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THE ® saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Man from the Old Testament
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Reward for Survivors
by GEORGE HARMON COXE

Deadly Plot of Mr. Ko
by SAX ROHMER

You Killed Miranda
by DOROTHY HUGHES

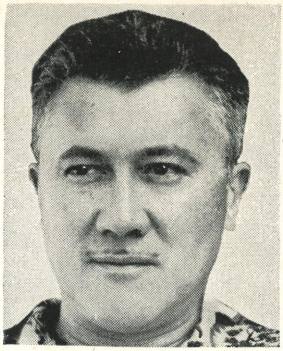
The Lovely Sinner
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE PEARL OF DYING BOYS' REEF

A NEW STORY by ADRIAN CONAN DOYLE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



IT IS A COMMONPLACE REMARK that artistic talent seldom seems to be inherited or handed down—a generalization which, like most generalizations, immediately brings to mind a number of striking exceptions which I hope will not unloose another flood of correspondence. I too can think of the two Alexandre Dumas, the multiple Barrymores, and a bunch of others with whom this space is too small to be interrupted. The generalization is still true by overwhelming percentage.

I do not know what the geneticists have to say about this, but this is my page and I am going to suggest that it might be less puzzling to remember how rare a thing artistic talent is at all. Then, suppose we take the positive angle, which is that an indisputable majority of geniuses were born of rather undistinguished parents. This tempts me to wonder if all artists are real oddities, more or less mutations. If so, their gifts might well be recessive qualities, easily swamped in a mating with normal chromosomes.

But even if they survive to be transmitted, the going is bound to be rough. Instead of being admired on their merits, your early efforts will be disparagingly compared with the mature achievements of Papa. If you are the son of Rembrandt, you had better paint like Rembrandt or go out and paint a barn. This is a more discouraging road-block than Papa himself ever had to face. If you are the son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, you had better not mess up any paper unless you have another Sherlock Holmes up your sleeve.

Adrian Conan Doyle, as a matter of fact, did exactly that when he collaborated with John Dickson Carr on a collection of original Holmes stories that Papa forgot to write. But this month he makes our Royal Box in his own right, with a brand-new story which is literally laid near the farthest point from Baker Street that this globe we live on permits. And we give you our word that THE PEARL OF DYING BOYS' REEF is here strictly on its merits—in fact, despite that reverse prejudice I was just talking about.

I'm also specially pleased to have another new story by Dorothy Hughes, because Miss Hughes is also a syndicated book reviewer who has often written nice words about the Saint. This lets me reciprocate by saying that YOU KILLED MIRANDA is pretty good, too.

The Phillips Oppenheim, Sax Rohmer, and George Harmon Coxe were all written by the old maestros themselves, as also was THE LOVELY SINNER. The only reason I don't give these chores to my son is because I don't have one.

Leslie Charteris

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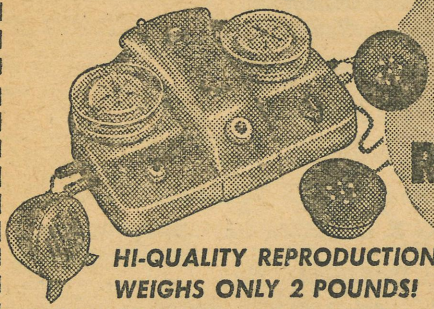

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THE ® saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1958
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the pearl of dying boys' reef

by . . . Adrian Conan Doyle

Solitude affects each in a different way. The Guardian saw it as an opportunity to serve in his own weird way.

"Cost yer one and a tanner without soda. Well, if you ain't got no money ye don't drink. Wot's that! Just got in from Dyin' Boys' Reef? Hey, Joe, 'eres a cove from Dyin' Boys. Alright, mate, the drinks on the 'ouse. One and a tanner's worth, the price of yer story."

They drew nearer then, the pearlers and the fishers of *bêche-de-mer,* but they did it very delicately, looking down into their glasses or up at the palm-leaf ceiling, anywhere except at the things they were really watching. For the Gentlemen of the sea, being professionally in contact with stingarees, firefish and suchlike cattle, are the most tactful men in the world when it comes to other people's mutilations and, for the same reasons, it was kind of comforting to know that a glass of whiskey needs only the palm, not the fingers, for its proper manipulation. You deny it? Then you weren't there that sweating afternoon when the stranger told his tale in Tasman Joe's Bar.

"It's a queer name, Dying Boys," he said, "but its got a

Adrian Conan Doyle, second son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, led a zoological expedition to the Cameroons in the thirties and an expedition to Southern Tanganyika in '52. Interested in big game fishing, arms and armor, boxing and shooting, he is perhaps best known here for his collaboration with John Dickson Carr in THE EXPLOITS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(Random House.)*

meaning, as some of you may know. Seems that one night a long time ago a *latakai* full of Kanakas, a hundred of 'em, was bearing south from the Nugurias when they ripped her bottom out on a reef. There was an atoll with palms on it, so they had a run for their money among the coconuts, and then, when they'd finished off the nuts, maybe they fed themselves for a'while off the reef creatures. But you can't drink sea-urchins, so ninety of 'em died of thirst and, save for one survivor who got picked up by turtle hunters, the rest went the harder way. Belly cramps by overstuffing themselves on their pals.

"When an atoll the size of a backgarden has sent ninety-nine men to their death, its got some right to a fancy name and, even then, it wasn't satisfied. There have been others since, not many, just one or two blokes who went south from the Nugurias and never came back; cyclones probably or a coral head, but reefs are like dogs and once they get a bad name—you know the old crack.

"It was all the fault of Henri Matin, the pearler from New Caledonia, that I lost my ketch the *Alice,* but he paid with his life for it. He never could keep his hand from a bottle, could Henri, so its likely enough he was stinking when he tore out her keel on the coral heads fringing Dying Boys' Reef.

"It was just dawn when he did it and all I felt down in the cabin was a kind of shudder, like an animal gives when it is hard hit, and then a pale green light where the bilges used to be. As I came through the hatchway, over she went on her beams, tossing us both into the sea and there I was swimming for my life with all my worldly possessions; that's to say, the pyjama trousers I was wearing. The coral wasn't a hundred yards distant and, as there was no swell running, both of us should have made it if there hadn't been somebody else looking for breakfast. No, I don't think it was a shark for, between yells, Henri kept on swimming even though he was leaving a trail like port wine across the blue water. I swam very well that morning. If you want to break a world's record just arrange to have something nibbling a shipmate a few yards in your rear.

"Anyway, when I scrambled up the reef, Henri was gone and, as I watched the last of my ketch take the plunge, thanks to that drunken sot, I could have pumped that barracuda by the fin for squaring the debt of the *Alice.* But what the Heck was I to do? There I was stranded on that ill-omened roof, way off the trade routes, with nothing but a pair of old pyjama trousers to give me a fresh start in life even if I was rescued by a miracle before the crabs picked over my bones. The first thing to do was to get to the

atoll, so I swam the inner lagoon and, tottering up a beach of blazing white sand to where the palm trees offered a bit of shade, sat myself down with my head between my hands to think things over.

"God, the silence of that place! There was the murmur of the sea, of course, and overhead that dry whispering from the palm fronds but these weren't noises, not honest life noises. They were just—well, bits of the same silence, the colored bits, that's all.

"It was lucky for me that the sun was still low in the East for, if I hadn't seen his shadow first, I might have died then and there from shock.

" 'Not the oysters,' said a grave voice. 'Coconuts, yes, but really you mustn't meddle with the oysters.'

"I sprang round.

"Now I'm not hot on Holy Writ but I reckon that Jehovah's fighting prophets must have been cut from just about the same timber as the man who was standing behind me. He was old and shaggy white, all hair and beard flowing in a tangled mass over his shoulders and chest. But it was his height that shook me most. I have never seen a man so tall, outside a freak circus, seven foot if he was an inch, and I've never seen a man so thin. He was wearing some kind of loose garment that left bare his neck, his arms and his legs, which is one way of describing a lot of brown bones sticking out of a tattered nightshirt, but his hands, I noticed even then, were simply enormous and clawed like the talons of an eagle.

" 'Who the hell are you?' I screeched, scrambling to my feet.

" 'Your brother,' said he, and his eyes which looked completely white, so sunburnt was his skin, smiled down at me mild as a child's.

" 'I didn't know this island was inhabited,' I remarked, feeling a bit more perky.

" 'Oh, yes,' said he, 'there are lots of God's children living here.'

" 'A new colony, eh? Seems a queer place for folks to settle. What do you do for food and water?'

" 'The Lord provides.'

" 'Where are the other folks?' I asked. Jiminy, if there were settlers in this God-forsaken place then there might be a schooner here every few months which could take me out of it. Things were looking up.

" 'You'll find some of our brothers there,' he said, pointing his staff at the reef.

"Shading my eyes, I stared at the long ridge of dead black coral fringing the far side of the lagoon. 'I don't see anybody,' I remarked at last.

"He smiled at me, like the skeleton of somebody's kind old grandfather.

" 'You will,' said he. 'There are many brothers here whom you must learn to know and love in the short time you'll be with us.' He broke off and seizing me by the arm—what a grip he had!—he pointed overhead. 'Look there,' he cried. 'That's one of God's folk who've been here quite awhile.'

"Now, has it ever occurred to you, Chums, that it's the little things that really scare one in life? A man will go to almost certain death with a grin on his face, but a harmless snake in his bed or an angry woman or a Custom's official poking about in the lockers after a long pearling—oh, no!

"So I looked up where he was pointing and my knees started to go shaky, even though there wasn't anything there to really scare me. Just a wopping big coconut crab creeping down the bole of a palm tree. You know what ugly blighters they are, the size of a football, all pink and red and blue with stiff black bristles and a pair of nippers that could cut through a man's wrist. Well, there he was, creeping slowly down, with the old man pointing at him and smiling in his beard as you or I might point and smile at a favorite son.

" 'Yes, he and his have been here quite awhile,' he said, gentle-like, 'and one soon gets to know them. Behold that black mark across his back. Surely this is the brother that ate the feet—stay, was it him?' He pressed his hand to his forehead. 'No, no, I am in error again. It was the Giant Clam, of course.'

" 'Look here, Mister—'

" 'Come,' he said, resting his hand upon my shoulder, 'you must be weary and in hunger. Is it not imposed upon us to succor and clothe the naked and the starving? Let it never be said that the commands of the Lord of Hosts were disobeyed by the humble Guardian of Dying Boys' Reef.'

"This sounded a bit healthier, so off we set along the sand and just round the point of the atoll I had my second shock. There was a little half-moon basin that might have been once a sea cove before it dried up, ending in a wall nearly ten feet high which was really a part of the island's crust. Between this and the cove was a neat little lean-to shanty built of coral slabs roofed over with doors from old ships. Even had a chimney, it did, made out of a bucket with the bottom knocked out.

"Inside, everything was clean as a monk's cell, the walls whitened all over with lime scrapped from dead sea shells and, best of all, was the reeking great pot full of sweet potatoes.

" 'You've made yourself so snug,' I said, between munches, 'it almost looks as though you've come to stay. Been here long?'

" 'Longer than you've been in this world,' he said.

"I stared at him with half a potato stuck in my mouth. Then I swallowed.

" 'Just how did you come here, mister?' I asked quietly.

" 'In the brig *Valentine,*' said he. 'I was the mate.'

"I knew all about the brig *Valentine.* Fifty-two years ago, she left the Solomons for the Philippines and was never heard of again.

" 'That's half a century,' I whispered. 'Weren't there any other survivors?'

" 'Half a century,' he echoed, 'and there were no other survivors.' And then he just sat there nodding and smiling at me and stroking his tangled white beard.

"I slept bad that night. It was comfortable enough, a kind of wooden crib full of palm fronds, but I was scared, like a kid's scared, and it made it no better that I didn't know the reason why.

"There was one thing struck me from the first. Men who've lived entirely alone have got one characteristic in common—they gush like a spout whenever they come in contact with someone else. Now this old man had been living on this atoll for more than fifty years, yet he never spoke a word, not a word, mark you, unless I spoke first. You'd have thought that desert island was so full of folk that he had all the jabbering a man could do with. And yet I tell you again, I never did see a place where the stillness was quite so still. The only time he'd spoken off his own bat was that remark of his when he came on me under the palm tree, so I asked him next day what he'd meant.

" 'I know the ways of men,' he replied. 'As soon as you felt the pangs of hunger you'd have gone out there on the reef murdering and butchering.' He was smiling as gentle as ever but deep under his brows I caught the red smoulder of his eyes. 'If you've got to eat, there's coconuts and sweet potatoes, but you leave them oysters alone.'

" 'Why?'

" 'Because there's God in 'em, that's why,' said he. 'The Almighty breathed His Spirit even into the lowliest of His creations and, if I find you meddling with the oysters or any other of the Brothers, I'll feed you bit by bit to the moray eels.'

" 'Here, steady on,' I grinned, trying to turn things into a joke. 'Man comes first, doesn't he?'

" 'First!' Snatching down an old brass-bound book from a shelf, he opened it at a marker before thrusting it under my nose. 'He comes *last.* Last! Don't it say in that there Bible that Man's the only fallen creature? Do you know what that means?' His voice began to quaver. 'We're doomed, shipmate, doomed.'

" 'Not if Christ knows it,' I

cried. 'He'd got a word to say—hullo, where's the rest of it?'

" 'Burnt,' he said very quiet, replacing the volume on the shelf. 'Torn out and burnt fifty years ago under my stew-pot. The Lord of Hosts wouldn't hold with that New Testament muck. But come, I am past the usual hour, it is time we were on the reef.'

" 'That's so,' I said, scrambling to my feet as, taking up his staff, he turned to the door. 'There may be a bit o' flotsam from the *Alice.*'

"The tide was out and under the setting sun the whole line of Dying Boys' Reef stood up in one long jagged black crest like the wattles of a sea-serpent in a lake of fire.

" 'Hurry, hurry,' he mumbled, fair dragging me after him to where the coral joined the shore. 'It's supper time, and the Guardian ain't never been late before. Flotsam, eh? This night I'll show you such a piece of flotsam as the eyes o' man never saw since the Angel of Wrath struck him off the ship's roll.'

"I'm no slouch, yet once on the reef I hadn't a chance to keep up with that gaunt iron skeleton bounding through the pools or leaping sure-footed as a goat from one slowly draining coral head to the next. There was a spur of coral sticking up on the deep-water side and no sooner had he reached it than down he flopped on his knees, his face so close to the sea that the tip of his beard spread out like a small white fan. I didn't lose no time getting a look over his shoulder, I can tell you.

"About five feet below the surface, that would be about twenty feet at high tide, was a broad ledge ending in a precipice plunging sheer down into a nothingness of indigo blue with one little fish hanging in it like a black crucifix; at least, it seemed a little fish until my head began to swim and I realized that what I was looking at was a full-grown hammerhead shark a hundred fathoms deep. But then, when I took another peek at the ledge, I forgot all about abysses and dizziness.

"Oysters! Now, as you boys know, the big pearlers seldom live above the ten fathom line but, whether through some local condition of feeding or breeding, the fact remains that, little more than an arm's reach down, the whole shelf as far as the eye could follow it was one solid mass of oysters, millions on millions of 'em, the real dinner-plate pearl bearers, each with its shell half-open against the turn of the tide, clustering so thick one on another that the mother-of-pearl shimmering through their mantles seemed to suffuse the water above with a radiance like moonlight.

"And right in the middle of them, just below where we were hanging over the coral, was something that made me rub my eyes. It had a blood-red fringe waving around the edge of its shell, yet it

wasn't a Giant Clam. It was an oyster and it was the size of a large cushion.

" 'Good God!' I gasped.

"Producing from his robe a coconut husk filled with some filthy stuff resembling chopped rockworm, the old man struck the water lightly, twice, with his staff and on the instant, as if in answer to some understood signal, the monstrous object began to gape until the rim of its upper shell was scarcely a yard below the surface.

"Then, very gently, he pushed aside the waving mantle with his pole, so that I could see into the depth of that marvellous cavern. Far back, on a mass of dark mucilage, lay an object that looked like an luminous violet egg.

" 'The pearl of Dying Boys' Reef,' he said quietly.

"I didn't speak. You don't when you are looking at a hundred thousand quid through five feet of water.

"He tipped out the husk and, as the cloud of worm fragments drifted downwards, the mantle began to quiver, drawing them in as though by suction. Then, slowly, the two halves of the great shell came together until there was nothing to see but a flat round rock with a scarlet lip hanging out of it.

" 'He likes his supper raw and bloody,' breathed a voice in my ear, 'and for half a century I've seen he has it.'

" 'I thought it was against the rules to kill for food?'

" 'Ah, but there's some as has privileges,' he muttered. I didn't catch the rest of it but it was something about those who sit on the Right Hand and those on the Left.

"When we got back to the shack, night had fallen. I didn't feel like going in, so I sat myself down on the sand with my back against the doorpost while I tried to get things straight in my mind. Why had the Guardian—yes, that's what he'd called himself—shown me his treasure? There lay the question that kept hammering at me again and again, and the more I thought about it and failed to find an answer the less I liked it.

"The old man had fed and sheltered me and yet at that moment, for no reasonable cause, if the choice of a companion on that lonely atoll has lain with me I'd have gladly exchanged the vilest wharf-rat on Thursday Island against the mate of the vanished brig *Valentine*.

"I was just beginning to wonder if the real trouble didn't lie in my own nerves when there came from out the darkness over the sea a sound like the report of a muffled gun. As I leapt up with some crazy idea that it might be a patrol vessel, it came again and, at the same time, far off beyond the invisible reef, a patch of livid

green fire spread and glowed and dwindled once more into blackness.

" 'Rest easy, shipmate,' chuckled a voice, 'that ain't what you're thinking.' My companion was standing immediately behind me.

" 'What was it?' I managed.

" 'A jumping devil-ray kicking up sea fire.'

" 'Another Brother?'

"He stuck his face nearly into mine. 'A creature of the outer darkness,' he hissed. 'Ain't you got it straight yet that the chosen folk are all on this here island?'

" 'Then I'm safe.' I put on a grin to see what he'd do.

" 'Supper's ready,' was all he said.

"We ate in silence by the light of a dried sea-grass wick soaked in palm oil and, what with the cutty pipe full of the same stuff he lit after the meal was over, there was enough smoke in the place to dry a string of herrings.

" 'Did you know a man named Skaggersdorf?' he asked suddenly.

" 'Skaggersdorf the Finn?' I replied. 'Yes, I knew him when he was working bêche-de-mer. Disappeared, he did, some years ago in a storm.'

" 'He was here.'

"I stared at him for a moment. This was news indeed. 'Well, I'm blessed,' I said. 'Did he stay long?'

" 'He's still here.'

" 'Here!'

"He rose and opened an old ship's locker against the wall. 'That's him,' he said, plunking something on the table. 'If you knew him, you should know them teeth.'

"I did. I had seen that pair of silver fangs too often not to recognize them now, even if they did look twice the size in the gumless grin of a skull. I cleared my throat.

" 'How did he die?'

" 'Let me see now,' he muttered, pulling at his beard. 'Some years back it was . . . yes, that's it . . . crabs. It was the coconut crabs that had him.'

" 'Steady, friend. A man can run from crabs.'

" 'Ho, no, he can't,' he sniggered. One huge taloned hand came sliding across the table as though to trim the wick now smoking worse than ever. 'Not when he's pegged out proper, shipshape and Bristol fashion.'

"I was just too late. Even as I sprang for the door, his grip was on my neck. He was old enough to be my grandpappy, but I had no more chance than if I'd been a doll.

" 'Ye're berthed, shipmate,' he screamed, 'anchor's down and all swingin' snug.' And he stretched me senseless with one frightful blow.

"When I came to again, I was fixed to the wall by a six-foot chain clamped round my wrist. So

I lay where I'd fallen, sick as a dog but watching close.

"The light being still murky, at first I could only make out the old man crooning to himself over the table and then, after a moment, it got clearer and I could see what he was doing. He was sharpening a thing that looked like a butcher's cleaver.

"There comes a time, perhaps once only, when a man knows by instinct that his life depends on his wits, but I must have been still a bit muzzy for all I could think about was the amazing size, when seen in the raw, as it were, of Skaggersdorf's silver teeth; that and some other matter which wouldn't come into focus until I got beyond him to the coconut crabs. Then I had it. Feet! If those crawling horrors had eaten the Finn, then whose feet . . . ? Only little boats strayed off the trade routes, so how many other wretches, necessarily sole survivors, had that evil reef fed into a maniac's slaughter house? Me, Skaggersdorf, the nameless man . . . it was the silence or perhaps my nerve broke . . . 'Who was he?' I yelled suddenly. 'Who's feet went to the clam?'

"The sharpening stopped while he peered at me across the lamp.

" 'Foot, not feet,' he said at last, 'the other was wooden. Jabez Miller, missionary.'

" 'You bloody murderer!'

"For an instant he made to come at me; instead, down he went on his knees with his fists, one of them grasping the cleaver, flung up to the ceiling. 'I forgives him!' he cried. 'Stop your ears, Jehovah! I forgives him, seeing You've delivered him here for Your purposes.' Then dragging me to the table, he seized my right hand, forcing it down until the fingers were outspread flat. 'He's growing, growing fast,' he said, 'but of late there's been too much rockworm. Five on each, one each day minced up fine. Remember a brat's game, shipmate, called Ten Little Boys?' The wick flared as the cleaver flashed down. 'Well, *now* there's nine.'

"And there was. It didn't hurt much, yet I fainted all the same.

"I'll spare you the details. It's enough that next evening he lugged me out to that cursed reef, like a dog on the end of its leash, and there we both squatted, watching the bits of raw meat, luminous red against the blue, sinking down into the maw of that monstrous oyster. It was queer to think that only a few hours before those minced fragments had been a part of me.

"That night he took off my right thumb.

"Fight? Like hell I did, but the mug who asked me that never knew the grip of a madman. It was like fighting with a man-eating tree.

"There they are, count 'em for yourselves. Seven stumps, just one

week, dated like a calendar on a pair of sponges that were once an able-bodied seaman's paws. And the thing that got into me most wasn't the pain, mates, but eating off a table top stained like a butcher's knacking yard with my own blood.

"Day by day I grew weaker and day by day, with the first flush of dawn, out we'd go linked together by that rusty chain, the mad and the dying, to troll for our daily bread. He'd made a little boat from a driftwood log with a rag of canvas for a sail and, though the palm crabs and every filthy thing clinging to the reef might be the Lord's Chosen, the hand of the Guardian was heavy on the fish.

"By the seventh evening, I was so groggy on my pins that the tide was already over the turn when we gained the point above the oyster ledge. Curiosity is the one fixed bearing in human nature for, hacked about as I was, at that moment nothing else seemed to matter except to see once more the feeding of that obscene marvellous thing. I must have been pretty far gone, for, as I crouched there staring down through the eddies of the rising tide, I found myself wondering what on earth my Aunt Mary's rusty coal scuttle could be doing sitting down there among the oysters until, even as the old man tapped the water with his staff, the lid began to lift and there again was that wonderful glimmer like a patch of moonlight drowned in the sea. The Guardian fell on his knees.

" 'Hungry, are ye?' he gabbled, emptying the contents of the coconut husk into the water. 'Want your bite o'sup, eh? Well, suck 'em in, my beauty, suck 'em in, for is it not writ that the Lord will provide?'

"It was already at it and, watching those crumbs of flesh—crumbs that only that morning had been encircled by my wedding ring—drifting down into the creature's maw, such a deathly sickness came upon me that it was only by clutching at a coral knob that I saved myself from falling headlong. But, even as my mutilated stumps closed upon it, I knew that Fate had played her last card. The knob was an empty conch shell, the size of a melon, and without even pausing to take aim, I flung it with every remaining ounce of my strength at the Guardian's head. As luck would have it, it caught him above the ear, came a spurt of spray and there he was in the sea.

"When he broke surface, the blood was running down his neck, and his eyes, fixed on mine, blazed like coals. We were still linked by the chain and, as I'd lost my only weapon, the conch shell, he had me at his mercy once he'd regained the reef.

" 'All right, shipmate,' he said, quietlike, 'we'll see who'll pay for that.' And then, even as he spoke,

the red light in his eyes became fixed and still like the glare in a dead animal's.

" 'Let go!' he howled suddenly. 'Let go, ye varmint!'

"Crawling to the edge, I peered down. He must have kicked out in his fall, natural enough, I suppose, and there are some things, also natural enough, that don't like being kicked between their gaping jaws. The two halves of the great oyster had come together gripping his right foot as in the iron grip of a vise.

" 'Help me,' he screamed. 'Yer wouldn't let a rat die this way. Help me, brother! The tide's risin' and I can't rise with it, mate, I can't rise with it!'

"And all the time, across the slow wash of the sea, his hands were reaching out to me like eagle's talons, a-quivering with murder and fury and terror.

"Twice he dived down and I could see him tugging frenziedly at the lips of that awful shell, and twice he came up. And in the silence of the reef, all gold and blue and wonderful, it seemed to me strange that, where there weren't no dogs, a dog should be barking, for how was I to know it was myself that was laughing, lying there on the coral with the chain stretched taut between us, and laughing fit to bust at the finest joke a man ever did see.

"Inch by inch swelled the tide and though his hooks came nearer and nearer to the reef he couldn't stretch no farther for the grip of the thing down there on the submarine ledge nor pull me in, for all his tugging on the chain, because of my own grip around the coral. I stopped laughing to watch the water close around his nostrils and then it was that, with his white hair and beard floating around him like a patch of silver light, he began to sing. Aye, mates, to sing! Wasn't it old Solomon who wrote a song once in the Bible? I reckon it must have sounded about the same—rolling stuff with the heave of a sea chanty and God glaring out at you in every line—until suddenlike the voice was no longer there and only bubbles breaking on the surface.

"I gave him ten minutes, lying there with the drift and drag of him pulling at the chain, and then I took my dive. Fortunately, it didn't take me long to get a grip on the shackle key hanging round his neck, for I'm not pretending I enjoyed it down there in the blue shadows with his grinning lifeless eyes hidden from me one moment and at the next staring straight into mine with the sway of the tide.

"I unlocked the chain and had already turned for the reef when a thought, the one great thought of my life, burst on me. If one man's foot was the wedge, another man's hand could be the scoop.

"A slit about three inches wide now separated the two halves and,

forcing my arm between them while the blood spurted in clouds from my lacerated flesh, I groped desperately through a cold slimy mass like the putrescence of some rotting body until my fist, or rather its three remaining fingers, closed on something hard and oval. From the midst of filth I drew it out and, even though my breath was running short, I couldn't surface before taking a peek at it.

"Violet it was and shaped like a pear with a kind of light that made you want to lick it, kiss it, swallow it. And there I hung in the sea gloom, clinging to the dead man while I gazed down on the thing balanced on my open palm, on one of the great wonders of the world shining in the blood-stained darkness of my palm. Then up I went to the air and the sun, leaving behind me forever that softly gleaming ledge where still, for all I know, the Guardian of Dying Boys' Reef floats anchored to his oyster.

"There's not much more to tell. I loaded the little boat with everyone of the Lord's Chosen that seemed edible and, hoisting the rag sail, set forth from that accursed island. I hadn't a chance of getting anywhere, I knew that, but there's a cleanliness of death at sea which calls to a man. However, I was still alive, even if I had a black tongue like a parrot's sticking out of my mouth, when Soapy Bennett and his bêche-de-mer schooner picked me up one glassy morning three hundred miles from nowhere.

"Well, gents, that's my tale, one and a tanner's worth, and being a trifle short o' cash I'd take it kindly if you'd refill . . . What's that! Buy me own or be damned for a bum? Why, ye stony-hearted rascals! And me with the price of all New Ireland sewn into the tail of my shirt!"

CRIME PREVENTION IN ENGLAND

THE PRIMARY DUTY of the police is the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime. They are also concerned with the investigation of crimes committed. (Every citizen has the right to arrest a citizen whom he sees committing a serious offence, but a police officer has certain additional powers of arrest *and* responsibility for investigating the facts.) There is no national police force, but about 40 separate bodies under the immediate control of county and other local authorities. Scotland Yard is not a Central Government body, but simply the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police, and does not investigate crimes outside the Metropolitan Police Area *unless requested to do* so. All police forces are, however, under the general control of the Home Secretary to ensure that conditions of work and pay are comparable throughout the country. All forces are required to maintain a certain level of efficiency in order to qualify for Central Government grants towards their upkeep.

the lovely sinner

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Only Simon Templar could make a two-thousand-year-old legend pay off in modern New Orleans. . . .

"WINE, that maketh glad the heart of man," quoted Simon Templar, holding his glass appreciatively to the light. "The Psalmist would have had things to talk about."

"It would have been a love match," said Lieutenant Wendel, like a load of gravel.

"Up to a point," Simon agreed. "But then he goes on: *And oil to make him a cheerful countenance.* Here we start asking questions. Is the prescription for internal or external application? Are we supposed to swallow the oil, or rub it on the face? . . . I am, of course, quoting the Revised Version. The King James has it *Oil to make his face to shine,* but the revisers must have had some reason for the change. Perhaps they wanted to restore some element of ambiguity in the original, dividing the plug equally between mayonnaise and Max Factor."

The detective stared at him woodenly.

"I've wondered a lot of things about you, Saint. But what a guy like you wants with that quiz stuff is beyond me."

Simon smiled.

The Saint saga is full of sequels. In this one you should recognize a damsel with whom he tangled in these pages exactly one year ago.

From: THE SAINT ERRANT.

"A man in my business can never know too much. A brigand has to be just a little ahead of the field—because the field isn't just a lot of horses trying to win a race with him, but a pack of hounds trying to run him down. Quite a lot of my phenomenal success," he said modestly, "is due to my memory for unconsidered trifles."

Wendel grunted.

