That trash?" Morley waved his glasses to indicate with scorn the detective books. "I should say not."

"And so I had to, night after night, because I knew if I didn't no one would."

"You don't have to feel so noble about it." Morley put on his glasses and his voice remained sardonic. "I notice it didn't take you long to start painting your nails again."

Dr. Lanning spoke under his breath and stepped towards Morley, his jaw hard and eyes stormy. Ballard, taking no chances, moved in front of him and Lanning stopped.

"Take it easy," Ballard said.

Louise Cooper had her head down and Standish could see her

face working. She looked at her red-painted nails. "Yes," she said in a small voice. Then, lifting her glance, speaking more to herself than anyone in the room, she said, "He didn't like painted nails. He spoke about it the day after I came nearly a year ago and so I wore them plain. Then this morning . . ." She hesitated, a catch in her voice. "Oh, what difference does it make? You wouldn't understand."

Standish cleared his throat. He still did not know what he should do, but thinking of the old man in the other room and hearing now this bickering and recrimination, he felt a little sick inside and wanted only to get out. He nodded at Ballard and the lieutenant said, "What about it?"

"I'll have the body removed to the morgue."

"But look here," Lanning spoke quickly, his eyes resentful. "You've seen the record. You've no reason to doubt me as the attending physician just because some private detective no one ever heard of was murdered last night."

"Mr. Cooper heard of him," Ballard said.

"If you insist on performing an autopsy . . ." Lanning began.

"I didn't say that," Standish cut in. "I want to make a more thorough examination and I can do it better at the morgue. I'll



let you know if there's to be an autopsy . . ."

Dr. Standish played no golf that afternoon. When he had made a further inspection of the body at the morgue without finding any sign of violence he came back to the office and sat at his desk, harried by his thoughts and by the things Lieutenant Ballard and Mary Hayward had to say.

Ballard came in at three. "I talked to the Cooper lawyer," he said. "Frank Alson. He's burning at the idea of a p.m. but he told me about the will and all three of them had sweet motives."

"You're figuring the girl too?" Standish asked.

"I'm figuring everybody and you know it," Ballard said and went on to elaborate. "Morley and the girl cut in for a third of about two million bucks and the grandson in Germany gets the other third. I talked to the servants and Morley was right when he said the old man had trouble with Lanning over the girl."

He pulled out the Pullman stub he had found in Max Pell's pocket. He said he'd learned that Dr. Lanning came from Chicago and had gone to school there, coming here after his Army service because he had an uncle in town who was retiring from practice. "So Lanning was

in a spot to marry a third of two million dollars," he said, "and that's a motive, son."

"What about the girl?"

Ballard consulted his notes. He said the girl was from Oklahoma City and met young Cooper at a U.S.O. dance while he was serving as an instructor to Navy fliers at Norman. Later when Cooper knew he was going to sea he married Louise and she continued to live there until he was reported killed off Okinawa in the summer of '45.

"Then she came to live with the grandfather," Ballard said. "Been here ever since."

"She and Morley didn't get along."

"Because she said he started making passes at her after she'd been there a couple of months." Ballard scowled. "That Morley," he said. "I don't know. He's a writer, so he says. Got a lot of books I never heard of and is writing something that's supposed to remake the world his way. He's been living with the old man for five years and the servants could never figure why the old guy put up with him. But he did. Morley stands to get a third of that dough, and if old Cooper got wind of something and put Max Pell checking up on him . . ." He did not finish the thought. He leaned forward. "Something about the set-up smells, Doc," he said. "What about an autopsy?"



Dr. Standish lit a cigarette and worried his lighter, his eyes darkly brooding because he could do longer evade the issue. He knew that in a legal sense he was within his rights to perform or order an autopsy; he remembered the phrasing of the law and knew that it was his opinion and his alone that determined whether an autopsy should or should not be done. He knew, too, that there were other than legal considerations.

"Frank Alson is the Cooper lawyer," he said. "He carries a lot of weight in town. If I do a p.m. and find out Cooper died as Lanning says he died . . ."

"Alson will sure throw that weight around," Ballard finished. "Yeah," he said, and stood up. "I guess he could make it tough for a young guy like you." He hesitated, put on his hat, gray eyes steady. "It's up to you, Doc."

Standish sighed and his grin was humorless. "Get out," he said. "Beat it. I'll do your p.m. tonight."