They sat in a booth in Arnaud's, which Simon had chosen over the claims of such other temples of New Orleans cuisine as Antoine's or Galatoire's because the oak beams and subdued lights seemed to offer a more propitious atmosphere for a meal which he wanted to keep peaceful.

For Simon Templar was in some practical respects a devout lover of peace, and frequently tried very hard to vindicate the first person who had nicknamed him the Saint, in spite of all the legends of tumult and mayhem that had collected about that apparently incongruous sobriquet. Because a modern buccaneer in the perfect exploit would cause no commotion at all, even if this would make singularly dull reading: it is only when something goes wrong that the fireworks go off and the plot thickens with alarums and excursions, hues and cries, and all the uproar and excitement that provide such entertainment for the reader.

"Besides which," Simon continued at leisure, "I like civilized amenities with my crime—or wine. Both of them have a finer flavor for being enriched with background." He raised his glass again, passing it under his nostrils and admiring its ruby tint. "I take this wine, and to me it's much more than alcoholic grape juice. I think of the particular breed of grapes it was made from and the dry, sunny slopes where they ripened. I think of all the lore of wine-making. I think of the great names of wine, that you could chant like an anthem — Chambertin, Romanée-Conti, Richebourg, Vougeot, Clos des Fèves. . . . I think of great drinkers—*buveurs très illustres,* as Rabelais addresses us—of August the Strong of Saxony, who fathered three hundred and sixty-five bastards and drank himself to death on Imperial Tokay, doubtless from celebrating all their birthdays—or of the Duke of Clarence who was drowned in a butt of malmsey wine. . . . Or, perhaps, I might think of pearls. . . ."

Wendel suddenly stiffened into stillness.

"I was wondering how to bring pearls into it."

"Did you ever hear that wine would dissolve pearls?" asked the Saint. "If you collected these items, you'd have read about how the decadent Roman emperors, in their lush moments, would dis-

solve pearls in the banquet wine, just to prove that money was no object. And then there's a story about Cleopatra's big party to Caesar, when she offered him wine with her own hands, and dropped a priceless pearl in his goblet. Now if you knew—"

"What I want to know," Wendel said, "is how much you're interested in Lady Offchurch's pearls."

The Saint sighed.

"You're such a materialist," he complained. "I arrive in New Orleans an innocent and happy tourist, and I've hardly checked into a hotel when you burst in on me, flashing your badge and demanding to know what the hell I want in town. I do my best to convince you that I'm only here to soak up the atmosphere of your historic city and incidentally absorb some of your superb cooking with it. I even persuade you to have dinner with me and get this epicurean picnic off to a good start. We are just starting to relax and enjoy ourselves, with poetic excursions into history and legend, when suspicion rears its ugly head again and you practically accuse me of planning to swipe some wretched dowager's jewels."

"I'll go further than that," Wendel rasped, with the raw edges of uncertainty in his voice. "I'm wondering what made you choose this place to eat in."

"It seemed like a good idea."

"It wasn't because you expected Lady Offchurch to choose it too."

"Of course not."

"So it's just a coincidence that she happens to be here."

Simon raised unhurried eyebrows.

"Behind you, on your left," Wendel said, trap-mouthed.

The Saint drank some wine, put down his glass, and looked casually over his shoulder.

He did not need to have Lady Offchurch more specifically pointed out to him, for her picture had been in the papers not long before, and the story with it was the sort of thing that made him remember faces. The late Lord Offchurch had, until his recent demise, been the British Government's official "adviser" to a certain maharajah, and this maharajah had bestowed upon the departing widow, as a trivial token of his esteem, a necklace of matched pink pearls valued at a mere $100,000. Lady Offchurch had provided good copy on this to receptive reporters in Hollywood, where she had been suitably entertained by the English Colony on what was supposed to be her way "home." She had also expressed her concern over the fate of an Independent India, abandoned to the self-government of a mob of natives which even the most altruistic efforts of the British raj had been unable in two centuries of rule to lift

above the level of a herd of cattle—except, of course, for such distinguished types as the dear maharajah.

She was a thin, bony, tight-lipped woman with a face like a well-bred horse, and Simon could construct the rest of her character without an interview. There was no need even to look at her for long; and as a matter of fact, he didn't.

What kept his head turned for quite a few seconds more than identification called for was Lady Offchurch's companion—a girl half her age, with golden hair and gray eyes and a face that must have launched a thousand clichés.

"Well?" Lieutenant Wendel's voice intruded harshly and Simon turned back.

"Beautiful," he said.

"Yeah," Wendel said. "For a hundred grand, they should be."

"Oh, the pearls," Simon said innocently. "I didn't notice. I was talking about her daughter."

Wendel squinted past him.

"She doesn't have a daughter. I guess that's just a friend. Maybe came with her from Hollywood—she's pretty enough." His eyes snapped back to Simon with a scowl. "Now quit tryin' to head me off again. When I read this Offchurch was in town, I naturally start wondering if any big operators have checked in about the same time. I'm a lazy guy, see, and it's a lot easier to stop something happening than try to catch a crook after he's done it. . . . And the first hotel register I go through, I see your name."

"Which proves I must be up to something, because if I wasn't planning a Saint job, I'd obviously use an alias."

"It wouldn't be out of line with the kind of nerve I hear you've got."

"Thank you."

"So I'm tellin' you. I'm having Lady Offchurch watched twenty-four hours a day, and if my men ever see you hanging around they'll throw you in the can. And if those pearls ever show up missing, whether anybody saw you or not, you better be ready with all the answers."

Simon Templar smiled, and it was like the kindling of a light in his keen, dark, reckless face. His blue eyes danced with an audacity that only belonged with cloaks and swords.

"Now you're really making it sound interesting."

Wendel's face reddened.

"Yeah? Well, I'm warning you."

"You're tempting me. I wish policemen wouldn't keep doing that." Simon beckoned a waiter. "Coffee—and how about some *crêpes Suzette?*"

The detective bunched his napkin on the table.

"No, thank you. Let me have my check—separately."

"But I invited you."

"I can take care of myself, Saint. I hope you can too. Just don't forget, you had your warning."

"I won't forget," said the Saint softly.

He lighted a cigarette after the police officer had gone, and thoughtfully stirred sugar into his coffee.

He was not affronted by Wendel's ungraciousness—that sort of reaction was almost conventional, and he hadn't exactly exerted himself to avoid it. But it was a pity, he thought, that so many policemen in their most earnest efforts to avert trouble were prone to throw down challenges which no self-respecting picaroon could ignore. Because it happened to be perfectly true that the Saint had entered New Orleans without a single design upon Lady Offchurch or her pearls; and if it was inept of the law to draw his attention to them, it was even more tactless to combine the reminder with what virtually amounted to a dare.

Even so (the Saint assured himself), his fundamental strength and nobility of character might still have been able to resist the provocation if Destiny hadn't thrown in the girl with the golden hair. . . .

He didn't look at her again until Lady Offchurch passed his table, on her way to the special conveniences of the restaurant; and then he turned again and met the gray eyes squarely and timelessly.

The girl looked back at him and her face was as smooth and translucent as the maharajah's pearls, and as brilliantly expressionless.

Then she lowered her eyes to a book of matches in front of her, and wrote inside the cover with a pencil from her bag.

The Saint's gaze left her again, and didn't even return, when a passing waiter placed a match booklet somewhat ostentatiously in front of him.

He opened the cover and read:

27 Bienville Apts.
St. Ann Street
at 10:30

Lady Offchurch was returning to her table. Simon Templar paid his check, put the matches in his pocket, and strolled out to pass the time at the Absinthe House.

This was the way things happened to him, and he couldn't fight against fate.

So after a while he was strolling down St. Ann Street, until he found the Bienville. He went through an archway into a cobblestoned courtyard, and there even more than in the narrow streets of the Vieux Carré it was like dropping back into another century, where cloaks and swords had a place. Around him, like a stage setting, was a chiaroscuro

of dim lights and magnolia and wrought-iron balconies that seemed to have been planned for romantic and slightly illicit assignations, and he could make no complaint about the appropriateness of his invitation.

He found an outside stairway that led up to a door beside which a lantern hung over the number 27, and she opened the door before he touched the knocker.

He couldn't help the trace of mockery in his bow as he said: "Good evening."

"Good evening," she said calmly, and walked back across the living room. The front door opened straight into it. There were glasses and bottles on a sideboard in the dining alcove across the room. As she went there she said: "What would you like to drink?"

"Brandy, I think, for this occasion," he said.

She brought it to him in a tulip glass, and he sniffed and sipped analytically.

"Robin, isn't it?" he remarked. "I remember—you had a natural taste." His eyes ran up and down her slender shape with the same candid analysis. "I guess there's only one thing you've changed. In Montreal, you were pretending to be Judith Northwade. What name are you using here?"

"Jeannine Roger. It happens to be my own."

"A good name, anyway. Does it also belong to the last man I saw you with?"

For an instant she was almost puzzled.

"Oh, him. My God, no."

"Then he isn't lurking in the next room, waiting to cut loose with a sawed-off shotgun."

"I haven't seen him for months, and I couldn't care less if it was years."

Simon tasted his brandy again, even more carefully.

"Then—are you relying on some subtle Oriental poison, straight from the pharmacopoeia of Sherlock Holmes?"

"No."

"This gets even more interesting. In Montreal—"

"In Montreal, I tried to pull a fast one on you."

"To be exact, you set me up to pull a job for you, and I was damn nearly the sucker who fell for it."

"Only instead of that you made a sucker out of me."

"And now all of a sudden I'm forgiven?"

She shrugged.

"How can I squawk? I started the double-cross, so how can I kick if it backfired? So now we're even."

Simon sat on the arm of a chair.

"This is almost fascinating," he said. "So you sent me that invitation so we could kiss again and be friends?"

A faint flush touched her cheekbones.

"When you saw me with Lady Offchurch, I knew I'd have to deal with you sooner or later. Why kid myself? So I thought I'd get it over with."

"You thought I was after the same boodle."

"If you weren't before, you would be now."

"Well, what's the proposition?"

"Why don't we really team up this time?"

Simon put a cigarette in his mouth and struck a match.

"It's a nice idea," he said. "However, you may be overlooking something. How do you see the split?"

"Fifty-fifty, of course."

"That's the trouble."

"That's how it has to be. You can't turn it down. If you can louse me up, I can do the same to you."

The Saint smiled.

"That isn't the point. You're forgetting something. Remember when you were the damsel in distress, and I was all set up to be the knight in shining armor? You had the right idea then."

"You hijacked me," she said sultrily, "like any other crook."

"But I didn't keep the spoils, like any other crook," he said imperturbably. "I found out how much Northwade had underpaid that young inventor, and I sent him the difference—anonymously. Minus, of course, my ten-per-cent, commission."

She was not quite incredulous.

"I've heard stories like that about you, but I didn't believe them."

"They happen to be true. Call me crazy, but that's my racket. . . . Now, in this case, it seems to me that most of the value of that necklace ought to go back to the poor bloody Indians who were sweated by the maharajah to pay for it while the British Government, as represented by Lord and Lady Offchurch, were benevolently sipping tea in the palace. So if you helped, I might let you have another ten per cent, for yourself; but that's all. And you can't turn it down. Don't forget—if you can louse me up, I can do the same to you."

She sat down in another chair and looked upwards at him under lowered brows, and her gray eyes had the darkness of storm clouds.

"You certainly make it tough—stranger," she said, and her smile was thin.

"Can't I sell you a good cause, just once?"

"I think your cause stinks, but I have to buy it. You don't give me any choice. Damn you."

The Saint laughed. He crossed to her and held out his hand.

"Okay, Jeannine."

She put her cool fingers firmly in his; and he knew, he knew quite surely, that the handshake

was as false as the way her eyes cleared. The certainty was so real that it was a fleeting chill inside him, and he knew that now they were committed to a duel in which no tricks could be ruled out.

But his gaze matched hers for frankness and straightforwardness, and he said: "Well now, pardner, let's know what track you were on."

"I was on the Coast when she arrived. I was working out on a producer. He took me to a party that she was at. I knew I couldn't risk her in Hollywood, but I found out that New Orleans was the first place she wanted to stop over in on her way East. So right away this was my home town. I took the next plane here and got hold of this apartment, and don't ask how. Then I wired her the address and said I was sorry I'd been called away suddenly but she must look me up and let me show her the town. Then I spent my time with a guide-book finding out what to show her."

"As an inspirational worker, it's an honor to know you," Simon murmured approvingly. "Of course, you can't belong to an old Creole family, because you can't introduce her around. So what are you—an artist?"

"A writer. I'm getting material for a novel."

"Which the producer was interested in."

"Exactly."

"And how did you figure the job?"

She was silent for a few moments, her eyes turned to a corner but not looking at anything.

"I've been able to get the necklace in my hands long enough to count the pearls while I was admiring them, and take a wax impression of one of them for size. I'm having an imitation made in New York. As soon as it gets here, I've only got to make the switch."

Simon showed his respect.

"You can write scripts for me, any time," he said.

"Now tell me your angle," she responded.

"Darling, I never had one."

She stared.

"What?"

"I didn't even know La Offchurch was here, until that guy I was having dinner with pointed her out and practically dared me to steal her necklace. He just happens to be the local Gestapo."

Gun metal glinted in the gray eyes.

"Why, you chiselling . . ." Then she laughed a little. "So you do it to me again. Why do you always have to be bad news, stranger? It could have been so much fun."

"It still could be," he said impudently; but she stood up and slipped past him towards the sideboard. He strolled lazily after her and said: "By the way, when

do you expect to get that imitation?"

"Maybe the day after tomorrow."

And again he felt that tenuous cold touch of disbelief, but he kept it to himself, and held out his glass for a refill.

"On account of Wendel—that's the name of the gendarme—I'd better not risk being seen with you in public." He looked across the alcove into the kitchen, and said as the idea struck him: "Tell you what—if we can't eat out together, we can still dine. I'll bring some stuff in tomorrow and start fixing. I forgot to tell you before, but I'm as good as any chef in this town."

"You just got a job," she said.

He went back to his hotel in a haze of thought. The cool draughts of scepticism which had whispered around him began to reward him with the exhilaration of walking on the thin ice which they created. He was a fool for danger, and he always would be.

This was danger, as real as a triggered guillotine. It was true that she had no choice about accepting his terms—out loud. But it wasn't in keeping with her character as he knew it to accept them finally. And she had been just a little too evasive at one point and too acquiescent at another. It didn't balance. But when the catch would show was something he could only wait for.

He went to her apartment the next afternoon, laden with the brown paper bags of marketing. She made him a drink in the kitchen while he unpacked and went to work with quick and easy efficiency.

"What are we having?"

"Oxtail." He smiled at her lift of expression. "And don't despise it. It was always destined for something rarer than soup."

He was slicing onions and carrots.

"These—browned in butter. Then we make a bed of them in a casserole, with plenty of chopped parsley and other herbs. Then the joints packed neatly in, like the crowd at a good fire. And then, enough Chanson Burgundy to cover it, and let it soak for hours."

"When does it cook?"

"When you come home tonight. I'll drop in for a nightcap, and we'll watch it get started. Then it cools, overnight, and tomorrow we take off the grease and finish it. . . . You'd better let me have a key, in case you're late."

"Why don't you just move in?"

He grinned.

"I guess you forgot to invite me. But I'll manage." He trimmed fat from the joints, while the frying pan hissed gently with liquescent butter. "Did the mailman deliver?"

"It didn't come today."

And once again it was like a Geiger counter clicking to the intrusion of invisible radioactivity, the way his intuition tingled deep down at her reply.

He said, pleasantly: "I hope you really do know as much about me as you indicated once."

"How do you mean?"

"I shouldn't want you to be worrying about whether I'm going to doublecross you again. I made a deal with you, and when I make deals they stay made. It's only when someone else starts dealing from the bottom that all bets are off."

"Obviously," she said, with cool indifference.

She let him take a key to the apartment when he left, and that alone told him to save himself the trouble of returning for a search while she was out. If there was anything she didn't want him to find, it would certainly not be there.

He had taken routine precautions against being followed when he went to the Bienville, but as he turned into the lobby of the Hotel Monteleone the chunky figure of Lieutenant Wendel rose from an armchair to greet him.

"Had a nice afternoon, Saint?"

"Very nice, thank you," Simon replied calmly; and the detective's face began to darken.

"I thought I warned you to stay away from Lady Offchurch."

The Saint raised his eyebrows.

"I wasn't aware that I'd been annoying her. She is at the St. Charles, which is very grand and metropolitan, but the French quarter is good enough for me. I can't help it if our hotels are only a few blocks apart. Perhaps you ought to have the city enlarged."

"I'm talking about this gal Jeannine Roger. What are you cooking up with her?"

"Oxtails," said the Saint truthfully.

Lieutenant Wendel did not seem to be the type to appreciate a simple and straightforward answer. In fact, for some reason it appeared to affect him in much the same way as having his necktie flipped up under his nose. His eyes became slightly congested, and he grasped the Saint's arm with a hand that could have crumbled walnuts.

"Listen, mister," he said, with crunching self-control. "Just because I spotted you right off didn't mean I figured my job was done. When I found Lady Offchurch was going around with this Roger twist, I had her investigated too. And it comes right back from Washington that she's got a record as long as your arm. So I put a man on to watch her. And whaddaya know, first thing I hear is that you're spending time over in her apartment."

Simon Templar's stomach felt as if a cold weight had been planted in it, but not the flicker

of a muscle acknowledged the sensation. As though the grip on his arm hadn't been there at all, he conveyed a cigarette to his mouth and put a light to it.

"Thanks for the tip, chum," he said gravely. "I just happened to pick her up in a restaurant, and she looked like fun. It only shows you a guy can't be too careful. Why, she might have stolen something from me!"

The detective made a noise something like a cement mixer choking on a rock.

"What you'd better do is get it through your head that you aren't getting away with anything in this town. This is one caper that's licked before it starts. You're washed up, Saint, so get smart while you've got time."

Simon nodded.

"I'll certainly tell the girl we can't go on seeing each other. A man in my position—"

"A man in your position," Wendel said, "ought to pack his bags and be out of town tomorrow while he has the chance."

"I'll think that over," Simon said seriously. "Are you free for dinner again tonight?—we might make it a farewell feast."

He was not surprised that the offer was discourteously rejected, and went on to the bar with plenty to occupy his mind.

One question was whether Wendel would be most likely to challenge Jeannine Roger openly, as he had challenged the Saint, or whether in the slightly different circumstances he would try to expose her to Lady Offchurch, or whether he would pull out of the warning business altogether and go out for blood.

The other question was whether Jeannine knew the score already, and what was brewing in her own elusive mind.

At any rate, he had nothing to lose now by going openly to the Bienville, and he deliberately did that, after a leisured savoring of oysters Rockfeller and *gombo filé* at Antoine's while the young officer who was following him worried over a bowl of onion soup and his expense account. The same shadow almost gave him a personal escort into the courtyard off St. Ann Street, and Simon thought it only polite to turn back and wave to him as he went up the outside stairs to Number 27.

From the window, he watched the shadow confer with another shape that emerged from an obscure recess of the patio. Then after a while the shadow went away, but the established watcher sidled back into his nook and stayed.

Simon crossed the living room and peered down from a curtained window on the other side. The back overlooked an alley which was more black than dark, so that it was some time before the glimmering movements of a luminous wristwatch dial betray-

ed the whereabouts of the sentinel who lurked patiently there among the garbage cans.

Simon put on the kitchen lights and inspected the casserole. He added a little more wine, lighted the oven, and put the dish in. He hummed a gentle tune to himself as he poured a drink in the dinette and settled down in the living room to wait.

The apartment was very effectively covered—so effectively that only a mouse could possibly have entered or left it unobserved. So effectively that it had all the uncomfortable earmarks of a trap. . . .

The question now was—what was the trap set for, and how did it work?

It was a quarter to midnight when the girl came in. He heard her quick feet on the stone steps outside, but he only moved to refill his glass while her key was turning in the lock. She came in like a light spring breeze that brought subtler scents than magnolia with it.

"Hullo," she said, and it seemed to him that her voice was very gay. "I hope you haven't been waiting too long."

"Just long enough. There's a bolt on the inside of the door—you'd better use it," he said, without looking up. He heard the bolt slam, after a pause of stillness, and turned with an extra glass in his other hand. "Here's your nightcap, baby. You may need it."

He thought of a foolish phrase as he looked at her—"with the wind and the rain in your hair." Of course there was no rain, and her hair was only just enough out of trim to be interesting, but she had that kind of young excited look, with her cheeks faintly freshened by the night and her gray eyes bright and arrested. The incongruity of it hurt him, and he said brusquely: "We don't have any time to waste, so don't let's waste it."

"What's happened?"

"The joint is pinched," he said bluntly. "The Gestapo didn't stop at me—they checked on you too, since you were Lady Offchurch's mysterious pal, and they know all about you. Wendel told me. They've got both sides of the building covered. Look out the windows if you don't believe me."

"I believe you," she said slowly. "But—why?"

"Because Wendel means to catch somebody with the goods on them."

It was only an involuntary and static reaction, the whitening of her knuckles on the hand that held her purse; but it was all he needed. He said: "You had the imitation necklace today. You pulled the switch tonight. You made a deal, but you kept your fingers crossed."

"No," she said.

Now there were heavy feet stumping methodically up the stairway outside.

"You were followed every inch of the way back. They know you haven't ditched the stuff. They know it has to be here. And they know you can't get it out. What are you going to do—throw it out of a window? There's a man watching on both sides. Hide it? They may have to tear the joint to shreds, but they'll find it. They've got you cold."

"No," she said, and her face was haggard with guilt.

A fist pounded on the door.

"All right, darling," said the Saint. "You had your chance. Give me your bag."

"No."

The fist pounded again.

"You fool," he said savagely, in a voice that reached no further than her ears. "What do you think that skin we love to touch would be like after ten years in the pen?"

He took the purse from her hand and said: "Open the door." Then he went into the kitchen.

Lieutenant Wendel made his entrance with the ponderous elaboration of a man who knew that he had the last ounce of authority behind him and nothing on earth to hurry for. Certainty smoothed down the buzz-saw edges of his voice and invested him with the steam-roller impermeability of an entire government bureau on two feet.

"I'm from the Police Department, Miss Roger. I'm sure Mr. Templar has told you about me. I've come to trouble you for Lady Offchurch's pearl necklace."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"Of course not." His confidence was almost paternal. "However, it hasn't gone out by the front since you came in, and I don't think it's gone out by the back. We'll just make sure."

He crossed the room heavily, opened a window, and whistled.

This was the moment that Simon Templar chose to come back.

"Why, hullo, Lieutenant," he murmured genially. "What are you doing — rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet* for the Police Follies?"

Wendel waved to the night and turned back from the window.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Templar. I knew you were here, of course." His eyes fastened on the purse that swung negligently in Simon's hand. "This may save us a lot of trouble—excuse me."

He grabbed the bag away, sprung the catch, and spilled the contents clattering on the dining table.

After a few seconds, the Saint said: "Would anyone mind telling me what this is all about?"

"All right," Wendel said grimly. "Where is it?"

"Where is what?"

"You know what I'm talking about. The necklace."

"The last time I saw it," Jeannine Roger said, "it was on Lady Offchurch's neck."

The detective set his jaw.

"I work regular hours, Miss Roger, and I don't want to be kept up all night. I may as well tell you that I talked to Lady Offchurch before you met her this evening. I arranged for her to give one of my men a signal if you had been suspiciously anxious to handle the necklace at any time while you were together. She gave that signal when she said good night to you. That gives me grounds to believe that while you were handling the necklace you exchanged it for a substitute. I think the original is in this apartment now, and if it is, we'll find it. Now if one of you hands it over and saves me a lot of trouble, I mightn't feel quite so tough as if I had to work for it."

"Meaning," said the Saint, "that we mightn't have to spend quite so much of our youth on the rock pile?"

"Maybe."

The Saint took his time over lighting a cigarette.

"All my life," he said, "I've been allergic to hard labor. And it's especially bad"—he glanced at the girl—"for what the advertisers call those soft, white, romantic hands. In fact, I can't think of any pearls that would be worth it—particularly when you don't even get to keep the pearls. . . . So—I'm afraid there ain't going to be no poils."

"You're nuts!" Wendel exploded. "Don't you know when you're licked?"

"Not till you show me," said the Saint peaceably. "Let's examine the facts. Miss Roger handled the necklace. Tomorrow a jeweler may say that the string that Lady Offchurch still has is a phony. Well, Lady Offchurch can't possibly swear that nobody else ever touched that rope of oyster fruit. Well, the substitution might have been made anywhere, any time, by anyone—even by a chiselling maharajah. What's the only proof you could use against Jeannine? Nothing short of finding a string of genuine pink pearls in her possession. And that's something you can never do."

"No?" Wendel barked. "Well, if I have to put this whole building through a sieve, and the two of you with it—"

"You'll never find a pearl," Simon stated.

He made the statement with such relaxed confidence that a clammy hand began to caress the detective's spine, neutralizing logic with its weird massage, and poking skeletal fingers into hypersensitive nerves.

"No?" Wendel repeated, but his voice had a frightful uncertainty.

Simon picked up a bottle and modestly replenished his glass.

"The trouble with you," he said, "is that you never learned to listen. Last night at dinner, if you remember, we discoursed on various subjects, all of which I'm sure you had heard before, and yet all you could think of was that I was full of a lot of high-falutin folderol, while I was trying to tell you that in our business a man couldn't afford to not know anything. And when I told you this afternoon that Jeannine and I were cooking up oxtails, you only thought I was trying to be funny, instead of remembering among other things that oxtails are cooked in wine."

The detective lifted his head, and his nostrils dilated with sudden apperception.

"So when you came in here," said the Saint, "you'd have remembered those other silly quotes I mentioned—about Cleopatra dissolving pearls in wine for Caesar—"

"Simon—no!" The girl's voice was almost a scream.

"I'm afraid, yes," said the Saint sadly. "What Cleopatra could do, I could do better—for a face that shouldn't be used for launching ships."

Lieutenant Wendel moved at last, rather like a wounded carabao struggling from its wallow; and the sound that came from his throat was not unlike the cry that might have been wrung from the vocal cords of the same stricken animal.

He plunged into the kitchen and jerked open the oven door. After burning his fingers twice, he took pot holders to pull out the dish and spill its contents into the stoppered sink.

Simon watched him, with more exquisite pain, while he ran cold water and pawed frantically through the debris. After all, it would have been a dish fit for a queen; but all Wendel came up with was a loop of thread, about two feet long.

"How careless of the butcher," said the Saint, "to leave that in."

Lieutenant Wendel did not take the apartment apart. He would have liked to, but not for investigative reasons. For a routine search he had no heart at all. The whole picture was too completely historically founded and cohesive to give him any naïve optimism about his prospects of upsetting it.

"I hate to suggest such a thing to a respectable officer," said the Saint insinuatingly, "but maybe you shouldn't even let Lady Offchurch think that her necklace was switched. With a little tact, you might be able to convince her that you scared the criminals away and she won't be bothered any more. It may be years before she finds out, and then no one could prove that it happened here. It isn't as if you were letting us get away with anything."

"What you're getting away with should go down in history," Wendel said with burning intensity. "But I swear to God that if either of you is still in town tomorrow morning, I'm going to frame you for murder."

The door slammed behind him, and Simon smiled at the girl with rather regretful philosophy.

"Well," he said, "it was one way of giving those pearls back to the Indians. One day you'll learn to stop being so smart, Jeannine. Can I offer you a ride out of town?"

"Whichever way you're going," she said with incandescent fascination, "I hope I'll always be heading the other way."

It was too bad, Simon Templar reflected. Too bad that she had to be so beautiful and so treacherous.

And too bad, among other things, that his crusade for the cultivation of more general knowledge seemed to make so few converts. If only there were not so much ignorance and superstition in the world, both Wendel and Jeannine Roger would have known, as he did, that the story of pearls being dissolved in wine was strictly a fable, without a grain of scientific truth. . . . Nevertheless, the pearls in his pocket were very pleasant to caress as he nursed his car over the Huey Long Bridge and turned west, towards Houston.

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you killed miranda

by . . . Dorothy B. Hughes

They found her there, under the trees, a bullet in her heart. He had sworn that he would kill her if they met.

WHEN he saw Thorne Gledhill come into the room, there was no thought in him, only a memory of arid heat, so sensory that his skin stretched dry as vellum. In the initial moment the recall was merely to that summer of searing Texan heat, not to what had happened that summer, when he and Thorne Gledhill were two of the many in training for the then war. The sensation was brief and then thoughts returned, too many thoughts, some he had believed long and better forgotten. With them came sudden knowledge, something not known consciously until this moment. It was that he had been waiting two years for Thorne Gledhill to come home. For this he had deferred transfer to a larger hotel in the Penniman system, although he had offered other reasons to himself and to the general manager, climate, satisfaction with this resort, need for more experience—little excuses. The truth was that he was bound to wait for Thorne. Possibly he had helped chance to send him here in the first place because he had read or heard or remembered that Thorne had

Dorothy B. Hughes, one of the all-time greats in this field, should need no introduction to any mystery reader. Perhaps best remembered for her THE FALLEN SPARROW *(Duell Sloan & Pearce, 1942) and* THE DELICATE APE *(DSP, 1944) she here describes a murder that took place under two trees in Texas....*

moved to this town after the war.

In 1942 Lieutenant Thorne Gledhill had been slim and tall and handsome as a picture postcard, as Hal's Granny used to say of handsome men. The years had fingered Thorne lightly, he was still slim and tall and handsome but now there were marks around his eyes and mouth of the kind of man he was. The reason he looked so good might have been because he'd returned to the air force. Without the discipline of the service he'd probably be burdened with the slackness of all the idle young men who used the Penniman's La Cantina for their clubhouse.