Paul Standish had cause to view with doubt his decision several times before the afternoon was over. He had to listen to Lanning's protests; he had to listen to Frank Alson, who not only protested but threatened certain reprisals when he realized that Standish would not change his mind.

"I can't stop you," Alson said,

"but if you're wrong I can promise you more publicity than you ever had in your life—all of it bad."

Mary Hayward added her arguments to the others when she learned what had happened and what Standish intended to do. Normally her manner during office hours was one of strict formality but occasionally she scolded and bullied him with the proprietary intensity of a woman in love, though it was unlikely that she had ever admitted such an interest, even to herself. She had argued before that he should give up his work as medical examiner, stating that he would be much farther ahead if he put the same amount of time and effort on his own practice. She said so now.

"I think you're crazy," she said quite honestly, "to risk your future just because Lieutenant Ballard has some silly hunch."

Dr. Standish wondered about this after Mary had gone, his mind going inevitably back to old Doc Lathrop, who, in those tough early days when Standish had first hung out his shingle, had suggested that he might like an assistant medical examiner's job on fee basis. "You'll get a real chance to know anatomy," Lathrop said. "It might be something you'd like."

Standish found that Lathrop was right. The fees paid his office rent and the knowledge



gained helped him to save lives in the Pacific. Coming back to find Lathrop overworked and ready for retirement it had seemed natural enough to accept the full responsibility for the office, and though there had been times when he questioned the wisdom of his decision, he had never seriously considered giving up this work. That his own interest in crime might have influenced him was something he would have quickly denied.

Now he found himself wishing he had taken Mary's advice and in the hours that followed he found little comfort in the knowledge that he was doing his duty as Doc Lathrop had taught him. Not until eleven o'clock that night, when the autopsy was over and certain photographs were taken, was he able to relax and find some measure of pride and satisfaction in what he had done. For he knew in the end that Lieutenant Ballard's suspicions were well founded. James Cooper had indeed died of a hemorrhage but not, as Lanning had maintained, a spontaneous one brought on by natural causes. Cooper had been murdered.

The City maintained an office for its medical examiner on the second floor of the mortuary and adjoining this was a conference room. Here, at nine-thirty the next morning, Dr. Standish

made known his findings to Lieutenant Ballard and those he had summoned.

Dwight Morley sat indolently in his chair at one end of the yellow oak table, his myopic eyes veiled but suspicious. Louise Cooper, in a simple black dress that accented her paleness and made her brown eyes enormous, sat at one side and next to her was Dr. Lanning, his mouth sullen and gaze hostile as he watched Standish remove some 8" x 10" prints from an envelope.

Standish gave it to them straight, and without preliminaries. He said Lieutenant Ballard's suspicions had been confirmed. He said James Cooper had been murdered, though this was no reflection on Lanning's diagnosis, since the type of wound would be clinically undetected.

"Given the same case history, I would have made the same diagnosis," he said. "It took an autopsy to reveal the truth."

Lanning reached for the photographs, stared at one and then another, his mouth white. Louise Cooper sat perfectly still, eyes wide and incredulous as she watched Lanning. Dwight Morley shifted in his chair.

"What *was* the cause of death?"

"Cooper was stabbed," Standish said. "With a thin round instrument like an awl or an ice



pick. Stabbed here," he said and put a finger in front of and slightly above his ear. "The autopsy showed the brain wound and when we shaved the hair we photographed the points of entry. Not over three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter," he said, "with a minute scratch an eighth of an inch from that."

He rose, collected his photographs and handed them to Ballard, his lean face grave, his gaze steady as he studied briefly those around the table.

"He died yesterday morning," he said, "but in my opinion he was stabbed the night before after the sleeping pill had taken effect. A younger man might have lived for days with that sort of wound, but in Mr. Cooper's condition, death came more quickly."

"But"—Dwight Morley swallowed before he could continue—"there was no blood."

"A drop or two possibly," Standish said, "which the killer wiped away some time before morning." He walked to the door, thanked them for coming. I'll make my report and send a copy to the District Attorney," he said to Ballard and with that the lieutenant humped up and followed him into the hall, asking the others to remain.

"Now what, Doc?" he said.

"Look for an ice pick or an awl, preferably one that has a rough spot in the metal that

crimps the handle to the blade."

"Sure." Ballard scowled. "But what do you think? You must have some ideas. You generally do."

"I'm all out of ideas," Standish fashioned a wry grin. "You wanted an autopsy. . . . You had an idea Max Pell's murder was hooked up with Cooper and it looks as if you were right. Anyway now you've got another murder. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Ballard looked hard at him, half closing one eye. "Just like that, huh?" he said.

Standish pretended he didn't hear. "My job is to determine the *cause* of death," he said. "You and the D.A. are supposed to take it from there, and you know it."

Ballard accepted the decision because there was nothing he could do about it, but as the day wore on Dr. Standish found it hard to sit back and do nothing. It was all right while he was busy with an office full of patients; it was all right when Ballard came in at noon with an ice pick which he found in the Cooper kitchen and which had the proper length and the required rough spot on the metal crimping to match the photograph. But when he had a chance to think over the things Ballard said, the seeds of worry grew like weeds in the fertile soil of his imagination.



For Ballard was concentrating on Dr. Lanning and his reasons seemed sound. "He's going to marry one third of two million bucks," Ballard said. "To stop him the old man was going to fire him and maybe—I admit I'm guessing on this—cut the dame off. Max Pell was in Chicago checking on something and Lanning came from Chicago. . . . Also," he said, "Lanning had the sort of knowledge a guy would need to think up a murder like that. He never dreamed there'd be a p.m. and there wouldn't have been if it hadn't been for you stringing along with me."

Standish made no comment then and for the next two hours busied himself with a paper he was to read that evening at a dinner given by the State Medical Association. Then, with this out of the way, doubt and uncertainty again began to crowd his mind and, not telling Mary Hayward where he was going, he drove to the Cooper home.

There he talked to the houseman and servants; he inspected again the old man's suite and took a quick look at Dwight Morley's bedroom and study. When he returned to the office he telephoned a local travel agency, then called a friend of his saying he would be unable to attend the dinner and asking him to read the paper he had prepared.

Mary Hayward, overhearing part of this conversation, was shocked and upset. She demanded to know why, but instead of answering her Standish telephoned Ballard and asked about Dr. Lanning.

"Still think he's your boy?" he asked. "Have you booked him?"

"Not yet," Ballard said and wanted to know why Standish asked. "I thought you weren't interested."

Standish ducked that one. He said he'd been thinking things over. "I think you've got the wrong man," he said. "I don't know whether I can prove it or not. 'I'm not even sure I can . . .'"

Ballard cut him off with a growl.

He had worked with Paul Standish often enough to respect his intelligence and ability. In the past the doctor's knowledge and shrewd observations had helped break other murders and Ballard was not the sort of officer who, once he had settled on a suspect, became blind to other aspects of a case.

"Never mind the prologue," he said. "All I want to know is, will you try—and what do you want me to do?"

Standish told him without elaborating his own theory and when he hung up he found Mary Hayward standing before him her arms folded across her young



breasts and her green eyes severe.

"So that's the reason you can't give your speech?"

Standish had a hard time meeting her gaze. He tried to pretend it was not important. "It'll probably be a lousy dinner anyway. . . . Look," he said in a gesture of peace. "I should be back by seven. We'll go out somewhere and get a steak."

"No," said Mary, "we will not." Then because she had the impetuous directness of youth and because the things Standish said and did were so important to her, she continued her scolding without shame.

"I should think it would be enough, the chance you took performing the autopsy," she said. "You stuck your neck clear out to there and you got away with it. I guess it's a good thing you did," she added with some reluctance, "and I can understand that because you felt it was your duty. But this other—well, you have said yourself your job was to determine the *cause* of death and if you go up there trying to be a detective when you're not supposed to, instead of going to that dinner, then all I can say it that you're just"—she groped for a word and found it—"just grandstanding."

Standish pushed back his chair and stood up, his eyes averted so she could not see the hurt and disappointment mirrored there.

"You are probably right, Mary," he said quietly.

"But you're going."

"Until I'm sure about Dr. Lanning. I'm sort of responsible for putting him on the spot. Maybe he's guilty; maybe Ballard can prove it. But if he's not, and he gets involved and arrested, it will ruin his career whether he's guilty or not. . . . You can leave those letters I dictated on the desk," he said, "and I'll sign them when I get back. There's no need for you to wait."