Thorne was no longer Lieutenant Gledhill, yet somehow he'd never made it higher than Major. He had been on duty in Germany for the two years that Hal had been behind the bar here. His country place in the valley south of town had been closed for those years. It was still closed and Thorne stopping here at the hotel until his wife, this one was an Oklahoma socialite weighted with money, arrived to reopen it.

Hal couldn't avoid hearing gossip as he presided behind the bar, directing his three assistants; mixing drinks, authorized to exercise his judgment if any drinkers showed signs of getting anti-social. Somehow it never occurred to the customers, male or female, that he could hear their words. They were aware of Hal only when they wanted service; at other times he was to them as inanimate as the imitation Goya murals on the walls. And so he had listened to women mourn the absence of the darling Thorne; and to men, Thorne's own kind, sigh for him to return and liven their wastrel lives. He had watched other faces grow sullen or hostile at the name, and heard vulgar names mouthed often enough to be certain Thorne hadn't changed. And when Thorne came into the bar the night of his return, Hal knew for what he had waited.

It must be done without delay, in the period while Thorne was alone and available under the hotel roof. Once the wife arrived, it would be too late. Yet he could not do it alone; he must have help. In the two years he had been here, he had made two friends. That wasn't bad, a friend a year, some men didn't make a friend in a decade. Whether one of these two would help him or not could only be known by asking, but each Hal could trust.

The one was Aaron Gentry, lawyer; the other, Rufe Healey, reporter. One alone should be burdened by the story. All Hal had to offer was an old story; he had only knowledge, no facts. Knowledge had not been enough in that time of Texas, his knowledge against Thorne's lies, his accusation against Thorne's protestation; his, Hal Morton's, word against Thorne Gledhill's. Not in

valor, but in hopelessness, he had kept silent. The times were different today, not too much so, yet enough to make truth-speaking a need. Knowledge was still not sufficient. But he was so certain that he could, in his own way, go beyond knowledge to fact, that he would now name Thorne a murderer.

Aaron would be eager to serve justice and he would have the knowledge of what steps must be taken to make a murderer answer for his past crime. But Aaron would be legal; a lawyer must be legal, not personal. Whereas Rufe would think in terms of a story and the ingredients of that story, those who peopled it. Without the human ingredients there was never a story worth writing or reading. When he balanced Rufe's curiosity about people against Aaron's dedication to justice, necessarily legal justice, Hal decided to talk first to Rufe. Having decided, he recognized in a moment of clarity, that the beginnings of a story would never be enough for the reporter, there must also be for him its completion. He knew then that Rufe would help him.

Rufe would come into the Cantina about eleven, he always dropped by for a nightcap after he'd put the paper to bed. If he were alone, he'd come to the bar and there'd be a chance to start things moving tonight. If he were with friends at a table, it would have to be put over until tomorrow. Hal never intruded on his friends unless they were alone.

Rufe came alone, came to the bar, dug his elbows on it, said, "Usual, Hal," and surveyed the room while waiting his Scotch and soda. The large center table where Thorne was holding court exploded again into sonic laughter. "Gledhill's back, I see," Rufe commented, taking the glass from Hal and putting down a dollar. "I'll have to interview the goddam hero tomorrow, I suppose. What a man won't do for his lousy art."

Hal felt a surge of rightness over his choice. "How about having a coffee with me at Dandy's when I go off at midnight? This is my short night."

"Oh, God," Rufe groaned. "And I promised myself I'd go to bed tonight."

"I've got a story."

Rufe's eyebrows quirked.

"You want it?"

They went for coffee at midnight.

He told the story to Rufe. He told it without names, it was too early for names, with only "he" and "she," and "her husband" and "his wife."

The camp was in Texas and the summer was hot. It was hard to explain to a man who didn't know Texas just how debilitating was the heat. The camp was made one, jerry built out in the

middle of Texas nowhere, flat Texas land stretching into more nowhere whichever way the horizon was drawn. No one knew the why of Camp Pecosa then. Later its purpose was plain. There wasn't room in the better and more seasoned camps for all the men the Army had gathered; there had to be some place to keep them until they were sent on to the East or the West. From the beginning the camp was a way station but they didn't know it when they were testing it in the early war period, he and Thorne Gledhill and some five hundred other men, enlisted and officers, black and white. All they knew was the restlessness of waiting reassignment from the middle of nowhere, not a town of comforts for seventy-five miles, not a town for ten miles if you could call that one a town. However, that one had a railroad spur where the mail and the supplies came in; it also had the usual two or three crude saloons, one picture show, one country school, and a Baptist church. He and Thorne were first lieutenants, fresh out of Officers' Training.

It was because Hal volunteered to carry the mail that the story began. Morale being bad at its best in the camp, mail assumed even higher priority than its wont. Hal himself suggested to the C.O. that he could run a jeep over to the town to meet the evening train, thus giving the men mail call twice a day instead of de ending on the one morning trucking service. The C.O. was a Colonel, an unsuccessful one; he wouldn't have been in charge of Camp Pecosa if he'd been a worldbeater. If he'd had any hope of this duty being his big chance, it had been debilitated in the Texas heat before one moon's waning. The Colonel didn't care what anybody did, all he hoped for was to maintain a semblance of order and avoid mutiny.

There was something about the heat that made all the men in the camp begin to act differently. Not all, of course, there were always men in any spot who could hold fast to their integrity no matter the force of external environment. But the truth was that externals did affect too many men. To behave as a Roman when in Rome was more than a literary conceit. Deep down within each man there seemed to be some compulsion to be a part of the mores of his environment—an atavism from the cave when conformity was the better part of survival? In Georgia, there'd been an easy-going languor infecting even the rockribbed New Englanders. In Colorado, there'd been a brisk outdoor pioneer spirit of which the most sedentary intellectuals had partaken. In California, it was surprising how the Holy Joes had been spiced by the spirit of play. In Texas, they turned into Texans. Even the

ones who had been most caustic about Texans heretofore became unconsciously affected with hard-drinking, hair-trigger, take-nothing-from-nobody belligerence, and with 110 proof Texas brand of Americanism.

The few who didn't succumb, he was one, tried to keep to themselves and avoid trouble. It was hard not to believe that if you carried on in your particular rut, minding your own business, that you couldn't sweat it out here as you had in boot camp, and officer training, and before that in your civil life. But it wasn't easy. And sweat was the right word for it when the temperature remained at higher than 100 degrees day after sharp, sunglaring day. Rain didn't fall through that entire blistering summer.

The evening mail came in about six-thirty. The C.O. set a mail call for eight-thirty; he would have been a careful man without the nervous tension of this camp. Under its conditions, he planned with especial care to avoid any disappointments which might lead to trouble. Delayed mail could mean trouble.

It didn't take fifteen minutes to drive to the town but Hal would set out as soon as he'd finished his paper work, usually around five-thirty. He didn't care about mess, it was too hot to eat although the kitchen crew always put aside something for him. The lodestone wasn't the town; God knows there was no pleasure to be had in its confines. It was simply to get away, to be alone in blessed privacy for a measure of time each day. To be able to think his own thoughts, to remember his dreams and hopes, small as they were, and above all, to be free this much of the day of what surrounded him.

All he did was drive on through the town, past the one-room depot, and park somewhere alongside the tracks. When he would see a scrawl of smoke rise on the flat yellow horizon, he'd wheel the jeep back up to the loading platform. But until the smoke signal, he'd sit there alone in the jeep, not exactly in comfort, the concentrated heat of the day would hang soggily at that hour, but in peace.

It was by accident that he discovered the oasis. One evening, out of idle curiosity or boredom, or maybe something had happened that day which kept his thoughts jumpy, he decided to prospect a bit on the other side of town before heading back to camp. He was only a couple of miles past the town when he saw what looked like a couple of old trees, shade trees. From the road he didn't believe it. He sort of made a joke to himself about his beginning to see things as men lost on the desert were reputed to do. And he was, of course, wary of investigating, because he had no business being on this side

of the town with the mail stached beside him in the jeep. But when he noted that there was no road leading to the oasis, and no sign of farmhouse or rancho in that direction, he took a chance and bumped the wheels over the landscape to the shadow against the sky. When he pulled up there, he said, "God almighty," and it was near a prayer. Because there were two trees beyond the rise, two tall shade trees. They grew beside a cracked circular indentation which must once have been a water hole.

The rise was enough to hide the jeep from the sight of passers-by on the road. After that, instead of parking by the tracks, he'd go to his oasis. On that miserable dessicated plain, it was somehow pure miracle to be able to sit under the shade of trees.

There came the evening when another car was there first. He didn't know it until he had mounted the rise. By this time he thought of the oasis as his private own and he had quick resentment at its being invaded by a stranger. Until he saw her. She had spread a brown Army blanket under the trees and she was sitting there, reading a book. He knew who she was, Miranda Gledhill, Thorne Gledhill's wife.

She had raised her eyes, rather startled, when he stopped the jeep. After she saw him, she smiled. She had a small, rather shy smile. She knew who he was, too, of course; in a camp that small you knew the faces even if you hadn't met. After she smiled, she said, "Hello."

He said, "Hello, Mrs. Gledhill."

"Do I have your place, Lieutenant Morton?" she asked hesitantly.

He couldn't say yes although he wanted to, still half-way resenting her finding his preserve. But he said, "I can't claim it as mine."

"But it was your wheel tracks I followed, wasn't it? I saw the tracks before I saw the trees. I couldn't believe there would be trees."

"I couldn't either," he admitted.

They were this quickly at ease together, as if they'd known each other for years. Neither sent the other away. They met again the next late afternoon and the next and so on. He found himself waiting all day for just this quiet hour. Oh, there wasn't anything of love or chemistry in it, it was simply the fulfilling of the need for communication with what his granny would call "a kindred." They had so much to talk about. Books and music and philosophies and dreams and hopes. Although she was from New York and an exclusive college, and he had worked his way through a western university on a football scholarship, they might have come out of the same cradle. It doesn't happen often that you meet someone

who is a part of you from the beginning, not in the way of the flesh but of the mind and spirit. Miranda was this to him.

Perhaps unconsciously there was more, perhaps between man and woman there cannot be friendship without some degree of sex attraction. She was lovely to look upon, small boned, fair, graceful. In another country, in another time, there might eventually have been love. But the circumstances were such that neither could consider the meetings anything more than what they were, respite from that camp in Texas.

And then Thorne Gledhill learned of the meetings. She hadn't meant to hide them from him but there'd never been the moment to speak. Thorne wasn't interested in hearing what she did, he was interested in Thorne and in drinking at the Officers' Club. He didn't learn by accident. She was preparing dinner for him and happened to mention something like, "Hal was saying yesterday—"

With measured impact, he asked, "Hal who?"

She said, "Hal Morton," trying to be casual although knowing instantly what was to come.

He blew up. He raged and ranted and finally flung himself out of the house to have it out with that obscenity. He didn't find Hal who happened to be with the Colonel working on a recreation program for the men. But Thorne blew all over again at the Officers' Club. By the next day it was an undercurrent throughout the camp.

Hal heard the rumblings; there were those who told him out of affection and those who let him know out of contempt. He wasn't afraid of Thorne. However, he didn't expect to see her again. He felt sad about it, something beautiful and good had ended.

She was there that afternoon. She told him exactly what had happened, simply, without embarrassment. He took it. And smiled down at her. "I'll stay away," he said. "You need the oasis more than I." It was true. She had to put up with Thorne Gledhill, he didn't.

"No, you mustn't." She caught his hand. It was the only time ever that they touched. "If you do, he'll never understand. And he must, Hal. Don't you see, I can't go on with him unless he understands?"

Hal understood.

"He's always had his own way. If he doesn't, he has a temper tantrum. He's been spoiled, his mother, any girl he's looked at. I've known him for years, Hal. I think I fell in love with him when I was only twelve. I knew when I married him that sometime I'd have to help him grow up. This is the time to begin."

Dubiously, Hal repeated the gossip. "He said he'd kill you if you met me again."

She smiled. "He talks that way when he's in a temper. He doesn't mean it." The smile quivered and died. "But it's hard to talk to him then. When I get a chance I'll explain it all, how we happened to meet, how it's been."

She must have tried to explain to Thorne that night. The Officers' Club remembered how he came in later than usual, in an uglier mood than usual. Hal heard some of the men talking about it. Evidently she tried again the next day. By then Thorne had made his plans. He must have agreed to go with her to the oasis, to see for himself how it was. They found her there, under the trees, resting on the blanket, a bullet in her heart.

Thorne must have planned that Hal would find her there. But that day Hal didn't go for the mail; he was with the Colonel from morning until night, working against time to finish the recreational plan. It was chance that a couple of town youngsters, looking for solitude, stumbled across her that evening. The sheriff brought the news to the camp. There was a gun beside her, no fingerprints on it. It had come from supplies, anyone could have borrowed it.

Thorne tried to point the finger at Hal. It was plain that he'd planned to get Hal in an uglier way; it could have happened, feeling at the camp ran high. But Hal's alibi was beyond question. Thorne's alibi? It didn't satisfy everyone; it didn't satisfy the sheriff. But who could prove he'd been away from camp? He'd been seen often enough during the day and he'd been heard all evening wondering where Miranda could be.

And the orders had come. They were why the Colonel had kept Hal at his desk the day long. A country sheriff hadn't a chance to slow the progress of the war while he went about methodically uncovering a murderer.

Thorne went off to the Pacific. So did Hal. Not together. They didn't meet again.

After Hal told the story, there was no need for names. Rufe had worked with the police on some big stories; he had ideas which would never have occurred to Hal. Such as a tape recorder, the mike concealed just inside the French doors leading to the balcony. A balcony shared with the room next, Rufe installed in that room on the excuse of needing a hideout where he could complete a feature article.

On the night when everything was ready, Rufe phoned down to the bar when he heard Thorne reach his room. Hal answered the phone, made the proper responses. When he'd hung up, he told Jun his first assistant, "Major Gledhill requests a nightcap."

Jun said, "Bar's closed."

"For a customer as good as Major Gledhill," Hal went on

smoothly, "we'll call it five to instead of ten after. We don't want him complaining to the manager." He poured a double shot, added a small bottle of soda, ice. "I'll take it up."

"Your headache," Jun said.

Neither had permitted expression to color their eyes or voices but without it each had given opinion of Thorne Gledhill.

Hal went soft-footed through the dim lobby to the elevators, said "Five" to the tired girl on late duty. Quietly he walked down the carpeted upper corridor and without hesitation, only a breath, rapped on the door of 512.

"Who is it?"

"Service."

Thorne opened the door. He was half-undressed and he hadn't had too much to drink tonight. Enough, but he wasn't drunk. He said irritably, "I didn't order anything."

Hal consulted the tab. "Gledhill? Room 512?"

"I didn't order it. Some joker—"

"You don't want the drink?"

Thorne wouldn't turn down a drink. This had been Hal's gamble; he'd get in the room because Thorne wouldn't let him walk away with a good drink.

"Well, as long as it's here." Thorne moved away, permitting Hal to enter.

Hal closed the door unobtrusively, walked to the bed table, and set down the tray. Closing the door was another gamble but Thorne hadn't seemed to notice or care. When he finished mixing the drink, Hal turned and looked Thorne in the face. "Will that be all, Lieutenant Gledhill?"

The lieutenant was a slip, he hadn't meant to say it that way. But it tore away the masks. The two men looked at each other in cold, hostile silence.

Hal broke it. "You know who I am?"

"Yes, I know," Thorne answered. To prove it he began his usual obscenities.

Hal wondered how long Thorne had known him, whether only now or if he had recognized him behind the bar previously. Without emotion he heard Thorne out, and then he said, "You killed Miranda."

Thorne laughed, an ugly laugh. "Get out of here."

"Not yet," Hal said. "Not until I've said it. You killed her."

"If you don't get out, I'll call the desk. I'll have you fired, you—" Obscenity.

Hal took one step and blocked Thorne from the phone. "You killed her like you said you would. Because she came to talk with me. Because she was lonely and needed somebody to talk to, somebody who understood the way she was, the way she thought." Thorne hadn't got mad enough yet, not enough to blow. Hal had to get him that mad. "We were both lonely. We used to meet out there

under the trees, just sit there quietly and talk, sometimes read poetry. Sometimes we'd sing." It was harder to do it here than it would have been in Texas. "She was the loveliest girl I ever knew. So gentle, so good, so—"

Thorne lunged. "Shut your goddammed mouth!"

Out of expediency, not fear, Hal sidestepped him. With the drinking Thorne had done, he was no match for Hal. Hal continued inexorably, "You killed her. *Because she came to me.* Didn't you? *Didn't you?*"

And Thorne said it. "I killed her. Yes, I killed her! I ought to have killed you too. But I wasn't risking my neck on you. You'd have been strung up that night if the Colonel hadn't had his arm around you. There were plenty who'd have been glad to string you up."

He went on with the filth and the obscenities until he was beyond words.

Just as quietly as if he'd heard none of the villification, just as if his own anger weren't at white heat, Hal said, "I always knew. And I knew the time would come when I'd hear it from you." His lip curled. "You rotten white trash."

He went out of the room. Thorne would probably be at the phone already, demanding the manager, giving a lying report, believing it would be his word against Hal's.

Rufe had the door of his room ajar and Hal went quickly inside. Thorne might prefer a gun to the manager. Rufe's face was thin and tired. All he said was, "I got every word."

The trial was in Texas. Both he and Rufe were state's witnesses. It was Rufe who was the white-haired boy, the man who'd uncovered an old murder and nailed the murderer. Hal was in the background where he wanted to be. In Texas it was best that way.

After sentence was pronounced, the photographers and reporters and all the townsfolk were like gulls around Rufe. No one noticed when from across the courtroom, Thorne's eyes met Hal's for the last time. Not in despair, in continuing hatred. And no one but Hal knew the words which formed on Thorne's lips. The old, old obscenity. . . .

A DANISH OPINION OF MYSTERIES

SIGURD HOEL writers in an article, recently published in Denmark:

"Good mystery writers are pioneers in many ways. They often take up subjects which the 'fine' authors have yet to discover, and as far as style is concerned—they are often better, because they work under much harder conditions. First and foremost, they are *not* allowed to bore their readers! What appears in today's good detective novel will appear in Tomorrow's "literary" novel!

man from the old testament

by . . . E. Phillips Oppenheim

To do the work of the Double Four was to move in the shadows of History and to see things known to few men....

BERNADINE, sometimes called the Count von Hern, was lunching at the Savoy with the pretty wife of a Cabinet Minister, who was just sufficiently conscious of the impropriety of her action to render the situation interesting.

"I wish you would tell me, Count von Hern," she said, soon after they had settled down in their places, "why my husband seems to object to you so much. I simply dared not tell him that we were going to lunch together, and as a rule he doesn't mind what I do in that way."

Bernadine smiled slowly.

"Ah, well," he remarked, "your husband is a politician and a very cautious man. I dare say he is like some of those others, who believe that, because I am a foreigner and live in London, therefore I am a spy."

"You a spy," she laughed. "What nonsense!"

"Why nonsense?"

She shrugged her shoulders. She was certainly a very pretty woman, and her black gown set off to fullest advantage her deep red hair and fair complexion.

There are perhaps not many who remember the fantastic impact upon his day of that Priest (some said later he was a provocateur) who led a brief revolt against the Czarist Government at a time when both Lenin and a man named Trotsky were names known only to a handful of scattered exiles. Oppenheim brings back the tragedy—and twisted dedication—of that life.

From: PETER RUFF AND THE DOUBLE FOUR, by E. P. Oppenheim

"I suppose because I can't imagine you anything of the sort," she declared. "You see, you hunt and play polo, and do everything which the ordinary Englishmen do. Then one meets you everywhere. I think, Count von Hern, that you are much too spoilt, for one thing, to take life seriously."

"You do me an injustice," he murmured.

"Of course," she chattered on, "I don't really know what spies do. One reads about them in these silly stories, but I have never felt sure that as live people they exist at all. Tell me, Count, what could a foreign spy do in England?"

Bernadine twirled his fair moustache and shrugged his shoulders.

"Indeed, my dear lady," he admitted, "I scarcely know what a spy could do nowadays. A few years ago, you English people were all so trusting. Your fortifications, your battleships, not to speak of your country itself, were wholly at the disposal of the enterprising foreigner who desired to acquire information. The party who governed Great Britain then seemed to have some strange idea that these things made for peace. Today, however, all that is changed."

"You seem to know something about it," she remarked.

"I am afraid that mine is really only the superficial point of view," he answered, "but I do know that there is a good deal of information, which seems absolutely insignificant in itself, for which some foreign countries are willing to pay. For instance, there was a Cabinet Council yesterday, I believe, and someone was going to suggest that a secret, but official, visit be paid to your new harbor works up at Rosyth. An announcement will probably be made in the papers during the next few days as to whether the visit is to be undertaken or not. Yet there are countries who are willing to pay for knowing even such an insignificant item of news as that, a few hours before the rest of the world."

Lady Maxwell laughed.

"Well, I could earn that little sum of money," she declared gaily, "for my husband has just made me cancel a dinner party for next Thursday, because he has to go up to the stupid place."

Bernadine smiled. It was really a very unimportant matter, but he loved to feel, even in his idle moments, that he was not altogether wasting his time.

"I am sorry," he said, "that I am not myself acquainted with one of these mythical personages that I might return you the value of your marvellous information. If I dared think, however, that it would be in any way acceptable, I could offer you the diversion of a restaurant dinner party for that night. The Duchess of Castleford has kindly offered to act as hostess

for me and we are all going on to the Gaiety afterwards."

"Delightful!" Lady Maxwell exclaimed. "I should love to come."

Bernadine bowed.

"You have, then, dear lady, fulfilled your destiny," he said. "You have given secret information to a foreign person of mysterious identity, and accepted payment."

Now, Bernadine was a man of easy manners and unruffled composure. To the natural *insouciance* of his aristocratic bringing up, he had added the steely reserve of a man moving in the large world, engaged more often than not in some hazardous enterprise. Yet, for once in his life, and in the midst of the idlest of conversations, he gave himself away so utterly that even this woman with whom he was lunching—a very butterfly lady, indeed—could not fail to perceive it. She looked at him in something like astonishment. Without the slightest warning his face had become set in a rigid stare, his eyes were filled with the expression of a man who sees into another world. The healthy color faded from his cheeks, he was white even to the parted lips, the wine dripped from his raised glass onto the tablecloth.

"Why, whatever is the matter with you?" she demanded. "Is it a ghost that you see?"

Bernadine's effort was superb, but he was too clever to deny the shock.

"A ghost, indeed," he answered, "the ghost of a man whom every newspaper in Europe has declared to be dead."

Her eyes followed his. The two people who were being ushered to a seat in their immediate vicinity were certainly of somewhat unusual appearance. The man was tall, and thin as a lath, and he wore the clothes of the fashionable world without awkwardness, yet with the air of one who was wholly unaccustomed to them. His cheekbones were remarkably high, and receded so quickly towards his pointed chin that his cheeks were little more than hollows. His eyes were dry and burning, flashing here and there as though the man himself were continually oppressed by some furtive fear. His thick black hair was short cropped, his forehead high and intellectual. He was a strange figure, indeed, in such a gathering, and his companion only served to accentuate the anachronisms of his appearance. She was, above all things, a woman of the moment—fair, almost florid, a little thickset, with tightly laced, yet passable figure. Her eyes were blue, her hair light-colored. She wore magnificent furs, and, as she threw aside her boa, she disclosed a mass of jewelry around her neck and upon her bosom, almost barbaric in its profusion and setting.

"What an extraordinary couple!" Lady Maxwell whispered.

Bernadine smiled.

"The man looks as though he had stepped out of the Old Testament," he murmured.

Lady Maxwell's interest was purely feminine, and was riveted now upon the jewelry worn by the woman. Bernadine, under the mask of his habitual indifference, which he had easily reassumed, seemed to be looking away out of the restaurant into the great square of a half-savage city, looking at that marvellous crowd, numbered by their thousands, even by their hundreds of thousands, of men and women whose arms flashed out toward the snow-hung heavens, whose lips were parted in one chorus of rapturous acclamation; looking beyond them to the tall, emaciated form of the bare-headed priest in his long robes, his wind-tossed hair and wild eyes, standing alone before that multitude, in danger of death, or worse, at any moment—their idol, their hero. And again, as the memories came flooding into his brain, the scene passed away, and he saw the bare room with its whitewashed walls and blocked-up windows; he felt the darkness, lit only by those flickering candles. He saw the white, passion-wrung faces of the men who clustered together around the rude table, waiting; he heard their murmurs, he saw the fear born in their eyes. It was the night when their leader did not come.

Bernadine poured himself out a glass of wine and drank it slowly. The mists were clearing away now. He was in London, at the Savoy Restaurant, and within a few yards of him sat the man with whose name all Europe once had rung—the man hailed by some as martyr, and loathed by others as the most fiendish Judas who ever drew breath. Bernadine was not concerned with the moral side of this strange encounter. How best to use his knowledge of this man's identity was the question which beat upon his brain. What use could be made of him, what profit for his country and himself? And then a fear—a sudden, startling fear. Little profit, perhaps, to be made, but the danger—the danger of this man alive with such secrets locked in his bosom! The thought itself was terrifying, and even as he realized it a significant thing happened—he caught the eye of the Baron de Grost, lunching alone at a small table just inside the restaurant.

"You are not at all amusing," his guest declared. "It is nearly five minutes since you have spoken."

"You, too, have been absorbed," he reminded her.

"It is that woman's jewels," she admitted. "I never saw anything more wonderful. The people are not English, of course. I wonder where they come from."

"One of the Eastern countries, without a doubt," he replied, carelessly.

Lady Maxwell sighed.

"He is a peculiar-looking man," she said, "but one could put up with a good deal for jewels like that. What are you doing this afternoon—picture galleries or your club?"

"Neither, unfortunately," Bernadine answered. "I have promised to go with a friend to look at some polo ponies."

"Do you know," she remarked, "that we have never been to see those Japanese prints yet?"

"The gallery is closed until Monday," he assured her, falsely. "If you will honor me then, I shall be delighted."

She shrugged her shoulders but said nothing. She had an idea that she was being dismissed, but Bernadine, without the least appearance of hurry, gave her no opportunity for any further suggestions. He handed her into the automobile, and returned at once into the restaurant. He touched Baron de Grost upon the shoulder.

"My friend, the enemy!" he exclaimed, smiling.

"At your service in either capacity," the Baron replied.

Bernadine made a grimace and accepted the chair which De Grost had indicated.

"If I may, I will take my coffee with you," he said. "I am growing old. It does not amuse me so much to lunch with a pretty woman. One has to entertain, and one forgets the serious business of lunching. I will take my coffee and cigarettes in peace."

De Grost gave an order to the waiter and leaned back in his chair.

"Now," he suggested, "tell me exactly what it is that has brought you back into the restaurant?"

Bernadine shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not the pleasure of this few minutes' conversation with you?" he asked.

The Baron carefully selected a cigar, and lit it.

"That," he said, "goes well, but there are other things."

"As, for instance?"

De Grost leaned back in his chair, and watched the smoke of his cigar curl upwards.

"One talks too much," he remarked. "Before the cards are upon the table, it is not wise."

They chatted upon various matters. De Grost himself seemed in no hurry to depart, nor did his companion show any signs of impatience. It was not until the two people whose entrance had had such a remarkable effect upon Bernadine, rose to leave, that the mask was, for a moment, lifted. De Grost had called for his bill and paid it. The two men strolled out together.

"Baron," Bernadine said, suavely, linking his arm through the other man's as they passed into the foyer, "there are times when candour even among enemies becomes an admirable quality."

"Those times, I imagine," De Grost answered, grimly, "are rare. Besides, who is to tell the real thing from the false?"

"You do less than justice to your perceptions, my friend," Bernadine declared, smiling.

De Grost merely shrugged his shoulders. Bernadine persisted.

"Come," he continued, "since you doubt me, let me be the first to give you a proof that on this occasion, at any rate, I am candour itself. You had a purpose in lunching at the Savoy today. That purpose I have discovered by accident. We are both interested in those people."

The Baron de Grost shook his head slowly.

"Really," he began—

"Let me finish," Bernadine insisted. "Perhaps when you have heard all that I have to say, you may change your attitude. We are interested in the same people, but in different ways. If we both move from opposite directions, our friend will vanish—he is clever enough at disappearing, as he has proved before. We do not want the same thing from him, I am convinced of that. Let us move together and make sure that he does not evade us."

"Is it an alliance which you are proposing?" De Grost asked, with a quiet smile.

"Why not? Enemies have united before today against a common foe."

De Grost looked across the palm court to where the two people who formed the subject of their discussion were sitting in a corner, both smoking, both sipping some red-colored liqueur.

"My dear Bernadine," he said, "I am much too afraid of you to listen any more. You fancy because this man's presence here was an entire surprise to you, and because you find me already on his track, that I know more than you do and that an alliance with me would be to your advantage. You would try to persuade me that your object with him would not be my object. Listen. I am afraid of you—you are too clever for me. I am going to leave you in sole possession."

De Grost's tone was final and his bow valedictory. Bernadine watched him stroll in a leisurely way through the foyer, exchanging greetings here and there with friends, watched him enter the cloakroom, from which he emerged with his hat and overcoat, watched him step into his automobile and leave the restaurant. He turned back with a clouded face, and threw himself into an easy-chair.

Ten minutes passed uneventfully. People were passing back and forth all the time, but Bernadine, through his half-closed eyes, did little save watch the couple in whom he was so deeply interested. At last the man rose, and, with a word of farewell to his companion, came out from the lounge,

and made his way up the foyer, turning toward the hotel. He walked with quick, nervous strides, glancing now and then restlessly about him. In his eyes, to those who understood, there was the furtive gleam of the hunted man. It was the passing of one who was afraid.

The woman, left to herself, began to look around her with some curiosity. Bernadine, to whom a new idea had occurred, moved his chair nearer to hers, and was rewarded by a glance which certainly betrayed some interest. A swift and unerring judge in such matters, he came to the instant conclusion that she was not unapproachable. He acted immediately and upon impulse. Rising to his feet, he approached her, and bowed easily but respectfully.

"Madame," he said, "it is impossible that I am mistaken. I have had the pleasure, have I not, of meeting you in St. Petersburg?"

Her first reception of his coming was reassuring enough. At his mention of St. Petersburg, however, she frowned.

"I do not think so," she answered, in French. "You are mistaken. I do not know St. Petersburg."

"Then it was in Paris," Bernadine continued, with conviction. "Madame is Parisian, without a doubt."

She shook her head, smiling.

"I do not think that I remember meeting you, Monsieur," she replied, doubtfully, "but perhaps—"

She looked up, and her eyes dropped before his. He was certainly a very personable looking man, and she had spoken to no one for so many months.

"Believe me, Madame, I could not possibly be mistaken," Bernadine assured her, smoothly. "You are staying here for long?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Heaven knows!" she declared. "My husband he has, I think, what you call the wander fever. For myself, I am tired of it. In Rome we settle down, we stay five days, all seems pleasant, and suddenly my husband's whim carries us away without an hour's notice. The same thing at Monte Carlo, the same in Paris. Who can tell what will happen here? To tell you the truth, Monsieur," she added, a little archly, "I think that if he were to come back at this moment, we should probably leave England tonight."

"Your husband is very jealous?" Bernadine whispered, softly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Partly jealous, and partly, he has the most terrible distaste for acquaintances. He will not speak to strangers himself, or suffer me to do so. It is sometimes—oh! it is sometimes very *triste.*"

"Madame has my sympathy," Bernadine assured her. "It is an impossible life—this. No husband should be so exacting."

She looked at him with her round, blue eyes, a touch of added color in her cheeks.

"If one could but cure him!" she murmured.

"I would ask your permission to sit down," Bernadine remarked, "but I fear to intrude. You are afraid, perhaps, that your husband may return."

She shook her head.

"It will be better that you do not stay," she declared. "For a moment or two he is engaged. He has an appointment in his room with a gentleman, but one never knows how long he may be."

"You have friends in London, then," Bernadine remarked, thoughtfully.

"Of my husband's affairs," the woman said, "there is no one so ignorant as I. Yet since we left our own country, this is the first time I have known him willingly speak to a soul."

"Your own country," Bernadine repeated, softly. "That was Russia, of course. Your husband's nationality is very apparent."

The woman looked a little annoyed with herself. She remained silent.

"May I not hope," Bernadine begged, "that you will give me the pleasure of meeting you again?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"He does not leave me," she replied. "I am not alone for five minutes during the day."

Bernadine scribbled the name by which he was known in that locality, on a card, and passed it to her.

"I have rooms in St. James's Street, quite close to here," he said. "If you could come and have tea with me today or tomorrow, it would give me the utmost pleasure."

She took the card, and crumpled it in her hand. All the time, though, she shook her head.

"Monsieur is very kind," she answered. "I am afraid—I do not think that it would be possible. And now, if you please, you must go away. I am terrified lest my husband should return."

Bernadine bent low in a parting salute.

"Madame," he pleaded, "you will come?"

Bernadine was a handsome man, and he knew well enough how to use his soft and extraordinarily musical voice. He knew very well, as he retired, that somehow or other she would accept his invitation. Even then, he felt dissatisfied and ill at ease, as he left the place. He had made a little progress, but, after all, was it worthwhile? Supposing that the man with whom her husband was even at this moment closeted was the Baron de Grost! He called a taxicab and drove at once to the Embassy of his country.

Even at that moment, De Grost and the Russian—Paul Hagon he called himself—were standing face to face in the latter's sitting

room. No conventional greetings of any sort had been exchanged. De Grost had scarcely closed the door behind him before Hagon addressed him breathlessly, almost fiercely.

"Who are you, sir," he demanded, "and what do you want with me?"

"You had my letter?" De Grost enquired.

"I had your letter," the other admitted. "It told me nothing. You speak of business. What business have I with any here?"

"My business is soon told," De Grost replied, "but in the first place, I beg that you will not unnecessarily alarm yourself. There is, believe me, no need for it, no need whatever, although, to prevent misunderstandings, I may as well tell you at once that I am perfectly well aware who it is that I am addressing."

Hagon collapsed into a chair. He buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"I am not here necessarily as an enemy," De Grost continued. "You have very excellent reasons, I make no doubt, for remaining unknown in this city, or wherever you may be. As yet, let me assure you that your identity is not even suspected, except by myself and one other. Those few who believe you alive, believe that you are in America. There is no need for anyone to know that Father—"

"Stop!" the man begged, piteously. "Stop!"

De Grost bowed.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Now tell me," the man demanded, "what is your price? I have had money. There is not much left. Sophia is extravagant and travelling costs a great deal. But why do I weary you with these things?" he added. "Let me know what I have to pay for your silence."

"I am not a blackmailer" De Grost answered, sternly. "I am myself a wealthy man. I ask from you nothing in money—I ask you nothing in that way at all. A few words of information, and a certain paper, which I believe you have in your possession, is all that I require."

"Information," Hagon repeated, shivering.

"What I ask," De Grost declared, "is really a matter of justice. At the time when you were the idol of all Russia and the leader of the great revolutionary party, you received funds from abroad."

"I accounted for them," Hagon muttered. "Up to a certain point I accounted for everything."

"You received funds from the Government of a European Power," De Grost continued, "funds to be applied towards developing the revolution. I want the name of that Power, and proof of what I say."

Hagon remained motionless for a moment. He had seated himself at the table his head resting

upon his hand and his face turned away from De Grost.

"You are a politician, then?" he asked, slowly.

"I am a politician," De Grost admitted. "I represent a great secret Power which has sprung into existence during the last few years. Our aim, at present, is to bring closer together your country and Great Britain. Russia hesitates because an actual *rapprochement* with us is equivalent to a permanent estrangement with Germany."

Hagon nodded.

"I understand," he said, in a low tone. "I have finished with politics. I have nothing to say to you."

"I trust," De Grost persisted, suavely, "that you will be better advised."

Hagon turned round and faced him.

"Sir," he demanded, "do you believe that I am afraid of death?"

De Grost looked at him steadfastly.

"No," he answered, "you have proved the contrary."

"If my identity is discovered," Hagon continued, "I have the means of instant death at hand. I do not use it because of my love for the one person who links me to this world. For her sake I live, and for her sake I bear always the memory of the shameful past. Publish my name and whereabouts, if you will. I promise you that I will make the tragedy complete. But for the rest, I refuse to pay your price. A great Power trusted me, and whatever its motives may have been, its money came very near indeed to freeing my people. I have nothing more to say to you, sir."

The Baron de Grost was taken aback. He had scarcely contemplated refusal.

"You must understand," he explained, "that this is not a personal matter. Even if I myself would spare you, those who are more powerful than I will strike. The society to which I belong does not tolerate failure. I am empowered even to offer you its protection, if you will give me the information for which I ask."

Hagon rose to his feet, and, before De Grost could foresee his purpose, had rung the bell.

"My decision is unchanging," he said. "You can pull down the roof upon my head, but I carry next my heart an instant and unfailing means of escape."

A waiter stood in the doorway.

"You will take this gentleman to the lift," Hagon directed.

There was once more a touch in his manner of that half divine authority which had thrilled the great multitude of his believers. De Grost was forced to admit defeat.

"Not defeat," he said to himself, as he followed the man to the lift, "only a check."

Nevertheless, it was a serious

check. He could not, for the moment, see his way further. Arrived at his house, he followed his usual custom and made his way at once to his wife's rooms. Violet was resting upon a sofa, but laid down her book at his entrance.

"Violet," he declared, "I have come for your advice."

"He refuses, then?" she asked, eagerly.

"Absolutely. What am I to do? Bernadine is already upon the scent. He saw him at the Savoy today, and recognized him."

"Has Bernadine approached him yet?" Violet inquired.

"Not yet. He is half afraid to move. I think he realizes, or will very soon, how extremely serious this man's existence may be for Germany."

Violet was thoughtful for several moments, then she looked up quickly.

"Bernadine will try the woman," she asserted. "You say that Hagon is infatuated?"

"Blindly," De Grost replied. "He scarcely lets her out of his sight."

"Your people watch Bernadine?"

"Always."

"Very well, then," Violet went on, "you will find that he will attempt an intrigue with the woman. The rest should be easy for you."

De Grost sighed as he bent over his wife.

"My dear," he said, "there is no subtlety like the subtlety of a woman."

Bernadine's instinct had not deceived him, and the following afternoon his servant, who had already received orders, silently ushered Madame Hagon into his apartments. She was wrapped in magnificent sables and heavily veiled. Bernadine saw at once that she was very nervous and wholly terrified. He welcomed her in as matter-of-fact a manner as possible.

"Madame," he declared, "this is quite charming of you. You must sit in my easy-chair here, and my man shall bring us some tea. I drink mine always after the fashion of your country, with lemon, but I doubt whether we make it so well. Won't you unfasten your jacket? I am afraid that my rooms are rather warm."

Madame had collected herself, but it was quite obvious that she was unused to adventures of this sort. Her hand, when he took it, trembled, and more than once she glanced furtively toward the door.

"Yes, I have come," she murmured. "I do not know why. It is not right for me to come. Yet there are times when I am weary, times when Paul seems fierce and when I am terrified. Sometimes I even wish that I were back—"

"Your husband seems very highly strung," Bernadine remarked. "He has doubtless led an exciting life."

"As to that," she replied, gaz-

ing around her now and gradually becoming more at her ease, "I know but little. He was a student professor at Moschaume, when I met him. I think that he was at one of the universities in St. Petersburg."

Bernadine glanced at her covertly. It came to him as an inspiration that the woman did not know the truth.

"You are from Russia, then, after all," he said, smiling. "I felt sure of it."

"Yes," reluctantly. "Paul is so queer in these things. He will not let me talk of it. He prefers that we are taken for French people. Indeed, it is not I who desire to think too much of Russia. It is not a year since my father was killed in the riots, and two of my brothers were sent to Siberia."

Bernadine was deeply interested.

"They were among the revolutionaries?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Yes," she answered.

"And your husband?"

"He, too, was with them in sympathy. Secretly, too, I believe that he worked among them. Only he had to be careful. You see, his position at the college made it difficult."

Bernadine looked into the woman's eyes and he knew then that she was speaking the truth. This man was, indeed, a great master; he had kept her in ignorance!

"Always," Bernadine said, a few minutes later, as he passed her tea, "I read with the deepest interest of the people's movement in Russia. Tell me, what became eventually of their great leader—the wonderful Father Paul?"

She set down her cup untasted, and her blue eyes flashed with a fire which turned them almost to the color of steel.

"Wonderful indeed!" she exclaimed. "Wonderful Judas! It was he who wrecked the cause. It was he who sold the lives and liberty of all of us for gold."

"I heard a rumor of that," Bernadine remarked, "but I never believed it."

"It was true," she declared passionately.

"And where is he now?" Bernadine asked.

"Dead!" she answered fiercely. "Torn to pieces, we believe, one night in a house near Moscow. May it be so!"

She was silent for a moment, as though engaged in prayer. Bernadine spoke no more of these things. He talked to her kindly, keeping up always his rôle of respectful but hopeful admirer.

"You will come again soon?" he begged, when, at last, she insisted upon going.

She hesitated.

"It is so difficult," she murmured. "If my husband knew—"

Bernadine laughed, and touched her fingers caressingly.

"Need one tell him?" he whis-

pered. "You see, I trust you. I pray that you will come—"

Bernadine was a man rarely moved towards emotion of any sort. Yet even he was conscious of a certain sense of excitement, as he stood looking out upon the Embankment from the windows of Paul Hagon's sitting room, a few days later. Madame was sitting on the sofa, close at hand. It was for her answer to a certain question that he waited.

"Monsieur," she said at last, turning slowly towards him, "it must be no. Indeed, I am sorry, for you have been very charming to me and without you I should have been dull. But to come to your rooms and dine alone tonight, it is impossible."

"Your husband cannot return before the morning," Bernadine reminded her.

"It makes no difference," she answered. "Paul is sometimes fierce and rough, but he is generous, and all his life he has worshipped me. He behaves strangely at times, but I know that he cares —all the time more, perhaps, than I deserve."

"And there is no one else," Bernadine asked softly, "who can claim even the smallest place in your heart?"

"Monsieur," the woman begged, "you must not ask me that. I think that you had better go away."

Bernadine stood quite still for several moments. It was the climax towards which he had steadfastly guided the course of this mild intrigue.

"Madame," he declared, "you must not send me away. You shall not."

She held out her hand.

"Then you must not ask impossible things," she answered.

Then Bernadine took the plunge. He became suddenly very grave.

"Sophia," he said, "I am keeping a great secret from you and I can do it no longer. When you speak to me of your husband you drive me mad. If I believed that you really loved him, I would go away and leave it to chance whether or not you ever discovered the truth. As it is—"

"Well?" she interposed breathlessly.

"As it is," he continued, "I am going to tell you now. Your husband has deceived you—he is deceiving you every moment."

She looked at him incredulously.

"You mean that there is another woman?"

Bernadine shook his head.

"Worse than that," he answered. "Your husband stole even your love under false pretences. You think that his life is a strange one, that his nerves have broken down, that he flies from place to place for distraction, for change of scene. It is not so. He left Rome, he left Nice, he left Paris,

for one and the same reason. He left because he was in peril of his life. I know little of your history, but I know as much as this. If ever a man deserved the fate from which he flees, your husband deserves it."

"You are mad," she faltered.

"No, I am sane," he went on. "It is you who are mad, not to have understood. Your husband goes ever in fear of his life. His real name is one branded with ignominy throughout the world. The man whom you have married, to whom you are so scrupulously faithful, is the man who sent your father to death and your brothers to Siberia."

"Father Paul!" she screamed.

"You have lived with him, you are his wife," Bernadine replied coldly.

The color had left her cheeks; her eyes, with their pencilled brows, were fixed in an almost ghastly stare; her breath was coming in uneven gasps. She looked at him in silent terror.

"It is not true," she cried at last; "it cannot be true."

"Sophia," he said, "you can prove it for yourself. I know a little of your husband and his doings. Does he not carry always with him a black box which he will not allow out of his sight?"

"Always," she assented. "How did you know? By night his hand rests upon it. By day, if he goes out, it is in my charge."

"Fetch it now," Bernadine directed, "and I will prove my words."

She did not hesitate for a moment. She disappeared into the inner room; and came back, only a few moments absent, carrying in her hand a black leather despatch box.

"You have the key?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, looking at him and trembling, "but I dare not—oh, I dare not open it!"

"Sophia," he said, "if my words are not true, I will pass out of your life for always. I challenge you. If you open that box you will know that your husband is, indeed, the greatest scoundrel in Europe."

She drew a key from a gold chain around her neck.

"There are two locks," she told him. "The other is a combination, but I know the word. Who's that?"

She started suddenly. There was a loud tapping at the door. Bernadine threw an antimacassar half over the box, but he was too late. De Grost and Hagon had crossed the threshold. The woman stood like some dumb creature. Hagon, transfixed, stood with his eyes riveted upon Bernadine. His face was distorted with passion, he seemed like a man beside himself with fury. De Grost came slowly forward into the middle of the room.

"Count von Hern," he said, "I think that you had better leave."

The woman found words.

"Not yet," she cried, "not yet! Paul, listen to me. This man has told me a terrible thing."

The breath seemed to come through Hagon's teeth like a hiss.

"He has told you!"

"Listen to me," she continued. "It is the truth which you must tell now. He says that you—you are Father Paul."

Hagon did not hesitate for a second.

"It is true," he admitted.

Then there was a silence—short, but tragical. Hagon seemed suddenly to have collapsed. He was like a man who has just had a stroke. He stood muttering to himself.

"It is the end—this—the end!" he said, in a low tone. "Sophia!"

She shrank away from him. He drew himself up. Once more the great light flashed in his face.

"It was for your sake," he said simply, "for your sake, Sophia. I came to you poor and you would have nothing to say to me. My love for you burned in my veins like fever. It was for you I did it—for your sake I sold my honor, the love of my country, the freedom of my brothers. For your sake I risked an awful death. For your sake I have lived like a hunted man, with the cry of the wolves always in my ears, and the fear of death and of eternal torture with me day by day. No other man since the world was made has done more. Have pity on me!"

She was unmoved; her face had lost all expression. No one noticed in that rapt moment that Bernadine had crept silently from the room.

"It was you," she cried, "who killed my father, and sent my brothers into exile."

"God help me!" he moaned.

She turned to De Grost.

"Take him away with you, please," she said. "I have finished with him."

"Sophia!" he pleaded.

She leaned across the table and struck him heavily upon the cheek.

"If you stay here," she muttered, "I shall kill you myself . . ."

That night, the body of an unknown foreigner was found in the attic of a cheap lodging-house in Soho. The discovery itself and the verdict at the inquest occupied only a few lines in the morning newspapers. Those few lines were the epitaph of one who was very nearly a Rienzi. The greater part of his papers De Grost mercifully destroyed, but one in particular he preserved. Within a week the much delayed treaty was signed at Paris, London and St. Petersburg.

deadly plot of mr. ko

by . . . Sax Rohmer

Bimbashi Baruk and Cairo Intelligence hunt a kidnapped General—and meet a brave and beautiful lady.

GENERAL DESMOND COOPER and Colonel P. J. Western, of the U. S. Army, have left Cairo by air for Teheran to confer with British and Russian authorities on the problem of deliveries across Persia."

The above paragraph appeared in scores of newspapers; it was official; it was a plain statement of fact; but it is also a plain statement of fact that the sequel introduced circumstances so totally inexplicable that even Bimbâshi Baruk found himself at fault. These circumstances were brought to his notice by Colonel Roden-Pyne, of the Cairo Intelligence Department, sitting back, half sideways, with one long leg thrown across an arm of his office chair.

"Meaning that I am to go slinking around in disguise again?" Bimbâshi Baruk asked.

"Meaning that I am interested in a certain Mr. Ko."

"How is it spelled?"

"K-o. He is a Japanese gentleman."

Bimbâshi Baruk, elbows resting on the big, neat desk, puffed

Sax Rohmer, as we have had occasion to comment before, has perhaps contributed more to the mythos of our times than any other living author. In these stories about Bimbâshi Baruk, that remarkable undercover man, he shows much of the knowledge of the East for which he is so familiar.

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at his pipe reflectively. "I am not Nippon conscious," he declared. "All Japs look alike to me. I have never been able to take them seriously."

"You are compelled to take Mr. Ko seriously."

"Why the personal note? You mean, no doubt, '*One* is compelled,' et cetera."

"Exactly—and that One is you."

As old and intimate friends, the colonel and Bimbâshi Baruk scrapped formality in private, but now the bimbâshi registered firm, army regulations, opposition. "Possibly you are mistaken, sir. I wish to rejoin my unit."

"You are seconded for special duties."

"For how long?"

"What does it matter? . . . By the way: do you speak Japanese?"

"Certainly not. Why should I? Furthermore, I am imperfectly acquainted with Eskimo and my pronunciation of Choctaw is often criticized. I may add that I refuse to believe in the existence of any human being entitled Mr. Ko."

Colonel Roden-Pyne gave a lifelike imitation of a mare whinnying to her foal. Himself, he would have described the sound as laughter.

"I rather sympathize. Ko, in Japanese, means Marquis. I have been making inquiries, and I find that a Mr. Ko was formerly attached to the legation in Baghdad, where, although ostensibly a clerk, he was treated with marked respect. The Iraqi authorities requested Japanese representatives to leave, and Mr. Ko disappeared. There is no evidence, however, to show that he returned to Tokyo. Later, that very remarkable British agent known to me as A-14, but to you, I believe, as Rose of the Lebanon, reported that Mr. Ko was none other than the Marquis Karasu."

Yasmina (A-14), daughter of the Sheikh Ismail ed-Din, represented a chink in the bimbâshi's armor, but he did not wince. "Who is the Marquis Karasu?"

"He is the brain behind Japanese secret service—a really formidable character. And his latest exploit has placed us in an uncommonly hot spot. My reputation in this department is at stake. I—" the colonel broke off.

The blue eyes of Bimbâshi Baruk lighted up as if from within. "Count on me, Colonel, to do my best. What has happened?"

And Colonel Roden-Pyne, no trace of levity remaining, related a story which reduced the bimbâshi to silence.

A transport plane, equipped to accommodate six passengers, had set out from Cairo two days before. It was a well-tried machine reserved for a special purpose—the swift conveyance of staff officers from point to point. Piloted by Flight Lieutenant Walburton,

with Flying Officer J. J. Camper as navigator, it was destined for Teheran via Habbaniyah, the airport serving Baghdad. Sergeant Marks was radio operator and Corporal Dimes acted as stand-by and steward.

There were four passengers. These were: Brigadier General Desmond Cooper, with Colonel P. J. Western, both of the U. S. Army, and Captain Wallace of Headquarters Staff, an officer intimately acquainted with Russian and Persian affairs. The fourth member of the party was Miss Lotus Yuan, a young lady of good family, a brilliant linguist and a graduate of London University, who had represented Free China at a number of international conferences. She was generally admired for her chic and respected for her talents.

The plane made good time to its first stop, in Syria. Walburton reported that the engines were behaving "like black velvet." Recognizing the importance of those composing the party, Colonel Roden-Pyne had arranged for a chain of contacts. When they took off again, it was on a course which would pass over Rutbah on the motor road, where a pipe line crosses it. A code word to establish identity was flashed down to the station there from the plane, which was flying low, and twenty minutes late, together with a brief report, "All's well." Rutbah notified Habbaniyah of the party's approach. But Habbaniyah waited in vain. . . .

In perfect weather, under an azure sky, the plane from that moment passed out of view, and out of the knowledge of men. Nothing whatever had been heard of it, or of those on board, since Rutbah had exchanged signals.

"There are some hundreds of miles of desert," the bimbâshi pointed out, "in any spot of which they might have been forced down by engine trouble."

"This would have been reported, and the exact point of a proposed landing indicated by radio," Roden-Pyne argued.

"Their radio might have packed up."

"Rutbah is roughly two hundred and twenty miles southwest of Habbaniyah. Reconnaissance has been carried out over a wide belt. There is no trace. I tell you, B.B., it's black magic. Incidentally, it's going to break me. I was responsible for the general's safety."

It was then that silence descended upon Bimbâshi Baruk.

Certainly the case presented baffling features, not the least obscure being the behavior of the radio operator. Even allowing for sudden enemy interference, such as attack by a fighter aircraft (which possibility the colonel firmly wrote off), failure on the part of Sergeant Marks to send out an S O S remained inexplicable.

"I am naturally anxious to learn," the bimbâshi said, "what Mr. Ko has to do with the matter."

Colonel Roden-Pyne swung his leg free of the chair arm, opened a drawer and proffered a typewritten slip. The colonel typed execrably, not only running as many as four words into one another, but also using abbreviations; however, coughing dryly in disapproval, Bimbâshi Baruk succeeded in making out the following.

"Agents of Ko, who is in Persia, planning intercept General C. on way to T. Escort should accompany plane. A-14."

Bimbâshi Baruk looked up: his eyes, now, seemed to dance, so bright was that inward fire.

"I received this warning from A-14 too late"—Colonel Roden-Pyne's voice sounded off key—"It arrived at about the same time as the message from Rutbah reporting 'All's well!' "

Bimbâshi Baruk began his inquiry at Rutbah, proceeding there by air without an unnecessary moment of delay. On the way he studied a large-scale map of that desolate region which lies between Syria's border and the Euphrates. Part of it seemed to be practically uncharted, just waterless rock and sand amid which few creatures could sustain life. Assuming General Cooper's party to have been alive at the time that the plane landed (and it must have landed somewhere) their plight in such a wilderness was a thing appalling to contemplate. But the major problem remained that of the means by which Walburton had been cunningly forced down in a trackless inferno as notorious as the Syrian Desert; for the bimbâshi had now to credit the affair to enemy agents.

Investigations at Rutbah yielded a total blank. From the air, Bimbâshi Baruk surveyed toiling guards, moving insectlike about a dancing waste. R.A.F. patrols swept zones north and south of that belt which represented the normal course to Baghdad. But dusk was near again, when, out of the east, came that wandering Arab who brought news at last.

His camel excited the bimbâshi's pity: the poor beast had been driven hard; for this nomad from nowhere bore a message which he knew would earn reward. Fifty miles southeast of Rutbah, on a stretch of level sand near the Wâdi Amej, there was a deserted airplane. Bimbâshi Baruk took the man in hand.

What kind of plane?

It was large—at least, it was large in the eyes of the one who had seen it. There was a ladder leading up from the sand to an open door.

What had he found inside?

He had not dared to enter such

a magic chariot, which was the work of *efreets* and other devils.

Was the magic chariot damaged in any way?

Apparently not. It had alighted, to judge from data familiar to a son of the desert, as one would expect such an invention of Sheitan to alight: smoothly.

What signs did it bear?

Here, the informant failed. He began well by recognizing an R.A.F. disk shown to him, but he wavered, as to further indications, between correct identity marks and the slogan "Beer is best" which Bimbâshi Baruk offered, chalked on a board, as possible alternatives.

Would he swear by the Prophet that no one remained on board?

He would swear that no one remained on board, alive. He had ridden his camel around the plane many times, crying out in a loud voice. He was of the opinion that no dead men were inside.

Why?

He had seen no vultures and had heard no jackals. . . .

The Bedawi's firm refusal to act as a flying dragoman threatening to lead to a free fight, Bimbâshi Baruk set out guideless, in moonlight, by air for the Wâdi Amej, his pilot working by chart. The Bedawi was accommodated (with guard) beneath the roof of the rest house or beneath that part of it which had remained after German bombers and rebel Iraqi troops had done their worst, and their best. The night was crystal clear but bitterly cold.

They experienced little difficulty in finding the deserted plane. It lay on a sort of small plateau which appeared to be flat as a bowling green; but the light of a three-quarter moon is not the best illumination in which to attempt an experimental landing. However, the bimbâshi instructed Flight Lieutenant Carr to land; and Flight Lieutenant Carr landed.

"A perfect natural airfield, sir," he remarked. "Walburton must have been up on his maps."

"H'm," muttered the bimbâshi, "one wonders."

This, indeed, was the missing plane. Bimbâshi Baruk walked all around it, silently, followed by Carr, Captain Maitland of the Sappers, and a sergeant pilot, who had accompanied him. No one spoke as he went up the ladder; Maitland and Carr followed. The sound of their footsteps must have been audible for miles, so complete was the desert stillness. . . . When, at the end of twenty minutes or so, they switched off lights and descended again to the moonbright plateau, Captain Maitland stared blankly at Bimbâshi Baruk.

"It's supernatural," he said, and he seemed to be afraid of his

own voice. "It's a Marie Celeste of the air."

The facts justified his words. They had been able to identify places occupied by various members of the party for the reason that nothing, apparently, had been disturbed. On one table they found an open attaché case initialed "D.C." It contained two recent handbooks on Persia, a sealed box of a hundred Turkish cigarettes, and a copy of the Egyptian Gazette. Near it was a writing pad beside which lay a fountain pen and a pair of reading glasses.

A letter headed "En route to Teheran," and jerkily written, began with the words "Dear Jack." A purely personal note to a friend, it contained such sentences as, "Lucky I gave up smoking years ago, as good cigars are unobtainable here," and it concluded: "We are approaching a place called Rutbah which I understand is about halfway to Baghdad (where we spend the night). Desmond." There was a P.S. It said, "At the moment of writing there seems to be . . ."

At this point, clearly enough, the general had laid down his pen. On the rack were a uniform cap, gloves, and a regulation revolver. Similar equipment was found in a neighboring rack and on the table a pigskin portfolio bearing the words: "Colonel P. J. Western." It contained some large-scale maps and a quantity of forms and official correspondence. An open novel lay face downward beside a pack of playing cards. There was a cup containing coffee dregs.

Aft of these places they identified that occupied by Captain Wallace. He had been solving a crossword puzzle from an old issue of the Daily Telegraph. A short cane and a "brass hat" were near by. A portside seat adjoining told a like story, the story of a smooth and uneventful passage suddenly interrupted. There was a sewing bag on the floor in which were balls of wool and some illustrated pamphlets containing instructions for making jumpers. Part of such a knitted garment lay on the chair. needles in place, a fur cloak over the chair back.

On the table Bimbâshi Baruk noted a Persian dictionary, a volume of Keats and a Baedeker's "Palestine and Syria," in German. All were closed, but the last was marked by a long strip of red wool. A camera (Miss Lotus Yuan was a photographic expert) and a vanity case filled with cosmetics, perfumes and other toilet articles rested in the rack.

The baggage room was empty. The vacant cockpit and its instruments were left for later inspection. Baruk found himself particularly interested in the steward's pantry. Four clean glasses and a dish of biscuits and hors d'oeuvres stood on a tray, a cock-

tail shaker beside them—and the shaker was full. He seated himself on the sand, leaning back against the ladder, and began to fill his pipe.

"Deliberation," he remarked, "should always precede action."

But he knew that he was baffled.

Bimbâshi Baruk was still deliberating when dawn broke and when sunrise threw golden spears of light across the wilderness. He had completed his inquiry and was boiling down findings to a working residue. Established facts were these:

All logbooks and other records had been removed, together with heavy baggage. There was evidence to suggest that the passengers' personal belongings had undergone careful searching before being replaced where they were found. The engines were in order and there was enough petrol in the tanks for at least another two hundred miles. He knew that one case in possession of General Cooper might well have tempted enemy agents. This was a large leather portfolio, metal reinforced with three strong locks, and it contained scale plans and detailed directions for extending existing facilities by road and rail and speeding up Anglo-American supplies to Russia some three hundred per cent.