There was a police car parked in the Cooper driveway and when Dr. Standish went upstairs he found Lieutenant Ballard waiting with a police photographer and a plain-clothes man. The photographer was setting up his equipment under the suspicious gaze of Dwight Morley, but Louise Cooper watched without interest and Dr. Lanning, who had been sitting on the arm of her chair, stood up when he saw Standish, surveyed him disdainfully, spoke coldly.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"Are you taking over the functions of the detective bureau, Standish? Because if you are . . ."

Ballard interrupted, his voice steady. "I'd take it easy if I were you, Dr. Lanning. I'm the guy that thinks maybe you're guilty, not the Doctor. He took the trouble to come up here to see if he could prove I was wrong."

Lanning said, "Oh." He sat



down again, glanced uncertainly about. Then, some of his defiance and bluster remaining, he said, "What makes you think I didn't kill him, Standish?"

"I don't think you would have used that ice pick," Standish said. "It came from downstairs, from a kitchen drawer. I doubt if you'd even know it was there and . . ."

"I didn't."

"I didn't think you'd have used it anyway, unless you were trying to pin the job on someone else, because you have instruments of your own that would have done just as well—as a matter of fact," he said, "I doubt if any doctor in his right mind would be stupid enough to kill in that fashion. A smart attending physician could take the life of a man in Mr. Cooper's condition by simpler methods and without fear of post-mortem findings."

"I thought of that but . . ." Lieutenant Ballard, paused, his gaze troubled. "Max Pell had a Pullman stub from Chicago," he said. "Lanning come from Chicago."

"What I want to know," Dwight Morley said, pointing at the photographer, "is what this fellow is supposed to be doing."

No one answered him. The others watched Standish and he said, "All that stub proved is that Pell *passed through* Chicago. The hundred and forty-odd

dollars he had on his bill suggests that he went a lot farther than Chicago. I checked with a travel agency. For that money a man might go twice that far. Maybe to Oklahoma. Pell wrote the word "Greene" opposite his hotel charge. There is a Hotel Greene in Oklahoma City."

He turned on Dwight Morley. "You want to know what he's doing?" He indicated the photographer. "He's going to take some pictures of that bottom shelf and the reference books Cooper kept there. I came up here this afternoon and checked on your library. I notice you go in for Proust and Thomas Mann and Marx and Krafft-Ebing."

"I damn well don't read this junk."

"Somebody did," Standish said. "Somebody took a particular interest in this book." He pointed to a heavy volume of legal medicine. "It's been used recently because the top of it is clean and the adjoining volumes have a thick coating of dust; that's what we're going to photograph first."

He took a breath and said, "I've got a copy of that book in my office; most medical examiners have. It's printed on heavy coated stock, the kind that takes fingerprints well. We'll photograph page 412, I think. Because on that page is a picture of a man who died like Cooper died.



It shows the tiny little hole the ice pick made, a hole covered by hair that went undetected until the autopsy. I think the fingerprints we'll find on that page will match yours, Mrs. Cooper."

For three seconds the room was still. No one moved. Then Lanning jumped up, his face stiff. "No!" he said. "Now wait!"

Standish ignored him. He took one look at Louise Cooper's drawn gray face, saw the approaching hysteria in her hot, bright eyes and went on, his voice direct, controlled.

"We might even find the answer for those red nails you were in such a hurry to paint," he said. "There wasn't much blood, was there? A drop or two which you wiped from the wound. But there was a little blood on the weapon and maybe your luck turned bad. You didn't get the blood on your fingers or nails where you could wash it off, you got a drop or so inside the nail, in the quick, where it wouldn't wash off and where you couldn't dig it out without making the quick bleed."

He said, "When the lieutenant came I guess that stain worried you some—until you realized that no one would notice if you painted your nails." He glanced at Ballard, and Ballard was watching the woman and Standish said, "A microscopic

analysis will tell us if I'm right about that and . . ."

He had no chance to finish. The hysteria and panic he had seen growing in the woman's eyes took command. She came out of the chair with catlike quickness, whirling away from the still incredulous Lanning and turning towards the door.

Standish made no move to stop her. He recognized this wild desire to escape as the instinctive, animal-like reaction of one whose mind no longer functions properly and let Ballard and the plain-clothes man deal with it. Then, seeing the look of shock and horror on Lanning's face, he knew that it was the young doctor and not the woman who would most need sympathy.

Mary Hayward was waiting when the Doctor Standish returned to his office at seven-thirty so were three reporters and a photographer who had heard about the autopsy. They wanted to know details and asked if he had any ideas about the murderer.