There were many problems which defeated the bimbâshi, but he had ample data, if only he knew how to use it, as he proceeded to point out to Captain Maitland.

"An important item," he said, "is General Cooper's P.S.: 'At the moment of writing there seems to be—'"

" 'Something wrong with the engines' is the conclusion of the sentence which leaps to one's mind."

"But there is nothing wrong with the engines."

"No. What about 'Something unusual taking place?' "

"Helpful, Maitland. I rather lean to that conclusion myself. Then there is the cocktail shaker."

Captain Maitland, reddish, unimaginative, inclined to put on weight, stared; he had light blue eyes which meant little but ignorance of fear.

"There is nothing unusual about the cocktail shaker."

"On the contrary, it is full. How long, after a cocktail has been prepared, does it remain in the shaker? A matter, not of minutes, but of seconds. Whatever disturbed the journey, therefore, entirely put Dimes off his stroke. He forgot to pour out the drinks. Again, at what hour should you expect cocktails to be served?"

"Six o'clock."

"This gives us the time at which interruption probably occurred: six o'clock. We may as-

sume that Walburton at this hour was following his proper course, and I have worked out where he should have been at six o'clock. General Cooper's unfinished postscript bears this out. Would you agree with my figures, Carr?"

"To within ten miles, sir," the air force officer replied eagerly, "from the time when he set out for there. I have marked a likely spot on the map."

"About three miles short of a place called El Dag. Anybody know anything about El Dag?" Nobody knew anything about it. "We have to suppose, then, in endeavoring to reconstruct what happened, that at El Dag, Walburton saw or heard something which led him to behave in a really singular manner; namely, to pass over Rutbah, and then change his course and come here. Why here? It would be difficult to give a pilot directions to a spot like this, wouldn't it, Carr?"

"I should say impossible—unless ground signals were used."

"Ah," murmured the bimbâshi, and his heavy-lidded eyes half closed; "that is a point." His eyes woke up again. "We come, now, to Baedeker's 'Palestine and Syria.' What are we to make of 'Palestine and Syria?' "

"That's perfectly simple," said Captain Maitland. "Miss Yuan, a highly intelligent girl, was checking details of the route in a guidebook."

"Of course she was," the bimbâshi conceded. "But why did she mark a certain page with a piece of red wool?"

"It was the page she was reading at the time something occurred."

"There, Maitland, I fear I cannot agree with you. In my opinion, it was the page she had begun to read *after* something had occurred."

"How do you arrive at that, sir?" Carr asked.

"Very simply." Bimbâshi Baruk took the book from a capacious pocket in his camel's-hair coat. "She has not only marked the page but she has also placed a penciled ring around the paragraph. This is the paragraph: 'Wâdi el Hamiz (the *Hamiza of the Crusades*), a small, dried-up oasis on the Plain of Roty; once a resting place for caravans on the ancient road from Aleppo to Basra. Contains a ruined mosque erected by En-Nâsir in 1318; is uninhabited.' "

He returned the book to his pocket and glanced inquiringly from face to face. "Any comments?"

"Rather!" The cry came from Carr; he was galvanized. "El Hamiz is about sixty miles northwest of Rutbah, just over the Syrian border and plumb between the two pipe lines. There was a project floated not long before the war to make it a refueling station on a new commercial air-

way. The route was from Beirut to Basra and intended to connect with a steamer service from Trieste. It was a German-Italian scheme, and I think our people smelled a big rat. Anyhow it was washed up. There is supposed to be water somewhere, and I understand that artesian borings had actually begun."

"Have you been there?"

"Personally, no; but it's marked on all our maps as a good emergency landing. I fancy that the airfield had been partially laid out, but of course it would be overgrown now."

"No doubt," the bimbâshi agreed, and his regard momentarily grew dreamy again. "You will note, Maitland, that El Hamiz is not on the normal route to Baghdad, although Miss Yuan had carefully marked it. But I hope that I have made it clear that quite a lot of our evidence doesn't add up. For example, how can we fit in the deliberate misinformation given to Rutbah?"

"What misinformation?" asked Maitland. "I saw the plane myself, watched it through my glasses until it was nearly out of sight. The pilot's report was handed to me. Simply read 'All's well. Walburton.' "

"That," said Bimbâshi Baruk, "is the deliberate misinformation to which I refer. Bearing in mind the fact that at Rutbah, Walburton was twenty minutes late, a considerable time must have elapsed since the steward had prepared cocktails — and they were never served. General Cooper never completed his postscript—" He looked from face to face, noting effects as the implication of this small but remarkable episode became clear to Maitland and Carr.

"Good Lord, sir!" Carr exploded. "It almost looks as though—"

"On the evidence found in the plane, you mean, it almost looks as though the party never reached Rutbah?"

"But I can trust my own eyes!" cried Maitland. "With respect, I don't see that your reasoning is necessarily right. It is always possible, for instance, that a member of the party was taken ill."

"There is a medical officer at Rutbah. Walburton would have made a landing there, rather than report 'All's well.' "

"At any rate," Carr exclaimed, "he wouldn't have brought the patient *here!*"

But Bimbâshi Baruk had permitted his attention to wander: he was gazing analytically at a wheel of the undercarriage. In morning light it presented a curiously speckled appearance, seeming to be mottled with countless flecks of light blue. This phenomenon demanded closer inquiry, and he moved across, knelt down, and began to scrape bright

fragments from the wheel. Holding a number of these in his left palm, he stood up, turned—and his somewhat saturnine face was transfigured.

"Look!" He extended his hand. "Blue Wind — flowers: *anemones* . . . Walburton landed somewhere else before he landed here—at some place carpeted with early wildflowers! Anemones are among the first. You used the words quite recently, Carr, 'But of course it would be overgrown now—' "

"El Hamiz!" cried Carr. "Good Lord, sir! Walburton must have been forced down at El Hamiz!"

"Are you mad, or am I?" Maitland demanded. "If Walburton landed at El Hamiz, why did he afterward cross Rutbah and report 'All's well?' "

"There is no evidence whatever," said Bimbâshi Baruk, "to show that Walburton ever did cross Rutbah . . ."

Rutbah regained, the bimbâshi had speedy corroboration of a theory which had presented itself to his mind as the only logical explanation of an episode otherwise inexplicable. Colonel Roden-Pyne had phoned an order to the effect that he was to be called up the moment Bimbâshi Baruk returned. The call was put through. . . .

"Hello, B. B.—urgent news for you. Anything to report?"

"I have found the missing plane."

"It was the real one, eh? Well?"

"Not a soul on board."

"No?" Colonel Roden-Pyne's voice gave the impression of a flat tire. "But the transport plans?"

"I regret to say are missing. I have come to the conclusion—"

"Wait a minute. There's something you must know. The new code (I call it Ack-Toc) is out of commission. The other side has got hold of it! I have the man responsible — native clerk — but it's cold consolation. They knew all about General Cooper's journey—even the identity word—"

"That is the conclusion to which I had come."

"What! How?"

"It's a long story, and I am in the middle of a job."

"Any hope?"

"Some. The plane has just come in, and I find myself curiously interested in the fact that General Cooper is a nonsmoker. I have an inquiry to make on this subject before starting."

"Where for?"

"El Hamiz . . ."

Reconnaissance by plane of El Hamiz revealed, notably, a V-shaped patch of brilliant blue shining like an enameled victory sign set in the desert. This was the abandoned airfield, now a meadow of wildflowers. Near by,

lay a long, squat building, surrounded by what appeared to be the remains of a wall. Excluding an assembly of carrion crows, which took to the air as the plane approached, no living thing was visible.

"Apparently not in enemy possession," said Carr; and then: "Hello! what's that?"

A flash of light had showed momentarily from a point between the wall and the low building.

"Field glasses," replied the bimbâshi; "somebody watching us."

Carr banked in a sharp turn, and they swept back over the airfield. Almost at the same moment a man came running out into brilliant sunshine, below; he was waving some white object which might have been (and was) a towel. Bimbâshi Baruk focused his glasses. He saw that the man with a towel was attired in shirt and trousers, both of khaki color; that he had a profusion of gray hair.

"Shall I make a landing, sir?"

"Yes."

They sank down onto a carpet of blue anemones with shallow sandy soil beneath and some firm flat foundation. As Bimbâshi Baruk climbed out, the gray-haired man, breathless, but clear-eyed, came up.

"Do I address Brigadier General Cooper?" the bimbâshi said.

"You do."

"I am Major Baruk, and more than happy to see you well, sir."

But General Cooper's manner remained unaccountably furtive, even when he acknowledged the bimbâshi's salute and accepted his hand.

"Do you entertain some doubts concerning me?" Baruk asked sharply. "Possibly Flight Lieutenant Carr can reassure you."

Indeed, the youthful joy of that officer had a most beneficent effect, and General Cooper explained himself.

"I apologize most sincerely, Major," he said. "I believe you will understand when you know the facts."

But even as he spoke, the bimbâshi was glancing around him interrogatively.

"You are wondering about the other members of my party?" the general suggested. "If you will come across to temporary headquarters—" he smilingly indicated the squat building—"and permit me to complete my toilet, which your welcome arrival interrupted, I will tell you the story."

And this was the story:

"About three minutes of six it happened. The steward was mixing drinks and I was writing a letter. I noticed some disturbance, and Sergeant Marks came to tell me that urgent orders had just come through. An unidentified plane was between us and Rutbah, and we were instructed

to change direction north-northwest and make for a place called El Hamiz, where we would find a British party. There we must land, and await further orders. I asked him 'Is El Hamiz a regular airfield?' He said he didn't know, but that the situation was evidently serious as we were expressly warned not to use our radio.

"We couldn't disturb the pilots for details, but Miss Yuan had a guidebook in which El Hamiz was mentioned. She marked the paragraph and passed the book around. It didn't sound promising; in fact, even drinks were forgotten, and everybody was looking out for enemy aircraft . . ."

Walburton arrived at El Hamiz, exchanged messages, and alighted on the azure runway. A party of armed men wearing British battle dress surrounded the plane; a lieutenant of artillery received the general and other passengers. Accompanied by Miss Yuan, Colonel Western and Captain Wallace, the general, engaged in conversation with Lieutenant O'Neil (for so he had introduced himself), crossed to that long, low building which they had observed from the air. "Don't bother to bring anything," Lieutenant O'Neil had said. "I am happy to tell you that the plane will be leaving again, on a new course, almost immediately."

Entering a bleak, concrete apartment, lighted by iron-barred windows, General Cooper found himself and his friends under cover of a machine gun, the nose of which protruded through an opening in the wall! Lieutenant O'Neil stepped outside, closed the door and addressed them through one of the windows.

"I must apologize for this interruption of your journey, but I am merely obeying orders. I am a German officer. Any sound will result in the machine gun opening fire. This I should very much regret. Your heavy baggage will be restored to you. There is water and some rations."

A trifling misunderstanding arose, but was soon settled, before the R.A.F. complement of the plane, escorted by three armed men, marched up to join the general's party. Sergeant Marks was seen to be developing a black eye. When all were securely locked in:

"I spotted the dirty business a minute too late," the sergeant explained. "There's a *Jap* in charge out there!"

Such, indeed, proved to be the case, for the Oriental in question presently appeared at a barred window. The yellow gentleman was liberal with apologies, but explained that the transport plans carried by General Cooper were indispensable to his purpose. He was sure that so many resourceful officers would find a means

of extricating themselves and their charming lady companion from this predicament. He retired; so did the machine gun.

"We broke out in eighteen hours, Major. It was a tough proposition. Marks and Dimes worked miracles."

"But where are they?"

"Marks and Dimes set out right away on the trail to Rutbah. They took enough water and rations to last the journey, on a low quota, if they didn't meet up with anybody or find a well on the road. Wallace and Camper followed (we drew lots); then Walburton and Western."

"But Miss Yuan?"

"No doubt she, too, has been completing her toilette, for here she comes."

Bimbâshi Baruk turned, as a slender girl entered from sunshine. She wore a suit which Bond Street might have delivered that morning; her stockings and shoes were Fifth Avenue. Glossy black hair framed a face which resembled a placid ivory mask, but the fine, slightly oblique eyes said that there might be snow on sleeping volcanoes. Her acknowledgment of General Cooper's presentation of Bimbâshi Baruk was that of one making a new and welcome acquaintance in the park.

"This place is a regular fortress, Major Baruk," she said; her voice was that of a silver bell and she spoke English which had no trace of accent. "It is built of concrete: you can see the mixers overgrown with wildflowers. It was their storehouse, I suppose, and they had to provide against Arab raiders. The airfield is as you see it—a carpet of blue anemones."

"To blue anemones," declared Bimbâshi Baruk, "I owe the pleasure of meeting you. But I fail to understand how you have existed here for more than three days and still contrive to resemble a cover design for a New York magazine."

"We found a water tank," said General Cooper. "It was pretty foul, certainly. But there was enough of iron rations left us to keep the party alive for a week in a pinch. Our heavy baggage was handed back—with the exception of one portfolio."

"But I left all my make-up in the plane," added Miss Yuan. "I am not as a rule so pale as this. When the general first sighted you, we were terrified—"

"I venture to doubt it."

"We thought it was the enemy returning; we thought they had found out."

"Indeed!" Bimbâshi Baruk's white teeth were revealed in a smile which collaborated successfully with his blue eyes. "Found out what?"

"That the plans in General Cooper's portfolio were not the plans of the Persian supply route! You see, there are plenty of old

maps and plans in Cairo, and I had a sort of intuition—intuitions are not Hitler's copyright. I scratched out some lettering and put other lettering in. It was easy."

"She had a hunch, Major," said the general. "It was right, too. We left the original plans at American headquarters. Those in the portfolio don't mean anything. I guess the Japanese thief beat it right for the Persian border, or he'd be back by now. Miss Yuan tells me that this holdup is the work of a certain Mr. Ko."

The bimbâshi turned to Miss Yuan, who was watching him contemplatively. "Do you mean that the man that you saw was Mr. Ko?"

"No, no," the Chinese girl replied. "Marquis Karasu would not have been so easily tricked. The marquis is clever. He is my enemy, the enemy of my people. I had never seen the man who was here. But what I persuaded General Cooper to do was this: I made photographs, much reduced, like aerographs, of the plans and of the text. These, we brought with us. I could easily have printed suitable enlargements in Teheran when we arrived. The negatives were in the general's attaché case on the plane, and—" she performed oddly graceful little gestures with slim fingers—"the plane has gone."

Bimbâshi Baruk patted her gently on the shoulder.

"My dear Miss Yuan, your intuition has not been wasted. We have recovered the plane. Mr. Ko has failed through a fault, common to his type of mentality, that of overelaboration. The plane was flown to Rutbah, at a most terrific speed, to make up lost time, and, as he had stolen the code in use, messages were exchanged which allayed immediate suspicion.

"His chief object in getting rid of the plane was to defeat air reconnaissance here in case the radio messages had been picked up by someone else. Then, it was abandoned in the Syrian Desert, no doubt at a prearranged spot where some sort of transport for the pilots was waiting, and everything on board was left as found, further to confuse inquiry. They needed time for their journey, you see. I am concerned about your companions, I confess." (As a matter of record, Marks and Dimes reached Rutbah some hours later and the other parties were picked up by patrols.) "But your aerographs are in safe hands."

"What's that?" cried General Cooper, and his expression changed magically. "What's that?"

"I considered it my duty to read your unfinished letter, and I noted, sir, that you were a non-smoker. Some hours later the

significance of this, considered in conjunction with the presence in your bag of a tin of Turkish cigarettes, dawned upon me. I examined the seal, and found that it had been, very neatly, tampered with. I broke it—and discovered the films. May I congratulate you, Miss Yuan? It is really a pleasure—and a vast relief—to know that we have you on our side."

Miss Yuan took the bimbâshi's extended hand, and a faint flush, like that in the heart of a lotus, crept over her ivory cheeks.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN SARAWAK

SERIOUS, CAREFULLY PLANNED and organized crime is rare in Sarawak where the most common crime is—petty theft. The Central Prison in Kuching, an old converted hospital, has no high walls—and there is no need for them. The Prison is fenced in, but this wouldn't prevent someone from breaking out if he wanted to do so. Escapes from the prison are however almost unknown.

There is really little reason to break out. If you are a first offender, you are detained in an entirely open prison which isn't even fenced in, and where the prisoners spend their time growing vegetables. A prisoner is often permitted to return home to see his family while he is still serving his sentence, and if he was the family breadwinner, and his wife and children are in need, the family is provided with food and money to tide them over.

Sarawak is a small country where people tend to know each other very well, and it often calls for considerable tact to arrange for the return of a prisoner to his village once he has completed his sentence. The prison authorities take an understandable interest, however, in the welfare of their former guests.

Violin-playing Edward Brandah, Assistant Superintendent of Prisons, is a Sea Dayak, descended from a people who only a hundred years ago were feared headhunters. Himself a friendly good-natured man, he knows the family problems of all the prisoners in his charge, and also works with the juvenile delinquents (yes, they have them in Sarawak too) confined in a nearby boys' home. The only people he despairs of are the few habitual criminals for whom the prison has become almost a home, and who come back and come back again....

quiet night

by . . . Norman Katkov

Danny loved his mother and he could tell you all about his paper's code of ethics. And he was also a heel. . . .

DANNY NYACK opened the front door of the police station, walked swiftly into the room at the end of which sat the desk sergeant, waved his hello to Jack Johnson behind the desk, and entered the police reporters' office which was next to the desk. He looked at a clock on the wall, checked the time with his wrist watch and, using one of two phones that rested on a long, wooden table against the wall, quickly dialed a number.

He stood there drumming tanned fingers against the table while he waited for the number, his brown hat pushed back on his head.

He was wearing a camel's-hair coat, a double-breasted, lounge-model gray flannel suit, a brown gabardine shirt, with a sports-type collar buttoned at the neck without a tie, and Army officer's brown buckled shoes.

His high cheekbones, browned now from a two-weeks vacation in the Florida sun, gave him the appearance of an Indian. He had brown, curly hair that he wore long about the neck, and a long, thin, slightly hooked nose, and

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thin lips that were the most expressive part of his face.

The fingers stopped their steady drumming on the table. There was a click in his ear as someone picked up the phone at the other end.

"Hello," Danny's voice was shrill and urgent. "Hello, Ma? Ma, is that you?" He waited for an instant, listening, then his face broke as he smiled broadly. Still holding the phone he sat down in a swivel chair, and with his free hand, wrapped the coat around him, then pushed the hat down over his eyes.

"Hello, my baby," he spoke softly into the phone, almost insinuatingly, as one would talk to a sweetheart. "How's my baby?" He laughed then. "Ma, you know I haven't got any other babies but you. All right, so I'm a liar. Did you like the movie? Well, if you cried it must have been good. Was Bette Davis good?" He had seen the movie in Florida, but he liked to listen to her talk. His mother loved movies, and graded them by the length of crying that she could do while the scenes unfolded.

"Ma, did that cab pick you up at the movie? Yeah, and he took you home? Uh-huh. What?" This time he laughed loudly. "You tipped him a quarter, because he took you home for nothing. Ma, he gets paid for it, don't worry about that. All right, baby. You're wonderful. What are you going to have for supper tomorrow? That's my girl. What kind of pie do I get tonight?" His mother always left some pastry and milk for him when he got home.

He made a kiss for her through the mouthpiece, audibly, and she asked him to come home early, and he promised that he would. She told him to be sure and button his coat when he went out and he said that he would, and then he said good-bye and hung up.

He got up, took off his coat and hat, hung them up behind the door to his office and walked to the desk.

"Anything doing, Jack?"

"Quiet night. Not a thing. By the way, there was a call for you. Left his number. Said it was important."

"Thanks a lot, Jack." Danny looked at the slip of paper that the sergeant handed him, crumpled it into a ball, and slipped it into his jacket pocket. Phil Biddle's private number. What did Phil Biddle want with him? He and Phil had always been friendly, and had gone on a few parties together when Phil was running bootleg into the town. Even now, he always got a case of bourbon at Christmas from Biddle, and vaguely he had always had the notion that if he ever needed money badly, the taxicab king would give it to him. Phil was clean, Danny knew that. Well, he decided he'd call him. Let him cool his heels for half an hour.

The reporter walked out of the

room and to his right, stopping in front of a lighted room. He looked in, hesitated a moment, then entered.

"Hello, Mary, anything doing?" His voice was quiet, thoughtful, solicitous.

She reached behind her and picked up the day's reports. "There isn't much. Some kid over on the South Side swallowed a dime. He's out at City Receiving now. You can call Doc Parsons out there. A truck with feed on tipped at Eighth and Main. It blocked traffic for about an hour but nobody hurt. That's about all. Quiet night."

"Yeah, quiet night. Thanks, Mary." He took the reports and walked to another section of the building, knocked on a glazed door through which light shone, and without waiting for a "come in," entered the room.

A heavy man sat behind a desk in the bare room. He sat quietly reading the evening paper, and he spoke now to Danny from behind the paper. "Listen, Danny, Phil Biddle's brother is upstairs."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Danny moved to a chair opposite the desk, sat down, lifted his feet up on the desk and lit a cigarette. He smoked for a moment, and then looked up at the big man. "Has he been booked, Jim?" Danny asked the question casually, as though he were asking for information about a drunken driver, or a kid that had been picked up for a burglary.

"No, he isn't booked. I got some brains in my head, ain't I?" He moved in his chair and faced Danny. "It's a damn good thing I'm working nights though, and it's a damn good thing you got Jack Johnson on the desk tonight." Jim Dorsey was a captain of detectives, in charge of the station from 5 till 2 A.M.

"Whatya mean it's a damn good thing?" Danny's voice was plaintive, hurt. "It's nothing to me if Phil Biddle's brother is booked or not booked or what happens to him. I've got nothing with Phil Biddle's brother."

"Look, kid," the big man's voice was gentle. "Tom Biddle is drinking himself up. Phil is doing fine with those cabs, the town has forgotten about him ever being in the rackets, and he just married that skirt on the Hill. He don't want publicity. Phil Biddle is clean and you know it, and I know it. Tonight Tom got a load on out at Hell Lake, and coming into town he banged up some farmer's rig on the Post Road. The farmer is okay, but his rig is ruined, and some punk kid that's been on the force for a month pinched Tom. I came to work just as they were taking him out of the car. The two coppers didn't even know his name yet, so I grabbed him and took him upstairs and told the punks that I would handle it."

"So—?"

"So if he's booked, he goes to court on a drunken driving charge. If he forfeits bail, he's still on the book, and it's still a story, and he gets his name in the paper, and your sheet says it's Phil's brother. That's going to be just dandy for Phil, just dandy. That's going to put him in solid with the Hill crowd that is."

"So—?"

"So, it's worth exactly a hundred fish to me to see that Tom goes home tonight—clean. And it's worth twenty-five fish each to those supersleuths, and Jack Johnson wants a half a yard. He's no punk copper. I'll take care of those monkeys from the wires and the radio stations; I'll break their backs if they show up here. But Phil knows you hand out dope for the *Morning Times,* and he knows it's the only morning paper in town. He ain't going to rest easy till he knows it's okay. That's all, Danny."

The big man went back to his paper. Danny got up and went out, taking care to shut the door quietly behind him. He went back to his office and settled himself in the swivel chair, still holding the reports.

Mary was right. It was a quiet night. It was only thirty minutes after he had gone to work that he called his office and asked for rewrite, having checked the two stories Mary had told him about.

He talked to the rewrite man, agreeing that there should be a picture of the kid holding the dime in his hand, and that there might be a feature follow story on the family circumstances.

The rewrite man told him that the city editor wanted to talk with him, and then he knew that Tom Biddle might be a problem. "Yes, George?" He spoke casually as the city editor picked up the phone.

"Danny, I understand that Tom Biddle was booked about five tonight."

"I don't think so, George. Where'd you hear it?"

"Some copper goes with my wife's sister, and he told her that he was going off duty, and he hears some guys talking in the garage about it. Phil Biddle's just married that girl on the Hill, and I don't think he'd like it. Call me." The city editor hung up.

So. So now George smelled it. Now it was getting to be just swell. Now it was really getting good. Danny sat for a moment, his legs crossed, one leg swinging freely. Then he rose, closed the door of his office and returned to his chair.

He picked up the phone, asked the operator for the number that the desk sergeant had given him. "Hello, hello, this is Danny Nyack. Is Phil there? Phil Biddle, who do you think? Nyack. Danny Nyack. Yeah. I'll wait."

A harsh, rasping voice said, "Biddle."

"Phil, this is Danny Nyack. Did you call me?"

"Yes, I did, Danny boy. How have you been? How's your mother? I haven't seen either of you for quite some long time."

"She's fine, Phil, fine. As a matter of fact I gave her the courtesy card you sent me, and you know, Phil, she tipped the driver two-bits." They both laughed. "She felt sorry for the poor boy, she said."

"She's a wonderful woman, Danny. You know what I think of your mother. I'm proud that she rides in my cabs."

"Thanks, Phil, thanks."

"Danny, you know what I called for?"

"Tom?"

"That's it, Danny. I've got the farmer and the rig all taken care of. I don't want any mess, Danny. I want Tom and I don't want it printed."

You don't want it printed, Danny thought. Who the devil are you to keep stories out of the paper? Well, brother, you'll keep it out, but you'll pay. And how, you'll pay.

"It'll take five bills Phil."

The man on the other end of the line whistled softly, "What's the matter, Danny? Cost of living gone up?"

"There are a lot of people to see, Phil. You know I don't care as far as I'm concerned. I'm happy to do it, you know that."

"You're the boss, Danny boy. I'll be down about nine. Have Tom outside for me, will you, Danny boy?"

Danny hung up and sat for a moment. Then he walked to Jim Dorsey's office. "I'll have the two hundred here for you about midnight, Jim, but he wants Tom at nine o'clock."

"All right, Danny, you're giving the orders." Danny looked at the big man, but Dorsey had completely dismissed him, and was reading some investigation reports on his desk. Danny left the office and walked around to the other side of the building into the central fire department switchboard. He checked the log book for fire runs then talked for almost a half hour with the operator about a fishing party that both had been on the previous summer, and left.

His office was cold when he came back. He shut the window that looked out on a court, and sat down once more. Danny picked up the phone, listened for a dial tone, dialed his office number, said, "Forget it," when the operator answered, and hung up. He thought for a moment, then picked up the phone again and asked for George Hewitt.

Hewitt said, "City desk," and Danny said, "George? Danny. Look, George, that Tom Biddle yarn is a phony. Some farmer ran his rig off the road out on the Post Road and when the coppers

got there, here was Tom stiff, and they figured he'd smashed the guy up, but the farmer tells them that's all there is to it, and this guy that was with Biddle, I don't know his name was, the coppers told him to drive, and that was the end of it."

"You're sure, kid?" Hewitt's voice was friendly.

"That's it, George."

"All right, Danny. Thanks a lot."

Danny hung up and turned to see a tall, thin man dressed in somber shades of black and gray standing in the doorway of the office. He rose and asked if the man was looking for someone.

"My name," the man said, "is Reverend T. L. Johnson. I am pastor of Trinity Church, Mr. Nyack, and I should like to speak with you for a few minutes if you will be good enough to spare me the time."

"I'm sorry, Reverend, but I don't remember meeting you." Danny took a handkerchief from a jacket pocket and wiped the straight-backed chair that rested next to the desk.

"Thank you, Mr. Nyack. We have never met." The reverend sat down carefully in the chair. "Mr. Nyack, you are very well known in the city. You have achieved the strange effect of gathering about you a great deal of notoriety, that, because it cannot be supported by concrete evidence, must remain entirely a matter of conjecture. There is about you an aura of mysticism which I sometimes wish that I might enjoy. Mr. Nyack, I've come to ask a favor."

Danny said nothing.

"Mr. Nyack, in a few minutes the coroner's office will call the police department to report a suicide. The woman's name is of no importance to you, although I imagine that you will be checking it soon. This woman is a parishioner of mine. That is, she was. She was seventy-two years old, and for the past six years has been suffering from cancer. She has not been out of bed for two years. Her sufferings have been unbearable, and I will admit that at times I have asked the Almighty for a merciful death soon. She lived with a married daughter and her son-in-law; honest, hard-working folk. She has two sons, both married, both living in the city, both with families.

"No member of that family, Mr. Nyack, has the slightest claim to notoriety, or publicity, or newspaper space. They have never done anything to warrant it. But this evening when the woman's daughter brought her dinner to the room, she found her dead—both wrists slashed." The reverend stopped and looked for Danny to say something.

"I don't get it, Reverend. Where do I come in?"

"Mr. Nyack, you are employed on the *Morning Times*—the only

morning paper in the city. In my dealings with the press I have come to learn the value of 'spot news'; today's news is tomorrow's history. I think that is correct. If you don't call the story in, you save the woman's entire family a great deal of anguish and sorrow.

"I have learned, too, that news is news, and that if it warrants news space, it must be called in. Yet, what difference will it make to your readers, and what possible difference can it make to you, whether or not the story is printed. This woman had an extremely small circle of friends, she is known by the smallest fraction of the city's population. I've come to ask you not to call that story in to your paper, Mr. Nyack."

Danny sat silent. He brought his hands together in front of his face, fingertips touching. He bent his head, then raised it, and looked up at the pastor.

From the inside pocket of his coat, Danny took a handsome leather wallet. He looked carefully into the wallet, then extracted a newspaper clipping. Danny held it forward and the pastor took it from him. That was in our paper a month ago, Reverend."

The pastor read the small clipping: "Richard A. (Dick) Lawson, 24, son of the publisher of the *Morning Times,* and former state amateur golf champion, forfeited $100 bail in municipal court Monday when he failed to appear on a charge of driving while drunk. Lawson was arrested Saturday night, after he had driven his car through the guard rails of the Ninth Street Bridge."