Standish said he had no comment. He said he had given a full report to the District Attorney and that any statement would have to come from him. "If you're interested in the police angle," he said. "why don't you talk to Lieutenant Ballard? I understand he made an arrest just a few minutes ago."



The gentlemen of the press got out fast and when Mary closed the door Standish went into his office, put his hat on the desk and sank gratefully into the chair. Mary came in and sat down opposite him, after a moment she said, her voice ashamed, "And I thought you were grandstanding. I'm sorry."

Standish glanced at her, finding a spot of color in the tawny smoothness of each cheek and seeing now the concern in her eyes. He told her to forget it, understanding her apology, and because he felt so weary and beaten and empty inside he said no more but sat motionless until she rose and went to the small refrigerator and began to take out ice. She put this into a glass, added Scotch and water and handed it to him.

"Take it," she said. "I guess a doctor has a right to a drink after a day's work, just like anyone else. . . . Would it help any to talk about it?"

Standish drank gratefully. Before he knew it he was answering questions, and presently Mary had the whole story. Then, arranging her hands in her lap, she sighed, an undertone of chagrin still lingering in her voice.

"And if you hadn't gone, the lieutenant would have arrested Lanning."

"I guess he would," Standish said. "But not for long. When

he got around to figuring out the Pullman fare and one thing or another he would have had to let him go. But it would have been tough on Lanning. . . . It's still tough," he said heavily. "In a different way."

"For a while," Mary said. "Until he realizes how lucky he is. Until he understands how it might have been if he had married her. . . . Why?" she asked presently. "Why did she do it?"

"She was a bad one," Standish said. "She ran away from home as a kid and got into trouble with some guy and wound up in reform school. Later she married a soldier and when he went overseas she made the mistake of marrying young Cooper without getting a divorce. She got by for nearly a year with the old man but he got wind of something and sent Max Pell west to check up on her and Pell got the goods. That's why the old boy had a row with Lanning. He wanted to break up the affair without telling Lanning the truth and when Louise saw she was going to get kicked out without a dime she made up her mind to do something about it before Cooper called in his lawyer. She'd spent a lot of time reading about crime to the old boy and she got the idea on how to kill him from that book on legal medicine. After that she simply walked in on Pell and shot him and walked out. If it hadn't been for Bal-



lard finding Cooper's check she'd have gotten away with it."

He drained his glass, put it aside, and with it he somehow put aside his weariness. He did not know whether it was the drink or the talking he had done which was responsible, but he felt immeasurably better. When he found Mary watching him and remembered her warm friendly ways he recognized the emptiness inside him for what it was and sat up.

"Look," he said. "I'm hungry." He shook his finger at her, continued with mock severity. "It's not often I issue a second invitation to dinner but this time . . ."

"I accept," said Mary, her voice relieved. "I'm starved."

She stood up and Standish rose with her. When he saw her smile, and the sudden radiance in her eyes he felt his own grin come and knew that everything was going to be all right again.

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# devil ball

*by . . . Lou Clark*

How could they laugh like this while she laid cold and dead and he was in this trouble? He sighed softly.

THE boy sat huddled in the chair. The dampness of his clothes and their pungent odor made him uncomfortable. The big cop had shoved him into this chair when they first came into the station. He had said, "Don't move," so for the past hour and a half the boy had sat almost motionless in the chair. Occasionally he slipped a furtive glance at the two policemen who were busy at the other side of the room.

The big one was grumbling. "It had to be raining, too. Oh, hell, I don't guess it'd ever be convenient. . . . Let's see what they say about the boy."

The other one spoke as he looked through the papers. "Never been in trouble before. Sure did pick a big one for his first brush with the law. Here's the school record."

He tossed the papers to the big cop, "Here y'are. Not too much to it. Dumb kid. Been in special since third grade. Fourteen now."

The big cop, his name was Farris, looked at the papers. "Emanuel Jones, aged fourteen."

---

*Lou Clark has been a teacher for several years, first in Pennsylvania, later in Ohio, working most of the time with slow-learning children. It is this understanding of and sympathy with youngsters like Mannie which is reflected in his story of a boy who, in a moment of fear, strikes out.*

---



He stopped abruptly. "Say, what's all this writing? They gave numbers when I was in school."