The reverend handed the clipping back to Danny. Danny smiled, "I call them all in, Reverend. That's the way we run our paper."

The pastor rose and buttoned his coat. He extended a hand toward Danny. "Thank you very much for your patience. It's a fine thing to know that we have such an honest newspaper in the city, Mr. Nyack."

Danny released his hand from the reverend's, and walked with him to the front door of the station, holding the door open. They shook hands again, and Danny walked back to his office. So I'm getting to be a gentleman, he thought. Twelve years in the business and I'm giving him ethics. Well, I'm certainly getting to be a dandy, yes, I am.

He called Leonard Alton, the coroner's deputy, learned the facts of the case, including the survivors and their addresses, and then checked with the morgue and the coroner, and nodded his head silently when he learned there would be a post-mortem the next day. He hung up and called his office.

"Ed," he told the rewrite man, "here's a suicide, might make a story. Here's Mary, F for Frank, Hurlihee. H for Harry, u, r, no, r for Robert, l, i, h for Harry,

double e, no, double e for Edward. That's right, H-u-r-l-i-h-e-e. Mrs. Yeah. She's seventy-two, cancer for six years, lived with a daughter, Mrs. J for Jack, H for Harry, Smith. Yeah. 415 Amsterdam. Yeah. This woman's been bedridden. Daughter takes care of her. Well, this afternoon 'bout five, the daughter comes in to feed her and here's the old lady in bed with both wrists ripped. Yeah, dead as a doornail. That's it. She's got two sons, William and Eli, live at 79 S. Wabash. Yeah. Three kids, eight grandchildren. That's it. No, nothing much else, quiet night. And tell George some reverend might call him to keep it out."

He walked downstairs, through a long hall, and out into a huge garage. He went into a small office at one corner of the garage, picked up the ledger marked "Ambulance" and, using the phone in the garage, called the office and gave them the ambulance runs for the last twenty-four hours. He called the police operator and told him he would be in the garage for a time, and if anything came up, to call him there. Five men: the ambulance driver, the doctor, a traffic cop going on duty in an hour, the garage mechanic and the wagon driver were playing five and ten rummy. Danny sat down.

"Say, Doc, I wanted to ask you." Danny began. "Ma doesn't look so good—"

"Listen, Danny," the doctor threw his cards on the table, "will you let your mother alone? I saw her last week, and she's fine. Just let her alone. She'll outlive both of us."

The other men laughed, and Danny smiled shamefacedly. He was dealt into the game, and played for an hour and a half, losing eighty cents. The sharp three bells of the fire gong broke the steady silence and Danny put his coins in his pocket and ran to the central switchboard.

"Whatya got, Joe?" he asked the operator.

"Giant Aircraft again, the sprinkler system," the operator exclaimed. "There ain't no more fire out there than there is in your pocket, but that damn alarm rings just the same."

"Thanks, Joe." Danny used the operator's phone, and told George Hewitt that the aircraft fire was a phony. The office had a police radio which picked up all fire and police calls, and an aircraft plant fire, even a dud, would require explanation to the city editor.

Danny went back to the office, looked up the phone number of the plant president and called him. He explained hesitatingly that he didn't want to bother the executive, but an alarm for the plant had just been sounded, that he—Danny—had checked it and it was just the sprinkler system. The executive thanked him, asked him what brand of bourbon he

drank, and when Danny told him to forget it, the executive insisted on both his preference and Danny's home address, and told him he could expect a case of whiskey. Danny told him and thanked him again, and hung up. He called a tavern owner, asked what the case was worth to him, and sold it immediately, promising to deliver it within a week.

He lit another cigarette, looked at the watch on his wrist, and saw that it was eight minutes past nine. He sat quietly with legs crossed, smoking the cigarette leisurely, occasionally tugging at his left sock. It was fifteen past nine when he dropped the butt to the floor, took his coat and hat from the door and walked to the front door of the building.

He searched the street for a sign of Phil. He noticed the familiar top light of one of Phil's cabs, parked a half block from the station, its usually bright light only a dim glow in the quiet street.

He walked back to Jim Dorsey's room. The captain of detectives sat quietly in his chair, his feet on the desk, his hands folded over a big stomach. Danny shut the door behind him.

"You got him, Jim?" Danny's voice was a little excited.

"Take it easy, kid, take it easy. I've got him. He's in there." Jim's head jerked to his left toward a door that was closed.

"All right, then. Let me have him and let's get this thing over with."

"Easy, kid, easy. There's a matter of the two hundred fish to take care of."

"Well, for Pete's sake, don't you trust me?"

The big man laughed. He laughed easily, and then gradually became convulsed with laughter. He laughed until tears came from his eyes. He laid his head on the table, and his hat fell from his head, and still he laughed.

He looked up at Danny standing there, and wiped his eyes with a handkerchief. "Kid, you're going to kill me one of these days. Honest to Pete, you're going to kill me. Listen," his voice was hard and cold now. "The only reason that I ever got to be captain around here is that I never trusted nobody. I trust as many people as you do. You know that as well as I do. Who the hell are you to ask me if I trust you? No, I don't trust you. Why should I? You're telling me that you'll be lucky if you wind up with a dollar on this deal, and I'm telling you that you're a liar. But that's all right, that's okay. All I want is my yard and I want that now." He banged a heavy fist down on the table.

"You said midnight." Danny's voice was injured.

"I don't give a hoot what I said. Tom Biddle's in there. For me, he's just another lob. I don't care if Phil Biddle is his brother.

I never backed away from Phil Biddle when he was running every game and every chippy in town, besides all the rotten poison that he sold, and I'm not backing away now. That's all. You go and get me that yard, and the other for the boys, and you'll get Tom. And get it fast. I'm tired of waiting."

Danny left the room and went to his office. From a drawer in the table, he took a long, tan, stamped envelope. He put it in the typewriter, typed his name, address and zone number on the envelope, and took it out again, placing it in the pocket of his coat.

He walked out of the building again, and over to the cab. He opened the door and got inside. Phil Biddle sat in a corner, quietly smoking. A glass pane separated them from the driver.

"Hello, Phil." Danny sat quietly, his legs folded, keeping his coat together with his hands in his pockets.

"Danny, how are you, old boy?" Phil Biddle waited quietly.

"Phil, I've got to have that dough first. Tom's in there and I'll have him out here in five minutes, but I'll need that dough first."

"What's the matter, Danny, don't you trust me?"

"I'm sorry, Phil, honest, but I've got to have the dough. I don't care as far as I'm concerned, but they want theirs. Now."

Phil Biddle reached into an inside pocket and extracted an envelope. He handed it to Danny and the reporter started to leave. Phil Biddle's hand moved and enveloped Danny's wrist. "Count it, Danny."

"What the hell, Phil!"

Phil Biddle rapped sharply on the window behind the driver. "Watch this, Frank." The driver turned and looked at Danny.

"All right, Danny, count it," Phil said.

Danny looked from one to the other. He smiled and opened the envelope. He counted five one-hundred-dollar bills. He shoved the money back into the envelope and opened the door of the cab.

"Five minutes, Phil. Drive around the back," he said, and walked away from the cab. Inside the door of the station was a small darkened vestibule. He stopped here, removed the five hundred-dollar bills from the envelope. He put three bills into the envelope he had addressed to himself, sealed it and dropped it in a mail chute that stretched the length of the room against a wall. The two remaining hundreds went into his pocket.

He looked around, stood there long enough to light a cigarette, and walked toward Dorsey's office.

He stopped just before Jim Dorsey's desk, shut the door behind him, and while the big man watched him as unemotionally as though he were reading a routine report, Danny took the two bills

from his trousers' pocket, and placed them before the detective.

Dorsey picked up the money, put it in his pocket, and picked up the phone on his desk. "Get Jack Johnson in here," he said, and hung up. He threw Danny a ring of keys, which the reporter caught, and Danny walked toward the door to his right. He tried two keys without success, the third opened the door, and he walked in.

Tom Biddle sat in a chair in a bare room, the stupid look of the habitual drunkard etched into the lines on his face. "Come on, Tom, let's go." Danny took his arm, and steered him through a door that was opposite the one that opened into Dorsey's room. They entered a darkened corridor, walked along it to a flight of stairs. Danny held him by the arm, while they walked up a flight of stairs, turned to the left, walked the length of another darkened corridor, and then down another flight of stairs. They emerged from the back of the building and walked directly to Phil's cab which was waiting in the darkened parking lot that stretched behind the building.

The door of the taxi was open when they reached it. Danny helped Tom into the cab. Phil Biddle sat in a corner away from his brother. Tom let his hand fall back onto the seat and was asleep in an instant.

Danny leaned into the cab, supporting himself with his left hand on the back of the front seat. Phil leaned over, put out his right hand, and Danny took it.

"Thanks, Danny, you're still number one in my book."

Danny smiled. "You've always been there in mine, Phil." He took the cabman's hand and shook it.

"No hard feelings, old boy?"

"No hard feelings."

"Remember me to the mother."

"Sure, Phil."

"Good night, old boy."

"Good night, Phil."

Danny slammed the door of the taxi, and walked rapidly away from it. He heard the motor catch and listened to the roar of the engine as it left the lot, but didn't turn.

He walked back to Dorsey's office, asked the big man if he wanted to get some coffee and when the captain arose, he called the paper to talk to the city editor.

"Hello, George. This is Danny. George, I'm clean here, not a thing, no, nothing. George, I'm going down to the Polack's with Jim Dorsey. No. Maybe half, three-quarters of an hour. I don't know, he wants to tell me something." He looked at the big man and winked. "No, not a thing, George. Quiet night."

Danny offered a cigarette to the detective, who lit a match for both of them, and they left the room.

THE saint's RATINGS

The wheel turns full circle

and it looks like the mystery writers' sins have come home to roost. By now we are all used to seeing movies made from mystery novels. Or as happens too many times, made from an idea suggested by a word in the title of the story. And TV as well has adapted many ideas that first saw the light of day in magazines and books. But now the inevitable has finally happened. Books are being adapted from TV and movie stories. With uniformly bad results. The story is *still the thing. Those tricked-out gimmicks may look good on the screen, but they* read *as brilliantly as last year's railroad timetable.*

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ashcan

THE BODY LOOKS FAMILIAR, by Richard Wormser (Dell, 25¢)

Intrigue in high places, with the criminals well up in the top ranks of the police and D. A.'s office—and the decent lads right at the bottom being stamped on. An off-beat, suspenseful, well written and absorbing story that will keep you nailed down until it's finished. You won't be able to find the hero until you have reached the end. And—wonder of wonders—you won't have missed him. Grab it.

ASSIGNMENT—ANGELINA, by Edward S. Aarons (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Wowee, it's all here! Including a killing in the men's room at Grand Central Terminal, a murder-by-murder tour of the U. S., and a super Nazi war secret. When the story slows a bit, a fine selection of full-bosomed, hay-rolling girls do their best to distract detective Sam Durell and the reader. Author Aarons just manages to tie this booming collection of assorted items into a quick-moving story—with an ending that is pure science-fiction.

WEST SIDE JUNGLE, by Jason Ridgway (Signet, 25¢)

Everyone wants that two hundred thousand in cash—and what they go through to get it! This book is dedicated to the idea that money is corrupting and *no one* stays honest once they get a sniff of that cool long green. Violence follows the money and sex mixes with the violence to keep things jumping. Don't let the title fool you though. This yarn may start in the West Side of New York City. But before it's through it has covered more of the country than a campaigning politician.

DRAGNET: THE CASE OF THE COURTEOUS KILLER, by Richard Deming (Pocket Books, 25¢)

Here's good ole' Joe Friday, pulled off the TV screen, popped into a book —and playing the absolute fool. A perfect example of good material wasted by being crammed into a formula that just doesn't fit. An intriguing story is paced smoothly by Deming. But every time you get interested . . . BANG. One of those meaningless Joe and Frank, low-key, laconic conversations hits you right in the eye.

CRY TERROR, by Andrew L. Stone (Signet, 25¢)

You'll cry too if you read this one. So obviously adapted from the shooting script of a movie that it reads like camera instructions instead of prose. It may make a good film, but the book is a complete waste of time.

reward for survivors

by . . . George Harmon Coxe

The answer to why a Judge is missing and a reporter has been killed looks at Flash Casey behind a gun.

CASEY, number one camera, for the *Express,* filled the exposed film holder from his camera and shoved it into the bulky plate-case at his feet. He took out a fresh holder, slipped it into the camera, fastened the case and swung the strap over his shoulder; then he leaned his stomach against the fire rope and watched the blaze.

There was not much to it; the very nature of the source limited the spectacle. A three-story, wooden tenement; old, crumbling, dilapidated even for Kaley Street. A kindling wood structure which seemed to glory in the display and nourish the broad spearheads of fire belching from the windows along the front and one side, and rapidly making the ground floor a continuous spread of flame.

The hot, yellow glow made a glistening bronze mask of Casey's rugged face, and after a minute or so he became aware of what felt like an acute attack of sunburn.

He said, "What the hell," irritably, as though disgusted at his wrapt attention, and ran his

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George Harmon Coxe, author of the just published THE IMPETUOUS MISTRESS *(Knopf, $2.95) and the recent* ONE MINUTE PAST EIGHT *(Knopf) is a former President of the Mystery Writers of America. Prominent in the field since the mid-thirties, he is perhaps best known for his many novels about Casey.*

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hand over the soft fabric of his ulster.

It was hot to the touch and he grunted, turned away and began to look for Wade, his fellow cameraman, in the crowd behind the fire lines.

A white helmet caught his eye. He bucked through to a battalion chief whose name escaped him, but whose face was familiar. He saw then that the chief was talking with Jim Trask.

Trask said: "Hi, Flashgun."

Casey grunted an answer, let the plate-case slide from his shoulder, spoke to the chief.

"I hear there was a guy caught in there."

"If he was," the chief growled, "he's still there."

"Well," Casey said, "it won't be long, anyway. In an hour you can wet down the foundation and go home."

"If it don't spread and wipe out the block." The chief's tone was annoyed and he cursed as his eyes swept the adjoining buildings.

Casey fell silent and followed the chief's gaze. A half dozen fat hose lines, criss-crossed on the street, continued to drench the side walls of the adjacent brick tenements which, fortunately, were set back from the flaming structure. A derrick-like water tower had waddled into position in the middle of the pavement and was alternately wetting down every nearby roof.

Casey glanced at Trask. "You eat it up, huh?"

Trask shrugged. One of the city's leading criminal lawyers, he was a nut on fires. Given an honorary appointment to the fire department, he had promptly ordered a gold replica of the official badge. A flash of that got him into the front row at every blaze.

Trask shrugged thick, overcoated shoulders. He was a heavy-set man with an imposing mien, a coarse, brutal face and a contradictory, booming voice that was nurtured for courtroom use.

"I get a kick out of it, yes," he admitted defiantly. "Liked fires as a kid and never got over it."

Casey said: "Must be a complex," and then turned around in response to a tug on his arm.

Tom Wade was doing a dance, the routine of which consisted mainly of hopping from one foot to the other so that his chunky body bounced his plate-case in and out from his hip. His round, good-natured face looked strangely aggravated and he said: "We got enough. Let's go."

"Why?" Casey said. "It's warm here, ain't it?"

"Warm hell! It's hot—all but my feet. They're froze."

Casey hesitated, glanced down the street again. The side opposite the blaze was, with one exception, made up of third-rate apartment houses and tenements. The exception was a four-storied, brick loft building with a plumb-

ing supply house on the ground floor. His glance slid up the dingy façade, focused on the roof and he said:

"Okey. One more shot. There's an alley back of that loft building. If there's a fire-escape I can get to the roof. It oughtta make a good shot from there—and I might catch her when the walls go."

He started through the crowd. Wade stopped hopping and grinned. "I'll go with you."

"You stay here," Casey grunted. "You'd never make it with those cold feet of yours."

Once one of the crowd, Casey broke into a trot. He swung right at the corner, jogged into thick shadows. The mouth of the alley was an opaque black curtain, and to eyes accustomed to the glare of the fire, the alley, itself, was an inky crevasse with no end, no floor.

He jogged on, keeping to what he thought was the middle of the cobblestone paving. He kept his head down, squinting vainly for guidance. He must have looked directly at that boxlike obstruction. But he did not see it; did not know it was there until his toe caught it.

He was off balance, his weight was all wrong. That right foot, just starting its step, stopped short and the rest of him kept on going. One knee hit the paving first; then he went flat on the cobblestones and slid along on the camera which had caught under his chest. The bulky plate-case, slung around one shoulder, plopped down on the back of his neck.

It took Casey several seconds to collect himself. The complete suddenness of the fall seemed to aggravate the jar. The wind was knocked from his body and he had to roll off the camera before he could get his breath. Once he got it he began to swear.

He got to his feet, retrieved his hat and plate-case, and as he groped for the camera, his hand touched the box-like object responsible for his fall. Seizing this outlet for his outraged feelings with savage delight, he caught one corner of the box and knocked it to the side of the alley with a combined heave and sweep of his arm.

Again he groped for his camera, snatched it up; then, as he turned to continue down the alley, his foot caught a second unseen object.

This time he did not fall; he merely stumbled. But the shock was greater; a cold, nervous shock that yanked his muscles taut and made his breath stick in his throat.

The object was soft, yielding.

Casey pulled his foot back. The complete blackness of the alley defied him. He shrugged off the plate-case and went quickly to one knee, his left hand grop-

ing. Stiff fingers touched cloth, found the buttons of an overcoat and as he bent close the fumes of whiskey tickled his nose.

He said, "Oh, a drunk, huh?" and there was relief in his hushed tones. He let his pent-up breath out slowly and found a match.

The little burst of flame threw a weird orange glow at his feet, picked up the outlines of a man who lay on his side. The hat had fallen off and he saw the profile of a thin face, hair that looked reddish and tousled. He pulled the man on his back, said: "Jeeze! Shorty Prendell," softly.

The match went out. Casey tore another from the paper packet and his mind found temporary acceptance in a satisfactory answer.

Shorty Prendell was a photographer for the *News,* a happy-go-lucky fellow, an habitual souse, good-natured, well-liked in spite of his irresponsible character. Casey had saved him his job more than once by covering an assignment for him, when he passed out; apparently he was running true to form.

Casey struck the second match and again the feeble glow settled upon the inert form. This time Casey's peering gaze slid down to Prendell's overcoat, slid down as far as the chest and stopped; and he sucked air and forgot about the whiskey breath.

There was an irregular round stain in the worn fabric of the gray overcoat—a reddish stain with frayed threads showing in the center.

For one brief moment Casey knelt there with his gaze riveted on the stain, and grappled with his thoughts while the stiff cold wind of the early March night swept the floor of the alley and tugged at his nerve ends. Then the match flame singed thumb and finger and he dropped it. Blackness wrapped around him, spurred him to action.

He left his case and camera, spun quickly and raced for the mouth of the alley, conscious of a dryness, a thickness in his throat.

There were three or four hundred people on Kaley Street, crowding the fire lines, hanging from windows, warming themselves and enjoying the blaze. There were firemen everywhere; but no policemen, not that Casey could see.

He found Wade right where he had left him. Wade was still dancing and he came up behind him and jerked him around.

Wade took one look at the white, grim lines of Casey's face and went wide-eyed and said: "What the—"

"Shorty Prendell," Casey flung out. "Shot. I stumbled over him in the alley. Get on a phone and—"

"Dead?"

"Call Logan!" Casey rapped, ignoring the question. "Tell him to bring a doctor. Save time. He oughtta make it in five minutes." He hesitated while Wade battled his surprise, added: "Snap into it! I'm goin' back."

In the alley again, Casey moved cautiously forward until he reached Prendell's body. He struck another match, glanced at the thin face. Then he wiped a damp palm on his coat and reached for a limp wrist. He held his breath while he felt for a pulse; then he let it out in a silent blast and gently eased the lifeless hand back on the cobblestones.

Casey was hunched there in the darkness, sitting on his heels smoking a cigarette when Wade came into the alley. Casey called to him, directed his steps and Wade crouched beside him and said:

"Is he—"

"Yeah," Casey said wearily. "A slug in the chest."

Wade whispered an awed oath, fell silent, finally said: "Why? What's it all about? What—"

"How do I know?" Casey clipped and his voice was angry, irritable from reaction. "I stumbled over him—over his platecase. Maybe he came back for the same reason I did. Maybe he came back to sneak a couple snifters out of his bottle. Somebody let him have it. Somebody might've had it in for him, or—" He broke off in a curse. "How the hell do I know?"

Wade said: "Jeeze. He was a swell guy."

"Yeah," Casey said. "And he's got a wife. And he was a souse and that made it tough for her. But he was a good guy. I'd like to get a crack at the punk that did it."

The two photographers were crouched there in silence when the police car jerked to a stop at the mouth of the alley. Two men swung to the sidewalk and became running silhouettes against the faint background of reflected light. A yellow cone from a flashlight swept the floor and sides of the alley, focused on Casey's face and Lieutenant Logan's voice flared: "Dead?" sharply.

Casey said: "Yeah."

The man with Logan, a vague, unrecognizable figure to Casey knelt beside Shorty Prendell, unbuttoned the coat, slid hands and fingers about in the semi-darkness."

"Shot twice," he said finally and stood up. "It's the Examiner's job all right and he's still warm."

Logan said: "Thanks, Doc. Tell the driver to take you home and then come back here."

When the doctor withdrew Logan turned to Casey. "Let's have it."

Casey told him what he knew, and was bitterly conscious that he

had but little to tell. Logan began a search of the alley.

"Well," Wade's voice was hesitant, guilty. "Er—hadn't we ought to get a couple pictures?"

Casey said, "Yeah," wearily. "With your box. I can't use mine till I look it over in the light."

Both ends of the alley were guarded by plain-clothes men. The examiner's physician had just finished his examination and he had but little to offer in the way of additional information.

"In the back," he said as he snapped his bag shut. "Looks like he was running, from the way he fell. One slug still in him; I'll turn it over to ballistics and give you a report tomorrow."

The little group around the body fell silent as the examiner left. Feet shuffled on the cobblestone floor and cigarette ends glowed and vaguely illuminated masklike faces. Logan spoke first and his voice was sullen, jerky.

"Not a thing. Not a damned thing but two empty shells." He turned to the lieutenant from the precinct house, and Casey whispered to Wade:

"You better beat it. The couple shots I got of the fire ain't worth a damn alongside this. Take my case with you and—"

"But what're you gonna do?" Wade asked dubiously.

"Me?" Casey grunted. "Me—I'm gonna stick with Logan."

"Then why can't I—"

"Will you quit arguin'? You took the pictures—develop 'em. It ain't my job, is it? G'wan, now. Take my case. If they need my two shots, develop 'em. But they probably won't."

"All right, all right," Wade grumbled. He groped around in the darkness, shouldered the two plate-cases and started down the alley.

Logan said: "Listen, Flash, don't you know if Prendell was working on something that—"

"How would I know?" Casey hesitated. "Why don't you get those other *News* guys in here?"

"I will," Logan jerked out. And he did not have to go far. He found the men he sought trying to argue their way past the plain-clothes man at the alley's entrance, and brought them back.

With the help of the flashlights, Casey recognized them both. Beardsley, a photographer, and Kelly, a legman. Logan gave them a few seconds to get used to the atmosphere of death, then he said:

"Come on, now. Gimme a lead. We ain't got to first base yet. What was he workin' on?"

"Nothing that I know of," Kelly said. "The three of us came down here in a taxi. Shorty'd had a couple drinks, and he still had the bottle. I didn't see him again after we got out of the cab."

"But wasn't he workin' on something else — before this,

maybe?" Logan pressed. "Think, damn it!"

Kelly hesitated. Casey heard Beardsley opening his camera, and the *News* photographer seemed to do his work, instinctively, automatically. It was apparent his mind was elsewhere because he kept saying: "Jeeze!" Then, "What would they kill him for? He never hurt a fly. Jeeze!"

Kelly seemed to shake himself, spoke regretfully. "I don't know. He wasn't workin' on anything that I know of." He turned there in the darkness and spoke to Casey. "You know, Flash. He was a swell little guy when he was sober. But the bottle was gettin' him. He was slippin', never got any big assignments any more. I don't think he was workin' on anything."

"Well, hell!" Logan exploded. "Can't I get any co-operation? What am I, a magician or something? Somebody better know something or it'll go down in the books as a bust. A newspaper guy gets knocked off and every sheet in town'll yell its head off. But that's all. Yell and take it out on the department."

"We'll find something," Casey said and there was a certain grim conviction in his tone.

"Talk," Logan snorted. "You find him dead. With that fire nobody'd pay any attention to this alley. Nobody saw him come in here. How the hell—"

The fading wail of a siren stopped him. An ambulance lurched slowly into the alley, its headlights exploding light over the cobblestones. Two white-coated internes swung off the rear step with a stretcher, set it down beside Shorty Prendell.

Casey watched the thin form being lifted to the canvas and his fingers flexed and he became conscious of that tightening of the throat. A dull, gnawing resentment smoldered deep within him. A bitter sense of frustration, born under the goading of his helplessness, warped his thoughts.

Murdered. A harmless little guy like Shorty. But something would come to light that would help. There'd be a break some place. And Logan could weave the breaks together if anyone could. He watched the stretcher disappear, heard the doors slap shut. The ambulance backed down the alley and its bell clanged jarringly to clear a path across the sidewalk.

He turned quickly then, spoke bruskly to hide his feelings. "You'd better take his camera and case in when you go, Beardsley. And"—he hesitated, continued hurriedly—"if they take up some dough for his wife or anything, count me in."

Casey rolled over in bed, tucked his head under the covers for a moment, then stuck his nose

out and blinked angry eyes at the insistently shrilling telephone on the bedside table. Each strident burst jarred the back of his head and in self defense he reached out, removed the receiver, dropped it.

He growled an oath, rolled over on his back. He stretched himself awake; for a second or two he enjoyed the luxury of a completely relaxed brain; then the thoughts of the previous night, and Shorty Prendell's death, flooded his mind and he sat up, scowling, at once troubled and resentful.

Reaching for the telephone, he pulled it over to his chest, fumblingly retrieved the dangling receiver, growled: "Yeah?"

The answering terse, incisive voice belonged to Blaine, city editor of the *Express*. This surprised him because he thought it was early and Blaine did not come on the desk until after lunch.

"What's the matter with you?" Blaine said.

"Matter with who?" Casey growled.

"You, dammit. Why didn't you bring that picture in yourself, develop it yourself, tell somebody about it?"

"What picture?" Casey said wonderingly.

"It looks like the biggest thing in months," Blaine went on crisply. "But that don't excuse you for running out on the job. Now get down here—and in a hurry. Logan's waiting."

"Listen," Casey rapped, "what—" He listened, said, "Hello," jiggled the receiver arm and finally slapped the telephone back on the stand and made noises in his throat.

Reaching under his pillow, he got his watch, saw that it was only ten after nine. He knew he was not due at the office for a couple hours and he said, "What's eatin' him? What the hell picture is he squawkin' about?"

He swung his feet to the floor, ran thick fingers through a shock of curly dark hair that was streaked with gray at the temples. For a moment he sat there on the edge of the bed, scowling, his stiff arms angling out at his sides, propping him up. He reached for the telephone, then changed his mind about calling Blaine back.

"Now that he's got me up," he grumbled, "I might as well go down. Boy, what a job!"

He pulled his pajama top off over his head, stood up and stepped out of the pants. For a moment he remained poised there, a big, naked, thick-chested figure, and grappled with Blaine's words.

He had not gone back to the paper last night. Wade had the necessary pictures, and he, Casey, had stuck with Logan for an hour or so, until he saw that further

developments in the murder case were unlikely until morning. It was nearly two o'clock then and he had stopped in an all-night coffee shop for sandwiches before coming home.

"Nerts," he said finally and went into the bathroom.

He took a quick shower and a shave. Within ten minutes he was fully dressed, and he had just picked up his ulster when the knock came at the door.

The knock annoyed him for some reason, and he put on his ulster and glared at the door without answering. The knock was repeated, vigorously, sharply.

Casey growled, "In a minute," then crossed the room, snapped back the lock and turned the knob.

There were two men in the hall. Casey knew one of them: a small, skinny fellow with a pale, wedge-shaped face and small shifty eyes. Sid Glasek. The other fellow, a thick-necked bruiser with a flat nose and scarred brows was a stranger.

Glasek pushed back his derby, said: "Hello, Flash," nodded to the thick-necked fellow and the two of them stepped across the threshold.

Casey frowned, stepped back, trying to figure things out. Glasek was a petty larceny politician, a punk and— He said: "I was just goin' out—and I'm in a hurry."

Glasek was warily apologetic. "It won't take a minute. He just wants to know if you got your camera and plate-case here."

"Yeah?" Casey's brows lifted skeptically and his voice got thin. "Why?"

The thick-necked fellow closed the door and put both hands in the pockets of his worn blue overcoat. Glasek shrugged, pushed his derby still farther back.

"We wanta take a look."

"You'd better beat it," Casey said and his brows came down. "I'm in a hurry."

Glasek's shifty eyes spied the camera on the center table. "There's no use gettin' tough about it. Show us the camera and case and we'll beat it."

"You'll beat it anyway," Casey clipped, "or maybe you wanta—"

"We wanta look around," the thick-set man cut in hoarsely. Casey glanced at him, watched the fellow take a heavy automatic from his coat pocket, deliberately turn it over in his hand and replace it so that the muzzle jutted threateningly forward. "And maybe you'd better pull in your neck while we do it."

Casey's eyes flared behind narrowed lids, but he made his voice disgusted. "Maybe you're right."

He stepped to the davenport, perched on the edge. The camera had nothing in it, was probably broken although he had not looked. And Wade had taken the plate-case to the office. The thick-necked fellow stood by the door and watched him, and Glasek

searched the room, went into the bedroom, came back and spread his hands.

"Okey," he said, but he said it regretfully. "If it ain't here, it ain't here. You see? We didn't want any trouble." He moved to the door. "Nothing to get het up about. No hard feelings."

"Oh, no," Casey said and his lip curled. "No. Come in an' look around any time—any time you got some punk with a gun."

"Don't get smart!" the thick-necked fellow blustered.

Glasek said, "Come on," and opened the door.

Casey watched it close and he glared at the panels for a moment as he reached for a cigarette. "That kind of stuff burns me up," he fumed. "And I hate riddles."

He crossed to the two front windows, glanced up at the heavy, sullen sky, down at the bleak and sunless street. Glasek and his hood were just getting into a taxi. Casey saw that it was a Blue and White. He noticed the number—T36746—and repeated it absently, half aloud.

Farrar, a rewrite man, was on the desk when Casey swung into the nearly deserted *Express* city room at nine-fifty, and he glanced up, said:

"Blaine's in Magrath's office. He's waiting for you."

"Yeah," Casey said. "I had an idea he was." He moved into a corridor behind the desk, turned into an office whose frosted glass panel said: T. A. Magrath, Managing Editor.

Blaine was sitting at the desk. Logan, opposite Blaine, turned and spoke over his shoulder before Casey got the door shut.

"You didn't hurry, did you?" he leered. Then, with a voice that snapped: "Hours we waste, you cluck. And all the time you—"

"Wait a minute," Casey barked. "What—"

"Sit down," Blaine said, "and listen."

Casey unbuttoned his ulster, made two more attempts to break through Logan's rush of words. Finally he muttered an oath, dropped into a chair beside the desk, and remained scowlingly silent, aware that some mistake had been made, but stubbornly unwilling now to try and explain until he heard the rest of the story.

Blaine, sitting stiffly behind the desk, his clothing immaculate, his gray hair smoothly parted, watched Casey and there was condemnation in his cold, gray eyes.

Casey watched Logan as he listened to his story and he saw that the lieutenant's handsome, smooth-shaven face was tense, a bit grim, that the black eyes were sharp and glaring.

"I don't know if it hooks up with Prendell or not," he was

saying. "But this line we've got on Judge Ottleib is plenty hot."

Ottleib. Judge Ottleib had been missing for more than a month. The name jerked Casey's thoughts from Logan.

At first the police had gone on the theory that his disappearance was a straight kidnaping job. But there had been no ransom notes, no demands of any kind. The theory shifted. For a short time it was thought he might have been murdered by some criminal he had sentenced and who sought vengeance. Then some investigator turned up information that clouded the issue still further.

Judge Ottleib received a salary of $17,500 a year. But in the past four years he had, in different banks, made deposits of nearly a hundred thousand dollars. And these deposits were almost entirely made of cash. With something to get their teeth into, the District Attorney's office began to unearth irregularities of other types. Certain criminal lawyers—Arnostein — Myers — Trask — had been thoroughly questioned. A record of cases tried under Ottleib showed a preponderance of decisions in their favor. Trask particularly had been fortunate in his verdicts under Ottleib.

But proof was lacking. And the disappearance of the Judge became a matter of personal opinion—that and nothing more. He was kidnaped, he was murdered, he intentionally disappeared.

"But I didn't have a lead," Logan broke in on Casey's thoughts. "No lead, no nothing; so I checked up on the guy that burned up in that tenement."

"It was straight, then, huh?" Casey said.

"Not so straight," Logan drawled sardonically. "But a guy burned up, yeah. The inspectors think the fire was set, but they can't be sure because the blaze wiped out everything. There's nothing left of this guy except bone ashes and teeth and a ring and a key—one of them law fraternity keys."

Logan grunted, stared at Casey and his eyes narrowed.

"The ring and the key were Judge Ottleib's."

Casey whistled and his eyes widened and Logan said: "We don't know how long he lived in that shack. Nobody in the neighborhood remembers him much until about a week ago. I showed 'em a picture of Ottleib. He's the guy that's been living there and the way it looks he's been there all the time. But he laid low at first when his picture was in the papers and everything, just started comin' out when the thing died down."

Logan pushed back in his chair. "The thing's a natural, huh? No mystery. The Judge hides out and gets burned to death. Only you and that buil-

headed luck of yours run smack into a break again and knock the layout all to hell." Logan leaned forward. "Now, by gawd, I wanta know why you get a picture like that and then—"

"Wait a minute," Casey blasted, and anger flushed his face. "I'm gettin' fed up with these riddles. Where'd you get the picture?"

"Out of your plate-case," Blaine said and his tone was sarcastically polite. "Wade brought it in, but all he developed was his own stuff. That's about all I could expect from him. But you—"

"I've probably heard it before," Casey said caustically. "What's the rest of it?"

"Wade forgot about your shots. He didn't remember until early this morning. Then he called in about a quarter of eight and told Farrar maybe we'd better see what you had."

"That's not his fault," Casey said. "I told him he didn't need to bother with my stuff. I didn't have anything but a couple of routine shots that—"

"Routine?" grated Logan. "Why you held out on me, you louse."

Casey stood up. "Let's see this masterpiece of mine," he said quickly.

Blaine opened a drawer, took out a four-by-five print, handed it to Casey. The big photographer stared at it and his eyes went wide. He jerked his glance away from the print, looked at Blaine, wet his lips. Then he looked back at the picture again and the eyes narrowed.

The camera had caught three men moving down what looked like an alley. All three men were back to the camera, but two of them, apparently attracted by some noise, were looking over their shoulders. Both faces were distinct. The man in the center was Judge Ottleib; the big man at his right was Brad Shannon. The third man could not be recognized.

Logan's voice was harsh, accusing. "One of your friends gets knocked off and—"

"And," Casey clipped, "you think I'd have a picture like this and hold out on you? That's the kind of a punk you think I am, huh?"

"Well," Logan pressed.

"You took it, didn't you?" Blaine whipped.

"No."

"Then," choked Logan, "who—"

"I never saw it before," Casey said.

"Where'd it come from?" Blaine exploded. "Who took it?"

"Shorty Prendell," Casey said grimly and then stared sightlessly at the picture and tried to figure out definite and logical reasons to substantiate his conviction.

Casey placed the telephone

back on the desk and straightened up.

He looked at Blaine, then at the scowling and uncomprehending Logan. He took off his brown felt, wiped the sweatband, jammed it back on his head again.

"That's it," he said. "Beardsley says he tried to get me last night. There wasn't a single plate in my plate-case."

Logan took a deep breath and his nostrils dilated as he snuffed it out again. "He musta just taken it," he said thoughtfully. "He was tryin' to get away with it and somebody put the slug on him—twice. But I can't figure how—"

"Listen," Casey said and slid a thick thigh across the edge of the desk. "Suppose Shorty was out there sneakin' a drink. While he was standing there these three came along—came out of one of those back doors, maybe. Somehow he gets a look at 'em, recognizes Ottleib. He knew what he had, and he took a flash of 'em and tried to run.

"Maybe he took a few steps before they got him. He went down on his face and the camera and case flopped out in front of him. Whoever shot him knew he had a picture—"

"Then why the hell—" Logan began.

"Because I musta come along," Casey said slowly, trying to visualize just what he had done the night before. "They were probably looking for the plate-case. I came along and they ducked into a doorway or something to wait till I went past. But I fell over the plate-case—Shorty's.

"And when I got up I knocked it clear over to the side of the alley. Then I found him. And I left my case right there beside him. They thought it was his. It's gotta be that way. They were there all the time and they opened my case by mistake, took out all the plates."

Silence greeted this. Blaine rubbed a lean jaw nervously, swiveled his eyes to Logan, back to Casey. "All right," he said. "What's the rest of it?"

"I can guess for you," Casey said. "Logan moved my case to one side. I told Wade to bring that case to the office. But Wade didn't know, or didn't think, about there being two cases besides his own. He picked up the first one—Shorty's—and brought it in. Beardsley took mine.

"I fell on my camera—would not risk using it. If it hadn't been for that I'd probably opened the case and then there would not 've been any mix-up. But—" He broke off, continued as though talking to himself. "Shorty was good. He must've jerked that plate from his camera as soon as he snapped it; must've slipped it into the case as he ran and—"

Logan stood up with a savage grunt. "Talk about your breaks,"

he said. "I should've had this dope last night."

"You're lucky to get it at all," Blaine said. "If there hadn't been two cases, Ottleib would've got the plate and you'd still be thinking he burned to death."

Logan began to pace the floor, talking as he moved. "All right. We know why Prendell got it. One of those three guys shot him. We gotta find Ottleib or Shannon. And the hook-up between 'em fits."

Casey knew what Logan meant. Brad Shannon was the sort of private investigator who worked exclusively for lawyers. He could be found almost any day hanging around the City Hall corridors, or the Court House rotunda. On two occasions he had been forced to stand trial for jury fixing. And in one instance Jim Trask had been implicated.

"Shannon used to work for Trask," Logan said. "And with this picture of him and Ottleib, we know which way we're going. I'll have a talk with Trask, too."

"He was at the fire," Casey said and told of the conversation.

"We'll get a story from him," Logan grunted. "Only it probably won't be much. Trask is plenty smart and he knows the law. Nothing but facts'll work with him. It's Shannon we want —or Ottleib."

"And Glasek," Casey said. He mouthed a curse, told of what happened at his apartment that morning.

"We got something," Logan said when Casey finished. "They know now they muffed the picture." He turned to Blaine. "Don't run it till I okey it. Let 'em worry about it and—"

"It's not ours, anyway," Casey charged. "It's a *News* beat."

"I'll take care of that," Blaine said coldly.

"Yair?" Casey said. "Well, Shorty Prendell took it, and he oughtta get credit, even if it won't do him any good."

Blaine's eyes blazed. "If it hadn't been for you, and a pot full of luck, nobody'd have it. But at that, I don't steal pictures." His lips curled as he finished, and he reached for the telephone, asked for Murphy, managing editor of the *News*.

Casey thought about just one thing while Blaine talked: Shorty Prendell—and his wife. Casey had met Mrs. Prendell and he recalled her now. A small, quiet, tired-looking woman who seemed to accept the negative lot life had cast for her.

Beardsley had not been quite right about Shorty. He had never harmed anyone maliciously, and he had the sort of personality that made you like him even when he was wrong. But he had harmed his wife. Irreparably, it seemed, by incessant drinking. She worked in an office to offset his expenditures on liquor. Casey

brooded about all this, and more, before he finally remembered something that gave a new and hopeful twist to his reverie.

Blaine hung up, spoke sardonically. "It's okey with Murphy. We'll both run it. Satisfied, Casey?"

Casey stood up. "There was a reward, wasn't there?" he asked, ignoring Blaine's comment. "When Ottleib was first missing."

"There still is," Logan said dryly. "Twenty-five hundred." He looked curiously at Casey and there was an undertone of disdain, unusual in his relations with the photographer, in his voice. "Lookin' for your cut already?"

Casey caught Logan's gaze, held it as he moved to the door. His lips dipped at the corners and his eyes brightened and narrowed. "My pal, huh?" he grunted, and left the room.

Casey was slouched in a broken down chair in the photographic department a half hour later, his feet cocked on the desk top, a cigarette in his lips, when Wade came in.

The young photographer's guileless blue eyes were wide with interest and there was a breathless, eager quality about his stance as he stopped beside Casey.

"Hey," he flung out, "you know this guy Glasek that—"

"Yeah," Casey said.

"Well," Wade hurried on, "he and some hood come up to my place a little while ago and want to know about my camera and plate-case. They searched—"

Casey jerked erect in his chair, listened to Wade tell a story similar to his own.

"Now how the hell can you figure that out?" Wade wanted to know.

Casey stood up without answering, picked up his hat and shrugged into his ulster. "Come on," he said.

"Where?"

"Come on," Casey urged, starting for the door. "You remind me of an idea I've been too dumb to develop. It might be good."

"Yeah," Wade said, perplexed, "but where? Do I take the box or—"

"Why not?" Casey said. "We might need it. I want to check up on the Blue and White cab that carted Glasek and his hood around."

Casey and Wade were in luck. From the taxi office they found the driver had a stand on Providence and Boylston; and he was parked there when they reached the intersection. All this took but twenty minutes, and ten minutes after that they stood on Marlborough Street surveying the ancient vine-covered façade of a four-storied structure that had the appearance of a private house

which had been remodeled into small apartments.

Casey had related the incidents of the morning, had told about the mix-up in plate-cases. Wade made brief awkward apologies for his failure to pick the right case and to develop Casey's supposed plates the night before, and, reassured by Casey's manner, promptly forgot about everything but the job at hand.

"It's a break the driver remembered where Glasek went," he said.

"There was nothing to it," Casey said. "He went from my place to yours, and then here. Let's have a look."

They went up worn stone steps, flanked by a stone railing, stepped into a gloomy vestibule. There were more than a dozen name cards tacked over mail-boxes along the wall, cards which identified the house as both a residential and business place, furnishing studios for two music teachers, an artist, an interior decorator.

Casey looked at the names twice, grunted disgustedly: "All we draw is a blank."

Wade looked glum. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to find out who lives in each one of these apartments."

"You don't know any of 'em, do you?"

"My gawd," Casey growled, "do you always give your right name?"

Wade grinned and said, "Oh," and then went out to the top step, stood there a moment while Casey took out a cigarette. When he lighted it and inhaled, he said:

"Go down to that drugstore on the next corner and call Logan. I oughta pass him up after what he said, but I don't trust some of those Headquarters guys. You give 'em a tip and they freeze you out on the pay-off."

"What'll I tell him?" Wade asked dubiously.

Casey sighed wearily and shook his head. "What the hell do you think? Tell him to get down here. Let him dope up a way of going through the building."

Wade was gone about five minutes. The frown on his round, good-natured face told Casey the answer before he said:

"He ain't there. Just stepped out."

"Yeah," Casey stormed. "Stepped out with his foot on a rail." He scowled, looked up the façade of the building. "I don't want to take a chance on anybody else."

"Why don't we go through the place ourselves," Wade said.

"Sure," Casey sniffed. "And tip our mitt if anybody recognizes us."

"Well," Wade scratched behind his ear and his brows knotted, "then why don't we get your car, park it across the street and

watch the place. We could get a pint and—"

"Lay off," growled Casey. "You're wearin' me down." He flipped his cigarette away. "What we need is somebody to—" He broke off in a grunt of satisfaction and the scowl vanished as an idea caught in his brain, began to blossom. He said, "You wait across the street," and ran down the steps.

At the corner drugstore, he walked to the telephone booths, called the *Express* and a minute later was talking with Gowan, the City Circulator.

"Mac—Flash Casey. You got any solicitors in the office? Yeah. The guys that go around from house to house and ask if they want to take the *Express*. Yeah. Well send one to"—Casey gave the Marlborough Street address. "What? No, nobody wants to subscribe, dammit. I just want the guy to go through a house for me. I might get a lead on the Prendell job. If I do the circulation department might peddle a couple extra sheets. And listen, connect me with Jerry—in the morgue—our morgue. I'll have him bring some pictures down to this subscription guy."

The circulation solicitor was a hoarse-voiced, red-faced fellow with a faded black coat, a dusty derby and glasses.

Casey said: "Did you bring the pictures I told Jerry to give you?"

"Yeah. What do you want I should do?"

"Take a good look at those pictures," Casey said and waited while the fellow took them from his pocket and studied the faces of Ottleib, Shannon and Glasek. "Then go through this house just like you was selling subscriptions. If you see any of these guys beat it back here. I wanta know if—"

"How about orders?" the man wheezed. "I work on commission and if I can sell a coupla names—"

"Sell 'em, then," snorted Casey. "But shake it up and don't stop to gas with everybody in the building."

The man looked dubious and shook his head from side to side. Then he took a folded copy of the *Express* from his pocket and stepped through the vestibule and into the hallway beyond.

Wade, top-heavy with admiration, said: "Hey, Flash. That's a swell idea."

Casey said: "Sure," and stepped down in the areaway under the steps.

All through the noon hour they waited and the stiff, March wind swept the street and whirled and eddied about the areaway. Casey stamped his feet in a monotonous rhythm, and kept his hands in the ulster pockets, hunched the collar around his ears. Wade sat on his plate-case

and hugged his overcoat, and pulled his neck in like a turtle.

Traffic in the street was swift, sporadic, flowing and ebbing with the signal light on the Avenue. Some time after one, two young girls with brief cases ran up the steps, giggling. A long-haired man with a flowing black tie came out.

A small truck with *Quinn's Trucking* lettered on its side pulled up to the curb. Two men got out of the enclosed cab. As they came up the steps one of them saw Casey in the areaway. He said, "Hi, Flashgun."

Casey grunted, "How's it, Spike?"

The two men came out a few minutes later, carrying an old-fashioned, squarish trunk. Casey cursed softly, said: "I'll bet that subscription guy's sellin' the whole building." He stepped out on the sidewalk and lit a cigarette as he watched the trunk being loaded on the truck.

"This ain't so soft as drivin' a hack, Spike," he said.

Spike Largo, a former second-rate boxer who had put on weight and drifted to taxi-driving, and then to trucking, grinned at Casey, said:

"But I'm gettin' three squares now, son. I'd starve, hackin' in these times."

Heels clicking on the steps behind Casey checked a reply. He turned, saw the red-faced solicitor and forgot Spike Largo. He said, "Who'd you find?"

"Him," the man said, and showed Glasek's picture. He sucked at his teeth, grunted and spoke in an injured voice. "This is gettin' to be a tough racket. There was another guy in the room; I didn't get a chance to see him because this first guy acts like he's got a grudge against me, or something. I ask him, does he want to take the *Express* and he—"

"Where?" chafed Casey.

"Apartment 3-D."

"Here." Casey thrust a dollar bill at the fellow. "Here's some expense money. I'll tell Gowan you're a wizard."

While the man stood there looking at the bill, Casey grabbed Wade's shoulder. "Listen," he ordered. "Go back to the drug-store. Call Logan again. If you can't get him this time, get Judson—or Orcutt. But get somebody, tell 'em where to come; then come back here and wait."

"What're you gonna do?" Wade argued.

"I'm goin' upstairs and—"

"You ain't gonna try and take those guys by yourself?"

"Hell, no. But I'm takin' no chances of their slippin' out the back way, either. I'm goin' up in the hall and wait there until Logan or somebody comes. But if Glasek *should* come out I can throw a bluff and—" He broke

off. "Oh, hell! Will you quit givin' me an argument?"

Casey shoved Wade, watched him hesitate, then break into a reluctant trot, the plate-case banging his hips. He climbed to the vestibule and went into a dim entrance hall that seemed strangely hot and stuffy. Opposite doors opened from the hall in front of the stairs, and adjoining this was a corridor which stretched to the rear. In one of the lower rooms, someone was banging out an exercise on the piano. From above came the muted shrill of a soprano trilling up and down a scale.

Casey climbed the carpeted stairs, unbuttoning his coat as he went. The practicing soprano became steadily louder, formed a background for thoughts that were expectant, yet apprehensive.

He did not know just how much good he was doing by following up his hunch and tracing the taxi; he was not sure what Logan would find when he went into the apartment. But it was at least a lead. The police would look for Shannon and Ottleib through the regular channels. This was on his own. And action, any kind of action, was better than sitting around and thinking about Shorty Prendell with the slugs in his back and a red-hot picture in his plate-case.

At the third floor landing the soprano was much louder, but still above him. Casey moved slowly along the corridor, found Apartment 3-D was about halfway down. He stopped in front of the door, leaned close to listen. But the soprano defied him and he scowled at the ceiling, cursed softly.

He moved to the opposite wall, leaned against it and lit another cigarette. It was probably an unnecessary precaution, his coming up here. But after this much trouble, there was no use taking a chance. Logan—and he hoped to hell it would be Logan—should be here in another five or ten minutes and—

A lock clicked. Casey's eyes jerked to the doorknob of Apartment 3-D, saw it turn. He stuck the cigarette in one corner of his mouth, wiped his palms on his coat. The door opened. Then he stepped forward so that, as the door swung wide, he met Glasek in the opening.

He stepped back, acted surprised and uncertain. But his eyes shot over Glasek's shoulder and got hard and shiny as they fastened on the big, overcoated figure beyond. Brad Shannon.

Glasek's surprise was genuine. He stammered, "Why—what—"

Shannon grunted and stepped forward, brushing Glasek out of the way. Then Casey saw the gun in Shannon's hand and he blinked, said:

"Hey. What the—"

Shannon stepped aside, mo-

tioned with the gun. "Come on in."

Casey moved into the well-furnished living room and closed the door by backing against it. He kept his eyes on Shannon, kept them wide and surprised.

Shannon watched Casey for a moment in silence. He was a big man, as tall as Casey and just as heavy; good-looking in a gross, swarthy way, he had a pointed mustache and hard, metallic eyes that seemed too small for his face. At the moment the eyes were suspicious, speculative; and his low voice had a snarl in it.

"Nosey, huh? Well, speak your piece."

"I was lookin' for Glasek," Casey said flatly.

"You wouldn't kid me, would you?"

"I was lookin' for Glasek," Casey went on and glanced at the little man's wedge-shaped face which was still overwritten with surprise. "He busted in on me this morning and I wanta know the set-up."

"How'd you find this place?" Shannon said slowly.

"Taxi-driver."

Shannon seemed to accept this, but with the acceptance, the eyes narrowed and his mustache drew back against his teeth. Reaching into his coat pocket, he took out a blackjack, weighed it in his palm, slipped the gun into the pocket.

"I'm gonna enjoy this," he muttered. "I'm kinda hot; maybe you know it. And this Glasek gag won't rub. There's a picture out that's put the pressure on me. Right now I got only one out. I gotta run for it till I find out where I stand. And you're the guy that got me in the jam."

Shannon moved slowly forward. "I should've let you have it in the alley last night. Then there wouldn've been any picture. But we made a mistake. You've got nothing on Glasek; but me —I'm spotted. So for hornin' in last night—and now—"

Shannon came forward swiftly, his left fist doubled, the right hand holding the blackjack, cocked.

Casey said: "Now wait—"

He knew what to expect; he shifted his weight and got ready for Shannon. And he had time to think that perhaps this was a good break, that the more time he could waste, the better it would be; and he was glad now, that he had taken the precaution to come up to the third floor hall and wait.

He poised on the balls of his feet, put up his hands. Shannon jabbed with his left, slashed out with the blackjack. Casey took the left, on his hunched chin, kept his eyes on Shannon's right, blocked the swing and stepped close, hooking his right. Shannon grunted, clinched, began to swing with blackjack as his left arm hugged Casey close.

Casey took two glancing blows —painful but not too damaging —to the shoulder before he could counter. Then he got his chin over Shannon's shoulder, gained momentary safety from the blackjack, and slammed away with both hands; short, powerful punches that ripped into Shannon's stomach and solar plexus.

Shannon could not stand up under such an attack. Lacking the cast-iron stomach muscles of a fighter in condition, he doubled, gasped, fell back. Casey jabbed him away with a left and then whipped over a right to the face. The punch missed the jaw by an inch. Shannon went over backwards. Casey followed him. Then Glasek was at his back, raining blows on the back of his head and neck.

Casey cursed, spun angrily. Glasek's eyes mirrored fear and he jumped back with catlike quickness as Casey lashed out. His left was short, and he took a step forward to follow up; then Glasek yelled:

"No! For gawd's sake, no!"

Casey froze at the almost hysterical tone; saw that Glasek's wide-eyed gaze was not on him, but to one side. He glanced over his shoulder and went cold. Shannon was on his knees, his swarthy face a mask of hate. The gun was in his right hand and the trigger finger was tensed.

Glasek saved his life. Casey knew that. But he had no feeling of gratitude then; it was all over in two or three seconds, and his only sensation was one of surprise and stark, momentary fear, followed by relief as Glasek wheezed:

"The noise! You can run for it if you don't spoil it!"

Shannon's pitiless gaze shifted to Glasek. That did it. The gun hand seemed to relax, and he got to his feet.

"Okey," he said. "This can wait a while." He picked up the blackjack, cocked one eyebrow, moved around behind Casey and said: "If you turn around, you get it anyway."

Casey half turned in spite of the warning. Then the blackjack crashed on his head. His legs sagged. Pain exploded in his brain, in his ears, and he went down on his hands and knees. He did not entirely lose consciousness, but he was helpless for a long minute while he rocked there on his knees, his head hanging between braced arms.

When he got to his feet again, Glasek had a length of rope. Shannon, grinning now, covered him with the gun while Glasek tied Casey's wrists behind his back.

"This'll do," Shannon said. "Hands and feet. By the time you get loose I'll be on my way and before I go I'll give you something to remember me by."

Casey fought the panic in his head, glanced about the room

and wondered about Logan. He did not know how much time had elapsed since he had left Wade, but in another couple minutes it would be too late. Once Shannon and Glasek left the house, there would be small chance of finding them again. His glance stopped on the suitcase at the end of the davenport. He had not seen it before and it served to verify his contention: Shannon had a definite plan of escape.

Glasek stepped from behind Casey. Shannon said: "Down on your belly now while we get the ankles."

Casey hesitated. Shannon started for him. He did not repeat the command and he took but one step, because in the next moment a loud knocking shook the apartment door.

Casey stiffened. Glasek gasped audibly and Shannon glanced wildly about the room, back at Casey. His gun came up then, and he stepped close, whispered:

"I don't stop now. I ain't got much to lose. Crab this and by gawd I'll let you have it." He looked at Glasek. The knock was repeated. Shannon prodded Casey with the gun. "Say, 'Just a minute.' "

Casey repeated the command in a thick dry voice; then Shannon pulled him to the door, stationed him two feet in front of it. He motioned Glasek to one side.

Shannon flattened himself against the opposite wall, lifted the blackjack in his right hand and covered Casey with the gun in his left. He motioned again to Glasek, who reached forward and slowly opened the door, keeping behind it.

Lieutenant Logan, one hand making a suspicious bulge in the pocket of his new-looking Chesterfield, said: "What the hell were you doin'?" and stepped into the room.

Casey's teeth clicked together. His hands clenched behind his back and he shook his head wildly in spite of his danger. Logan sensed the mute warning, but there was not time enough to do much about it. Shannon's blackjack slammed down on his gray felt before he could turn and he took one more step and folded over on his face, his hat rolling out in front of him.

Logan pulled himself to his feet three or four minutes later and said: "What'd he hit me with?" He rubbed the top of his head gingerly and his handsome face twisted in a scowl. "I'll bet you got a kick out of it, too, you louse."

"Nerts!" rapped Casey. "I got a lump behind my ear I'll stack up against yours. If my hands hadn't been tied I might've taken a chance." He hesitated. "But he was hot—and he knew it. He had the gun on me and if he started

to blast—and he would if he got cornered—he'd 'a' got us both."

Logan punched his hat back in shape, cursed bitterly. "That part's all right," he grated. "I can take it. But he's clear again. How the hell we gonna pick him up? What the hell kind of a set-up did you frame?"

Casey said: "Untie my hands," and told the lieutenant what had happened.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" Logan said.

"How'd I know they wouldn't go out the back way? I had to stall 'em, didn't I? Why weren't you in when Wade called you the first time?" Casey rubbed his wrists when Logan untied them, turned as a new thought struck him. "Hey. Where's Wade? I told him to wait outside."

"He was outside," Logan said. "He followed me in and I told him he'd better wait downstairs."

Casey muttered an oath, jerked open the door. The hall was deserted and he ran down the stairs. At the front door he saw a police sedan at the curb and went to it, spoke to the driver.

"You know Brad Shannon?" The driver said he did and Casey continued: "He didn't come out?"

"Would I be sittin' here if he did?"

"Where's Tom Wade?"

"He went in with Logan. I ain't seen him since." The driver, a young, ruddy-faced fellow, pushed over on the seat. "Say, what the hell's up? What—"

"Plenty," Casey clipped and ran up the steps. He went through the lower corridor to the back door, looked out into the little courtyard. He stood for a moment, grumbling to himself, then went back upstairs. The soprano was still practicing the same scale on the floor above.

Logan was on his knees in the center of the floor, inspecting a dark spot in the middle of the light brown rug. The spot was about three inches across and as he stepped close, Casey saw that it had a reddish cast.

Logan said: "That's blood just as sure as hell." He looked up at Casey. "It ain't yours." Casey shook his head. "Did Shannon or Glasek look like they'd been bleeding?"

"No."

Logan stood up, rubbed the lump on his head again, scratched his nape thoughtfully. When he spoke his voice was sharp, jerky.

"I don't know how old that stain is, but if it's fairly new, if it was made today—" He broke off, gave Casey a steady, narrowed glance. "The way I dope it, there's four guys mixed up in this act. Whose blood is it?"

Casey's brow drew down but he did not answer and Logan said:

"It ain't Shannon's, it ain't Glasek's; it ain't Trask's because

we had him down for questioning and I only left him a half hour ago. So who does it leave?"

"Ottleib?" Casey wheezed. "Hell, you mean—"

"I don't know what I mean," Logan said grimly. "I'm just askin' myself questions. If—"

The sudden shrill ring of a telephone stopped the sentence. Casey and Logan both turned towards the instrument on the little stand near an opposite doorway. Casey reached it first, swept the receiver into his hand.

The voice was Wade's, and even in his present tense state, Casey sensed the excited, breathless quality in the tone.

"Where are you?" Casey flashed. "Where'd you go?"

"I was in the downstairs hall," Wade said hurriedly. "I heard somebody running down, so just for fun I ducked under the stairs. It was Glasek and Shannon. They went to the front door, saw the police car and ran out the back way.

"I didn't know what had happened to you and Logan, but I thought I'd better follow 'em. So I did. They went over to Newbury, to a garage. I went down to the corner and got a cab. When they came out in a car, I followed 'em—"

"Where?" Casey cut in excitedly. "Where the hell are you?"