O'Connell, the other cop answered, "Aw that's this progressive stuff they got now. When you was in school, if a guy was dumb, he quit in the third grade and got a job. Now, they throw all these dumb ones together and then they send home report cards saying they ain't learning but they're trying."

He read the report silently for a while. "It says here, 'Emanuel is working to his capacity. He is a very well-behaved, polite boy.'"

"That so?" Farris was amused. "I'll bet he said *excuse me* when he bashed in his old Aunt Bessie's head with that frying pan. Can't you just see him. 'Excuse me, dear Auntie, but I'm gonna hit you with this here ol' frying pan.'"

The boy let out an involuntary sound before he remembered where he was. How could they laugh, he wondered, when Aunt Bessie was lying cold and dead and he was in a mess of trouble? He shifted imperceptibly on the chair.

"Wish I could take off this here sweater," he thought. "It's mighty uncomfortable. That rain sure did get me wet. . . . Wonder how long they gonna keep me here. Wish they'd hurry up."

As if in answer to the boy's

silent request, the two men came over to the boy. He seemed to shrivel before their eyes.

"Look here, boy," called Farris. "We ain't gonna bash *your* head in. No need to shrink up. All we want to know is why you done it."

"Yeah," joined in O'Connell. "That wasn't so nice what you did. Your teacher says you're a good boy. Good boys just don't go 'round killing their ol' aunties."

The boy tried to speak but all that came out was a high-pitched squeak. "I . . . I . . ." He looked at the two officers helplessly. Fear was stamped on his face.

Farris yelled angrily at him. "No need to get scared now. You wasn't scared when you picked up that pan and banged the old lady on the head. Now open up and tell us why. You ain't too dumb to talk."

Tears welled up in the boy's eyes. But no words came. He couldn't talk—not to this big man; not when he yelled and turned red and his eyes flashed. Why he looked just like that Goliath they talked about at church. No wonder David killed him. He'd like to kill *him*. But he'd better not think of killing. He was in enough trouble already.

O'Connell saw that it was Farris that the boy was afraid of. He spoke gently, "Tell me, Emanuel, was your Aunt Bessie



mean to you? Did she beat you? Come on, boy. Why'd you do it?"

It was this afternoon after school. He heard Thom calling him, "Hi, Mannie, Mannie. Wait up. I'll walk a ways with you."

"Okay, Thom. I'm going past McGee's."

Thom became excited. "Ya gettin' it today? Ya been savin' long enough."

"Yep. I guess I have. It was worth it, though." He smiled as if something wonderful were about to happen.

"How ya gonna explain it to Aunt Bessie?" Thom questioned. "She don't know about it yet, do she?"

A small frown appeared on Mannie's forehead. He replied slowly, "No, not yet. Aunt Bessie, she's sort of wrapped up in school. She don't put much stock in games."

Thom snorted. "Games? Coach says you play basketball like your life depended on it. Why he says you're the best *little* player he's seen. Basketball ain't a game. It's a . . . a," he stopped, unable to find the right word. "Well, it's more'n a *game*."

"You're right I guess. It sure means a lot more than studying. I guess maybe Aunt Bessie's right when she says education is the most important thing in the

world; but, for the life of me, Thom, I just can't make it come through my head. You know, I ain't hardly thought about nothin' but that ball. Seems to me that havin' my own ball is about the most important thing in this world."

Both boys stopped at the corner. Thom hit Mannie on the shoulder, "Well, see ya tonight. Coach says you're a cinch to make the senior team."

"Okay, Thom. I guess I'll be there."

"Guess! Boy, you just better."

Mannie explained, "I don't like telling Aunt Bessie I'm goin' to church. Seems worse when you put the Lord in a lie."

Thom brushed this aside impatiently. "Boy, are you silly? The team plays in the church hall, don't it?"

"Yes."

"So what's lying? If the old bat wasn't so mean, you wouldn't have to say anything."

"That's not so, Thom," Mannie protested. "My Aunt Bessie ain't mean. She just thinks different."

"You can take up for her all you want. Just be there tonight. See ya."

Mannie watched Thom cross the street and walk toward the drug store. Mannie's face was a picture of envy. Thom was a good fellow, he thought; good-looking, too. He was close to six feet tall and only fifteen.



McGee's Sports Shop was just up the street. He walked faster now. The excitement was almost unbearable. "Ain't it just swell," he thought, "my own basketball!" He hurried into the shop.

"Hi, Mr. McGee," he called to the man behind the counter.

"Hello, Emanuel. Guess this is the big day," he grinned at the excited boy.

Mr. McGee reached up on the shelf and pulled down two boxes. Mannie inched closer.

"Well, which will you have? The white or the tan?"

The boy pushed the white ball away disdainfully. "That's not for me. I want the regulation ball; nothing pretty to set in my room. Nope. This here one is for me." He reached eagerly for the other ball.

"I hear you're pretty good with one of these balls. Down to the church they say you're one of the best," said Mr. McGee.

Mannie accepted the man's statement not as a compliment but as a fact which they both recognized to be true. "I guess you're right, Mr. McGee. When I have a ball in my hands, it's . . . it's like I haven't been alive till just then. I guess you know what I mean."

He paused. Mr. McGee nodded in agreement. "I know what you mean, fellow."

He stopped, embarrassed. "I guess I'm talking too much."

"No," protested Mr. McGee,

"I'm not busy now and I enjoy company."

"Thanks, Sir. I'll be gettin' on now. One thing, though. I sure wish I could make myself as interested in that there math. I can get any play on the court, but to save my soul, I can't remember seven times eight." He walked to the door. "Well, so long, Mr. McGee."

He walked the four blocks to his house happily unaware of the awkwardness of the package under his arm.

It was a nice house he stopped at; nice as houses went in that neighborhood. It needed painting, but the windows were clean and the front had been swept.

With his package under his arm, Mannie went into the house. "I'm home, Aunt Bessie."

Bessie Jackson, tall and stern in her starched house dress, walked into the hallway. "You're late, Emanuel," she said. Her voice was as crisp as her dress.

The boy cringed, almost before she spoke. "Yes, ma'am."

"And what's in the box? Some junk to clutter up the house?"

The boy sensed her forbidding tone. "No, ma'am. I'll put it away. It's . . . it's a basketball. I saved up and bought it."

She gave a despairing sigh. "With us just barely able to get along, you go out and buy toys. Boy, won't you never learn?"

"But, Aunt Bessie, it won't cause no trouble. Honest!"



She ignored his words. "I suppose you're interested in girls and dances and parties, too. That's how it is now-a-days. Soon's a boy's old enough to dress hisself, all he can think of is girls, and parties, and dances, and games." This last she said even more scornfully. "There'll be none of that in this house. Not while I'm here. Do you understand?"

He shifted awkwardly, uncertain as to what to say. "Yes, ma'am." He turned to go to his room, but then he paused. "Aunt Bessie, Reverend Wilton says a little exercise is good for the mind. Makes us fresh. Maybe if I practice a little . . ." He stopped, hoping that what the minister had said would impress his aunt.

"Good for the mind, indeed. I don't know what Reverend Wilton can be thinking. Of course," she added, "can't do too much harm. Not if you get your studying done first."

"No, ma'am, Aunt Bessie. I mean, yes, ma'am! Honest, I'll work extra hard. I promise." He ran to his room excitedly. This was truly his wonderful day. His own basketball and a chance to make the senior team. He didn't deserve to be so happy.

He sat there on the edge of his bed, lightly bouncing the ball.

Aunt Bessie appeared in the doorway. "You'll do well to get

started on the lessons, Emanuel. You can't bounce a times table into your head. Though it seems to me that any boy of fourteen would be able to . . ."

"Yes, ma'am," Emanuel interrupted. "I'll get started. I'm working on sevens now. That's my homework."

"Very well. Let's get started."

An hour later Emanuel was still not sure if seven times eight was forty-nine or fifty-six.

"Gee, Aunt Bessie, them numbers just won't stick with me."

"Emanuel, a little effort is worth forty excuses. You'll go to church tonight and when you come back, we'll try some more. There's never been a stupid Jackson in our family. 'Course you're Jones, too. But Jacksons was always smart. Nobody will say Bessie Jackson's boy is in the dumb class. It's just a mistake that you're there. You work hard and like as not, by next month, you'll be out. I wish these church meetings didn't take up so much of your time."

"Yes, Aunt Bessie." A twinge of guilt passed through him. "Do you suppose that Jones's is just naturally not so smart? Seems to me like the more I try, the harder it gets."

At 10:30 Mannie returned home after basketball practice. It had started to rain and so he walked quickly. Even so, his clothes were drenched. He walk-



ed to the back porch so as not to track up the hall. "It's a good thing I didn't take my ball," he thought. "Wouldn't want it to get all wet. Aunt Bessie wouldn't understand what I'd need a basketball at church for, anyhow."

He opened the kitchen door and stopped short. There, like an avenging angel, stood Aunt Bessie. Accusation stood out all over her as she glared at the boy. She had put his ball on the table. It looked like a large head staring up at him.

The boy did not speak or move further into the room. He waited in agony for the inevitable outburst.

Aunt Bessie began slowly, softly. "A liar is worse than a thief, Emanuel. Do you know that? There ain't nothing worse in the world, boy, than a liar. And that's what you are."

As she looked at the boy, her anger and hurt increased. He could see his aunt age before his eyes. She wasn't proud and straight anymore. She looked old and weak, as though she had a terrible burden; a burden that he had placed there. Always before it had seemed that Aunt Bessie was the strongest, most unafraid person that lived. But not now.

She continued, her language more like the idiom of her girlhood. "You is worse than an ordinary liar. You used God to

lie about. That there's a terrible thing. So bad I'se afraid for you. You should git down on your knees an' pray that the Lord don't strike you dead for your sins.

"But no, you is proud of them. Proud! sneakin' out to play—to prance befo' cheap gals with yo' skinny legs flashin'. Half-dressed an' chasin' after a foolish ball."

The boy looked up in protest. His awful sense of guilt would not let him speak.

The old lady regained some of her composure. "Yes, that's it. The devil in a round ball with you chasin' him. When you should have been home studyin' you was out chasin' the devil.

"Talk about bein' slow and not able to learn." She spoke derisively. "The Lord left you, boy. He left your mind and you couldn't learn. Nothin' could get into your mind but sinnin'."

She moved close to the boy, who leaned back against the door. She towered over him, her dark eyes flashing. Still he did not speak. He could not look at his aunt and she was quick to notice this.

"No, you can't look here. Your guilty, lying soul won't let you. The Lord don't like ugly and that is what you is. Your mind is crammed full of ugliness—lyin', cheatin', sneakin' off. Betrayin' me who loved you and worked to make something of you.



"I wanted you to be somethin' better than your daddy. No dirty, filthy clothes; no workin' in stinkin' pits till you couldn't breathe; not dyin' before you know your boy. That's what I wanted for you, Emanuel. Just that you'd be better. Somebody to look up to; to be proud of."

She stopped, exhausted by her outburst of emotion. Almost too tired to continue, she backed away from the boy. "The devil's got hold fast on you," she said in despair. "I tried to make you good. But that devil—he's too much for me. He caught you."

"You is a little boy. Little body, little mind. That's how you's gonna stay. A little ugly boy you is and a little ugly man you'll be. Good for nothin' but lyin' and sneakin' and dyin' afore your time of the consumption—just like your Ma and Pa."

While she spoke, the anger within her seemed to fill her with a great hatred for the boy. He sensed this and was powerless to combat it. He could not tell her, in her sorrow, that she was wrong. The ball was not a devil's tool. It was good. It made him tall and handsome and even smart. Smarter than any boy he knew.

In her hurt, Aunt Bessie would not see this. She would not understand that he needed the ball as much as she needed church. In church he was still small, still dumb, still ugly. The

ball was something like magic.

Perhaps then, Aunt Bessie was right. Maybe the ball *was* a thing of the devil's. If so, it was a wonderful thing.

His aunt had slumped into one of the chairs. The boy, not knowing what to do, remained silently by the door. He was uncomfortably aware of the dampness of his clothes.

Both aunt and boy stared at the ball on the table. The old woman in dazed hurt, the boy in wonderment.

Then suddenly the old woman seized a knife from the table. The ball; the symbol of Emanuel's sin must be destroyed. Perhaps then, the devil would leave her and the boy would be free.

With a sense of complete horror the boy realized what his aunt was doing. Blindly he grabbed at the frying pan on the stove. "I won't let you make me small again," he screamed.

His hands—the hands that thought for themselves—threw the pan at his aunt's head. . . .

In the station, O'Connell asked again, "Why'd you do it, kid?"

The boy looked up at the man vacantly. He knew instinctively that this man would not understand. Nor would the loud Goliath at the desk.

In a low, despairing voice, the boy sobbed, "I did it 'cause I didn't want to study anymore."



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