"In a drugstore on Westland. Glasek went up in an apartment house; Shannon's hiding on the floor in the back of the car. I ain't seen a cop and I thought I could call you and—"

"We'll be right over," Casey rapped. "Stick—"

"They're comin' out," Wade gasped. "Glasek — and Jim Trask."

"Wait!" Casey shouted. "Wait and—"

"I gotta go," Wade said. "They're gettin' in the car. I gotta go. I gotta follow 'em, ain't I? Call you back."

Casey slammed down the receiver as the line went dead. "Call me back," he jeered. "How the—" He straightened up, knocked his head against Logan's who was standing over him, trying to get the gist of the conversation.

Casey told him what Wade had done and Logan said:

"Wait? Wait, hell! We can't wait. You said they took a suitcase. They'll blow out of town and—"

Casey didn't hear the rest of the sentence. One word stuck in his brain, flashed a driving association. Suitcase. In the stress of action he had forgotten an incident that might possibly be important—damn' important. Grabbing for the telephone directory, he pawed through it, found a number and again scooped up the telephone.

"Quinn's Trucking?" he bellowed a moment later. "Police

business. Lieutenant Logan speaking. You had a call for a trunk at—Marlborough. Spike Largo was drivin'. What apartment number was it?"

He waited, thumping one heel against the floor. "Yeah?" he said a few seconds later. "Where were you supposed to take it? Where? Okey. Okey."

Logan grabbed Casey's arm and jerked him around as he hung up. "What've you got?" he clipped. "You been holdin' out again? You know where they're goin'?"

"Yeah," Casey said and told about seeing Spike Largo and the trunk. "That trunk came from here," he finished bitterly.

"Where's it goin'?"

Casey started to speak, checked himself as a sudden calmness settled over him and he found room amid his racing thoughts for a new and forgotten perspective.

He put his fists on his hips, sweeping the tails of his ulster aside as he did so; he leaned forward slightly and took special pains with his words.

"Maybe you and I are workin' on different angles. Shorty Prendell was a friend of mine. I don't give a good—damn about Judge Ottleib, except for one thing. There's a reward out. If we get lucky and pull something out of a hat, I wanta be damn' sure Shorty's wife gets it all."

"You're not sure now, huh?" Logan asked caustically. "You think maybe I'm chiselin' in on widows now, huh?"

"You made a sweet crack about it to me this morning," Casey said. "I want to get you straight on it."

For a moment Logan's dark eyes snapped their irritation and resentment. Then he seemed to relax and a wry grin tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"Just when I think you'd like a slap in the mouth for yourself, you pull something that makes me like you. You want me to write out an assignment now, or can you wait till we earn this dough?"

"I'll wait, and we'll earn it. That trunk went out to the Norwell airport. We oughta make it in time."

It was past mid-afternoon when the driver kicked the motor of the police touring car to life. Logan sat in front, and Casey braced himself in the middle of the seat and hung on to a door with one hand, his hat with the other.

They went through traffic which was normal and not yet snarled by the five o'clock homegoing parade.

Outside of Dedham they were doing seventy and Logan hunched over and said: "Shake it up, Eddy."

"We're doin' seventy," Eddy said.

"Sure," Logan said. "But we're in a hurry. Step on it."

Casey held on. The chilled wind whipped in on him from both sides.

He let go of the door and leaned over on the back of the front seat. This was better and he wiped his eyes and watched the road. He saw the approaching truck about a mile this side of Norwell, had time to get a fleeting glance of Spike Largo in the cab.

"That's the truck," he yelled in Logan's ear. "Comin' back."

Logan nodded, yelled something in the driver's ear. The car held its pace for another minute, then braked suddenly and swung into a macadam feeder road in a dry skid. They roared up a half mile rise, reached the level ground again, and the landing field spread out before them under the dull and low-hung sky.

A heavy-looking cabin plane stood a hundred yards or so from the office, its wheels blocked, its propeller idling. Opposite the office, on the road, was a black sedan; a quarter of a mile behind this, a taxi crawled along, seemed on the verge of stopping.

Three men got out of the sedan as Casey watched. A figure stepped out of the office and walked to meet them. Even at a distance of a half mile Casey recognized the three men from the sedan. Faces were but vague ovals in the dusky light, but the figures —Glasek's, the towering Shannon, the burly stockiness of Jim Trask—furnished identification.

Casey yelled in Logan's ear again and the lieutenant pulled his coat open and reached for his gun. Then Glasek saw the onrushing police car; it was evident from the way he pointed.

For an instant all four men stared. The police car whipped past the loafing taxi and Casey saw Wade's face pressed to the side of the window. The man in the helmet started to run for the plane; the other three followed and strung out behind him.

Ten seconds later the police car slammed to a stop, its rear end yawing towards the ditch. Momentum slapped Casey against the front seat and he bounced back on the floor. By the time he got the rear door open, Logan was twenty feet in front of him with Eddy at his heels.

The taxi squealed to a stop. Casey saw Wade pile out and start to run and he yelled: "Stay back," and then set out after Logan.

The pilot was about ten yards from the plane. Glasek was about twenty yards behind him, Shannon followed, and Trask was still farther back, only fifteen yards ahead of Logan.

The lieutenant yelled a command, then Casey saw his right arm come stiffly up. His wrist kicked upward and the wind swept back the report of the shot.

Trask turned, stopped abruptly and whipped up his arm. He and Logan fired together; the police chauffeur fired. Logan went down as though one leg had been cut from under him. Trask staggered, fired again wildly; he went to one knee, pulled himself to a crouch, then fell over on his face.

Shannon fired over his shoulder, but kept running and the pilot had reached the plane, was tugging at the cabin door. Logan was trying to get to his feet when Casey raced past without slowing down. Then Eddy fired again; so did Shannon who was still ten yards shy of the plane.

Casey, weighted down by his bulky coat, was wheezing and puffing by the time he reached Trask's crumpled form; then he saw the automatic on the ground beside the outstretched fingers, and with no preconceived idea, he stooped, snatched it up without breaking his stride.

As he straightened, he saw Shannon jerk to a stop and spin about. Ignoring Eddy, who was five feet closer, Shannon swung his automatic towards the photographer.

Casey dropped to one knee as Shannon fired—and missed. He was close enough to hear Shannon's curses, close enough to see the desperate, twisted expression on the swarthy face, to see the black hole of the muzzle as Shannon brought the automatic down after the recoil of the first shot.

This time Shannon aimed deliberately. So did Casey. And a curiously fleeting thought of Shorty Prendell helped him, as he squeezed the trigger, felt the slap of recoil at his wrist an instant before he saw Shannon's automatic jump.

Two shots, Shannon's and Eddy's, roared out a fraction of a second after his own. Shannon's big body jerked sideways. Casey did not know whether it was his shot or Eddy's which had found the target, and he held his gun steady, waited stiffly on one knee.

Shannon's arm came down, hung limply and he took a step to brace himself. The gun slipped from loose fingers. Casey stood up and started forward, the police chauffeur moving at his side.

Death was streaking Shannon's swart face before Casey reached him. He seemed to crumple and go over backward, as though he were trying to sit down in a chair which had been jerked from under him.

Casey yanked his gaze away. At the side of the plane, Glasek and the pilot stood stiffly erect, their arms stretched rigidly perpendicular.

Logan limped to the side of the plane and Casey said: "You scared hell out of me. You went down so damn' quick I—"

"In the thigh," Logan said thickly. "I thought I lost a leg." He pulled his coat aside, glanced

down and felt of the side of his thigh where red was staining the blue fabric of his trousers. "It'll be okey when it stops bleeding."

Wade, who had run up and was standing at Casey's shoulder, whispered: "I'll be right back," and started across the field.

The police chauffeur had searched Glasek and the white-faced pilot and Logan said: "Where do you fit?"

"I don't know," the pilot said and his shaky voice sounded convincing. "That fellow" — he pointed to Glasek—"hired me to take him and two other guys to Richmond."

"What'd you run for?"

"Somebody yelled, 'Run' and I ran. I was rattled and—"

"It's gonna be tough for you if you can't prove it, buddy," Logan said.

He turned to Glasek. "You wanta talk?"

"I wasn't in on it," Glasek wailed. "I didn't know a thing about it till this morning. Trask told me to hire a plane, told me to see if I could turn up that picture and—"

"You didn't know about Prendell, maybe," Logan said. "But you damn' well knew about Ottleib. He couldn't stand the gaff and Trask couldn't either if Ottleib was caught. So the Judge hid out, doped out the plan to get himself burned to death. Who was it that got burned?"

"Shannon got somebody to claim an unidentified man in the morgue—some guy that drowned and was about Ottleib's size."

"And Ottleib," Logan went on grimly, "or maybe Trask—he was there—set that tenement on fire. Ottleib yelled from the window for a fake and beat it down the back way. Then what?"

"I tell you I wasn't there," wheezed Glasek. "How do I—"

Logan limped forward a step and slapped the fellow in the mouth so hard he knocked his hat off. It bounced on the frozen turf and Glasek yelped, staggered. He put his hand to lips that welled blood.

"Maybe you weren't there," Logan leered, "but you know."

"Shannon and some other guy was waiting in a place down the street. Ottleib beat it around there and when the fire got going good they sneaked out the back way to get a car and—"

"Prendell saw 'em," rapped Casey. "And he had guts enough to try a picture—and they shot him in the back." He stepped forward, cocking his wrist.

Logan grabbed him, said: "Lay off, I'm doin' the slappin' on this job." He pulled Glasek towards him. "What happened to Ottleib?"

Glasek's face went dead white and a fit of trembling seized him. Logan said: "He had a run-in with Trask or Shannon, huh?"

"He went all to pieces when they killed Prendell," Glasek

whimpered. "Murder scared him. He said he'd give himself up and say Trask had him kidnaped. He tried to fight himself out of the Marlborough Street place." Glasek's voice became faint. "Shannon shot him."

Glasek's head came up and his voice got sharp. "But that was early this morning. I wasn't there."

"You could be right," Logan said. He hesitated, pressed his lips together, looked at the plane, then at the pilot. "The trunk loaded in there?" The pilot nodded nervously and Logan said: "Well, I suppose we gotta take a look," grimly.

Casey knew what Logan meant. He'd had the same idea in the back of his head all the time, but other things had kept the thought submerged.

"Come on," Logan snapped. "You"—he pointed at the pilot—"and you, Flash."

They lowered the trunk to the ground.

Logan found it locked and the police chauffeur eventually found the key on Shannon.

Logan opened the lid, sucked in his breath. Casey took one quick look. That was enough to see that the body which lay face down inside, was tightly wedged with wadded newspapers, that there was quite a bit of blood, that the legs did not seem to be in the right place. He looked away and wiped cold sweat from his face as Logan slammed the lid.

"What were they gonna do with it?" Logan asked the stiff-lipped pilot.

"I don't—" the fellow said and Glasek interrupted.

"They were gonna dump it in the ocean—way out. Shannon was goin' to Miami, get a Pan-American to Trinidad. Trask was comin' back if it worked—you had nothin' on him."

Logan looked steadily at the pilot. "What a break for you, son."

Wade stumbled up then, fell over his plate-case as he slipped it from his shoulder.

"Boy," he said, "is this gonna panic 'em? Is it?"

Casey had forgotten that Wade had taken the camera with him from the office. Now he said: "You been luggin' that thing all this time?"

"Sure," said Wade, opening the camera and fooling with the shutter and focus. "Would I leave it some place with this kind of a job on the fire? Only you gotta pay the taxi guy; I ain't got a dime."

His pop-eyed gaze fell on the trunk. "You find Ottleib? Is he in there?" Casey nodded and Wade said: "Then open it up and let me—"

Casey and Logan said: "No," together. Wade looked hurt. "After all my—"

"This is a job for a police

photographer," Casey grunted. "Trask—Shannon, yes. But Ottleib—" Casey shook his head. "You couldn't get Blaine to print that kind of a shot, anyway."

Wade said: "Well—hell—" Then his tone brightened. "Ain't there a reward or something for finding Ottleib?"

"Yeah," Casey said. He looked at Logan, who met his gaze with steady eyes and nodded slowly; then he added: "There's a reward, but it's all sewed up. And don't give me an argument," he growled, but the hint of a smile in his eyes belied the growl. "Just get busy with that box. Get pictures enough for both of us and I'll take you in Steve's and buy the drinks."

"Hah," Wade said. "I knew there was a reward in it some place."

sound of the worm

by . . . Alphine Renslow

She was a perfectionist —and he was not. This infuriated him at times. She could be so annoying.

FIVE years ago, when Louise Aikens married Tom Lawrence, the town gossips' tongues had wagged vigorously. Those worthy matrons had, if rumor could be believed, even laid modest wagers as to the length of time the marital union could last. A year was the verdict of the more charitable among their group. Ella Brown, the leading contender for the gossip crown, summed up the situation with a few pointed comments at the weekly meeting of the sewing circle.

"Louise is a perfectionist. She has to have things just so. As neat as a pin about herself and her home. I've never seen a sign of dust anywhere in that house. Not that I snoop around deliberately looking you understand. Now that Tom, on the other hand—he's an easy going shiftless sort of man. Just never does pick up after himself, and pays no attention to anything Louise says to him about it. You can tell by the looks of that machine shop of his. Things always out of place. He always looks as if his clothes just fell on him. And when it comes to being messy, why he's the world's worst.

Alphine Renslow, who makes a first appearance in these pages with this little vignette, has appeared previously in many romance and children's magazines. A teacher by profession, she "spends all her spare moments writing." You will agree that she has a very nice gift for characterization.

The way he drops cigarette ashes all over the house drives Louise crazy. For the life of me I can't see how things ever got so far as marriage. But mark my words, girls, it can't possibly last."

Ella took a deep breath as her final words hurried over each other. Having pronounced sentence on the unlikely couple, she settled her ill-assorted pounds into the protesting rocker, while the other "girls" clucked in solemn agreement. But somehow in spite of all the dire predictions for an early demise of the connubial misadventure, the alloted year had come and gone, snowballing into the staggering total of five. Even Ella Brown became reconciled to having made a mistake. She finally admitted to her faithful coterie that the marriage was going to be just another case of "until death do us part," and she began to look for a new topic meaty enough for group dissection.

Tom Lawrence, the cause of so much speculation, peered nearsightedly over the edge of his horn-rimmed glasses at the small fat bottle setting precariously on the edge of the kitchen sink. He wondered idly how it happened to be there. It certainly wasn't like Louise to allow anything large or small, to interfere with a perfect household arrangement. She was adamant in her belief that there should be a definite place for everything, and she took it for granted that nothing would dare be found out of that place. This all encompassing plan included husbands. Tom ran his stubby fingers through his rapidly thinning gray hair, making it stand straight up on end. Louise hated to have him do that.

"You look just like a rooster with its tail feathers sticking out," she always said disapprovingly.

Tom chuckled, thinking about the first time he had been man enough to talk back to her, taking pride in his brief verbal bravery.

Yep, Louise was a real stickler for routines. Wash on Mondays, iron on Tuesdays, just like the nursery rhyme. A schedule for living and even for loving, and no time out for substitutions. She and her house were as neat as a pin and just about as comforting. Thinking about Louise's insistence upon neatness, Tom picked up the jar of blue ant poison, and walked out to the garage. He put the bottle back on the shelf where it belonged. Well, now even the ants' death potion had to match the color scheme of a blue and white kitchen, he thought in annoyance. He began to look for his favorite chair which he usually left in front of the garage. It was old and worn out, but Tom said he and the chair had the same kind of lumps. Louise had asserted shrilly that it was a disreputable eyesore, and had to be discarded. Tom retorted testily that when it went, he went. That remark had

seemed to quiet Louise temporarily at least.

"Drat that ornery female. She threw away my chair!" Tom said angrily. He mumbled to himself as he went into the kitchen, slamming the door behind him.

"She won't get away with that. She won't push me around anymore."

Before he married Louise, he was convinced that murderers were all cold-blooded killers. Now he knew better. Harp and nag long enough, and even a timid little easy-going guy would get fed up enough to do something crazy. Crazy maybe, but permanent. He wasn't going to put up with her any longer. He thought excitedly about the fool proof plan he had been working on for weeks. He told Louise in front of everyone they knew, including that old blabbermouth Ella Brown, that her car needed a complete overhaul. He knew she wouldn't believe anything he said. He got her all riled up in front of some of the boys who were always hanging around the shop.

"My car's all right. Don't touch it. You just want everyone to think you're a good mechanic. I can do better!" she shrilled.

Yes, he had enough witnesses. It wouldn't be hard to make sure the brakes weren't working. An unfortunate accident the papers would say. Nobody will blame me, Tom thought smugly. I'll tell them Louise tried to fix the brakes herself. Everyone knows how stubborn she is.

Thinking of a pleasant carefree future soothed his anger about the missing chair, and he began to look for something to fix for a snack. The tray of fancy cakes on the kitchen table was appealing. Probably for Louise's club meeting, he thought. Carefully counted no doubt. There never were any extras for him. Tom indulged in a sudden spurt of independence, remembering the past week when he had defied Louise, and ate the fried chicken she had been saving for dinner.

"Damned if she wasn't sputtering like an old model T starting up on a cold morning." He laughed aloud, rubbing his hands gleefully, thinking of his small but important triumph.

"Damned if I won't eat them all—even if it kills me," he said, enjoying the luxury of strong speech forbidden by his wife.

He began to eat the cakes, taking childish pleasure in watching the crumbs fall on the immaculate floor. This was the last time he would have to listen to Louise preaching about a messy man around the house. No more nagging about anything. Just peace and quiet forever. He licked the last bit of frosting from his fingers. He pulled absent-mindedly at the lobe of his ear, trying to remember where he had seen that same shade of blue before.

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what's new in crime

by . . . *Hans Stefan Santesson*

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts, novels that you'll wish to relax with, and a book which will be rather disturbing.

IF YOU still haven't read Baynard Kendrick's latest Duncan Maclain novel, CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER (Doubleday, $2.95), do something about this immediately!

Duncan Maclain has for years been one of the most vivid and most interesting of the personalities met in the near-to-real world of the mystery novel. (*It has always puzzled me that TV has not seen the potentialities of the blind detective.*) My own, and perhaps very personal, reaction to the present novel, was that the very fact that Maclain *can* falter and *can* make mistakes, as he does here, makes him an even more human and more credible person than before . . . I have a suspicion that some of us are tired, anyway, of the infallible—and grimly indestructible—supermen becoming so fashionable in the field. Here is a believable—and tired—man, facing problems that you can believe in, problems which he eventually solves. To repeat, if you didn't read Baynard Kendrick's CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER, do something about it!

Even though our friend over on the Saint's Ratings *desk has returned from his vacation, startled (to put it mildly) by the "quality" of some of the paperbacks waiting for him, we continue our own comments on current mystery and suspense novels, interesting — and otherwise.*

Trinidad-born Paul H. Mansfield, a photographer whose work has been shown in international exhibitions in the United States and England, has written an unusually effective first novel, FINAL EXPOSURE (Macmillan, $3.00). San Rafael — which could be, but perhaps isn't Tobago—is an interesting setting for the interplay of emotions which end with the murder of beautiful Vanessa Burnley, whom all too many people had hated. An able portrait of a society and of a way of life seldom met with in novels of this genre, and some beautiful characterizations.

Anthony Boucher, discussing Joel Townsley Rogers' THE STOPPED CLOCK (Simon and Schuster, $3.50) has said that a Rogers story—in the reading—is a "vortex of emotional compulsion, which may not be art but is certainly an experience." I am inclined to agree. Wildly improbable in spots, particularly when describing the lost years of beautiful Nina Wandley, THE STOPPED CLOCK is nevertheless a curious and compelling novel —with a genuinely surprising and at the same time credible murderer. There are stylistic similarities to what have been called the Gothic Existentialists of the Thirties. There are not only wildly improbable passages, but there are also some decidedly confusing passages.

Successful architect Philip Sargent was used to dealing with things that could be seen, measured or explained. Emotions, particularly obscure emotions, confused him, as did the unpleasant undercurrents that made a mockery of the peace that had appeared to reign in Bishop's Corner. Van Siller's THE WIDOWER (Doubleday, $2.95) is an interesting portrait of Suburbia, and also a novel about some credible—and generally well-meaning—people, caught up in what is soon suspected to be murder.

You also meet some likable—and rather harassed—people, in Seldon Truss' IN SECRET PLACES (Doubleday, $2.95), which again features Scotland Yard's Inspector Gidleigh and the *Daily Snapshot's* one and only Mr. Horace. Recommended.

Being public relations man for the biggest, the richest, and the most successful quiz program on television *can* have its drawbacks —when this includes coping with murder! Murder is *too* much! There is a limit to what one does for publicity!

Harry Olesker's first mystery novel, NOW WILL YOU TRY FOR MURDER? (Simon and Schuster, $2.95) is extremely able, fast moving, and at times rather funny. Keep an eye on this writer! He's good!

juliet and the magician

by . . . Manuel Peyrou

The dying man had insisted that they should blame nobody—he'd killed himself—but this was impossible.

THE real name of the magician Fang was not Fang, but Pedro Ignacio Gómez. He was the son of General Ignacio Gómez and nephew and grandson, respectively, of the colonel and sergeant major of the same name. His uncle, General Carballido, was one of the seven casualties of the Battle of the Arsenal, and his cousin, the son of the former, had traveled for many years through Europe to cure himself of a *surmenage* acquired during the Campaign of the Sierra. It would be easy to deduce from this that the military figures, early and contemporary, constituted the singular pride of the Gómez family; it would indeed be easy, but incorrect, because the family also numbered priests in sufficient quantity to reinforce its vanity.

The life of the boy Pedro Ignacio was divided between the awe of marching military files and the practise of religion. He helped with mass in the parish of another of his uncles, Father Gómez, widely known for his generous and liberal nature.

This precocious liturgy was of undeniable importance in young

Take three people, including one who has spent a lifetime escaping from his background, and you have murder. Manuel Peyrou, author of THUNDER OF THE ROSES *and* THE SLEEPING SWORD, *is one of the important names in Argentine detective fiction. This story was translated by Dr. Donald A. Yates.*

Pedro's life. He was a lad; however, he believed not in symbols but rather in realities. With the passage of time he began to suspect that all these matters resembled magic, and he wanted to perform more conclusive experiments, with palpable results. It would serve only to lengthen this story (and there is no intent to do so) to recount the times he failed in his efforts to extract a hen's egg from the mouth of Father Gómez, amid the benevolent jesting of the latter; or to record the dramatic instant when he nearly suffocated through having suddenly forgotten the system—learned through a correspondence course —of escaping from an hermetically sealed trunk. It is much better to come forward to the day when, converted into Fang, he made his debut in his hometown before an astonished and enthusiastic public.

Pedro Ignacio had a somewhat yellowish skin, his eyes were slightly almond-shaped, and he had a small nose; a few elementary makeup touches and he was an acceptable Chinese.

On the death of Padre Gómez, he inherited the equivalent in *pesos* of a thousand dollars, deposited in a branch of the Banco de Santa Fe; with professional inspiration he inverted a large sum into kimonos, backdrops, folding screens, and bamboo contrivances. When he disembarked in London, everyone assumed he was arriving from Shanghai. He worked for several years in the music halls of England and Scotland, and in 1930, with his tricks perfected, he appeared at the Palace, in Paris.

In Paris begins the drama that interests us. In a theatre in Montmartre at that time was playing the Great Dupré, illusionist, with his assistant, *La Belle Juliette.*

La Belle Juliette went on her afternoon off to see Fang's performance, and the fate of the Great Dupré was sealed: all of his power as illusionist was of no avail in breaking the biological charm contrived by tiny glands which conspired to make the girl's fickle heart beat faster. One December day, Juliet said good-bye to her friend and embarked with Fang for South America.

The addition of a beautiful female improved the appearance and the general effect of the spectacle; but Juliet's passion was brief. When she discovered that Fang was not Chinese she suffered an attack of fury and of insane exaltation. The truth was that she gave not a hoot for his not being Chinese; she simply could not pardon him for being South American. But Fang realized that racial discrimination was only a pretext for Juliet. The real reason was that she had overestimated the earning power of a magician. Money was Juliet's sentimental patron. She was subjected to the last and most abject of all servilities, according to Chesterton's expression: that of wealth. She

found mysterious qualities in financially powerful men, for the simple reason of their being powerful; money inferred implicit intelligence and sympathy, and, at times, even dissembled the physical aspect of men.

In 1937 appears the third character of our story. Through Juliet's intrigues, Fang's assistants had abandoned him. He placed ads in the dailies, turned to specialized employment agencies, explored infinite possibilities, but he failed to encounter the docile, quick-witted man he needed. One night in a cafe on Corrientes Street, he was approached by a small man. "I need work," he said. "I am humble and loyal." That unlikely declaration nevertheless reflected the truth. What is more, the little man later proved it with his death. He was working as a dishwasher in a Lavalle y Montevideo restaurant. He was excited by, enchanted with magic; he had spent the twenty *pesos* he amassed by pawning a camera for the admission to see Fang's array of tricks. Besides, he was slightly jaundiced and short. With a few light touches of pencil and a thin film of ochre he would look like a Chinese. His name was Venancio Peralta. Fang made a pleasant joke: "You will go on being Venancio; it will seem like a common local nickname for a little Chinaman."

Juliet was cold, superficial and clever. She considered that her marriage to Fang was the tragedy of her life and she was taking her revenge out on him in a thoroughly precise manner. Fang, on the other hand, found in Venancio devotion, and a practical and efficient assistant.

In December of 1940 Fang was closing out a booking at the Capital. It had been two weeks since the program had been changed. Among the tricks he included was the very widely publicized one of escaping dramatically in a few seconds from a bag which had been closed and sealed by witnesses chosen at random from the audience. Fang was introduced in a large blue silk bag, the mouth of which was tied up before wax seals were affixed to the loop and knot. At this point a showy circular curtain would descend around Fang, and when it raised the magician would appear completely freed, exhibiting the knot and the seals intact. The members of the audience who had assisted in the act would search the bag and verify the undisturbed state of the fastening.

That night three men, two of whom were with their wives in the orchestra pit and another who occupied a box, came up to the stage at the invitation of Juliet, who was wearing a very low cut black gown. Fang took off his kimono and stood clothed in long pants and a blue shirt. The bag was shown to the public and the three men examined it at length;

it had no false stitches or openings. Fang put his legs into it and the others helped him get the rest of his body inside. Venancio displayed a sash and then tied it around the top of the bag; one of the men poured wax over the knot and placed a seal on it. The arrangement of the persons who surrounded Fang was as follows: with their backs to the audience were the two spectators who had come up from the main floor; then came Venancio, after him the man who came from the box, and finally, Juliet. When they had finished placing the wax seal, Venancio said: "The bird has escaped." One instant later, he clutched his hand to his breast, moved a few steps along the stage and, saying: "Go ahead; let the curtain down," disappeared offstage. Juliet followed him with a look of surprise, but went ahead and dropped the circular curtain around Fang. At the end of ten seconds she raised it to reveal Fang with the blue bag in his hand, bowing to his public.

At that moment a man came rushing out from the wings and shouted something that could not be understood. The curtains closed then and disorder broke out on the stage. Fang, Juliet and the three men from the audience, terrified, ran toward the wings and found Venancio on the floor. One of the men claimed he was a doctor and examined him. He had a dagger driven into his chest. His last words were: "Don't blame anyone; I killed myself."

The news was carried to the manager; the latter appeared, very harassed, before the audience and announced that the performance was suspended and asked the crowd to leave the theatre in an orderly fashion. A stagehand ran out into the street and returned with a policeman, who wasted ten minutes writing down trifles in a notebook. Finally, a police officer arrived and put into effect official measures. The measures were almost exclusively telephone calls in which he requested orders.

One hour later Dr. Fabian Giménez, a court judge, arrived. Dr. Giménez was a man of fifty years with the signs of good living and good drinking upon him, peevish and resigned to the inconveniences of his profession. They had called him away from a meal at the Círculo de Armas and he was cursing with moderation the criminal who elected such an hour for his atrocity. He was accompanied by his secretary, Garcia Garrido.

The three men who had come up on the stage at Juliet's invitation were Dr. Angel Cóppola, physician at a municipal hospital; Manuel Gómez Terry, an unregistered accountant; and Máximo Lilienfeld, a newspaperman.

Dr. Cóppola was a heavy man, with the stiff, elegant air of one who has just stepped out of his tailor's; he had white hair, but his

face seemed young; he was carefully shaved. He gave a rapid exhibition of his scientific knowledge which devastated Gómez Terry who was familiar only with folios, go-betweens, distributions and deeds, in addition to soccer. During this conversation they were observed with a certain irony by Lilienfeld, who was short, slender, blond, with bleached eyebrows and was dressed in a suit of ready-made clothes. At the same time Dr. Cóppola was wondering how this little, insignificant-appearing man happened to be occupying such an honored seat *avant-scène;* he was unaware that Lilienfeld was a newspaperman.

Dr. Giménez took statements from everyone, which were summed up and annoted by young García Garrido. The show, it seemed, had proceeded in a routine manner, save in two respects: the position of Venancio and Juliet at the moment the bag was sealed and the sentence the former uttered only a few seconds before being stabbed. According to one of the members of the company, in order to facilitate the execution of the trick, Venancio always occupied the same spot, toward the right side of the stage, and Juliet habitually took up a position opposite him, toward the left. If in the last performance they had occupied their customary spots, the order would have been the following: Cóppola and Gómez Terry, their backs to the audience; then, flanking Fang, Juliet, Lilienfeld and finally Venancio. However, the order was as previously indicated: first the doctor and the accountant; then to the left of both, Venancio, followed by Lilienfeld and Juliet, standing around Fang.

Fang had requested permission to retire to his dressing room, claiming to have been affected by the death of his assistant and friend; it was there that Dr. Giménez went to see him, to establish amid silk flowered kimonos, swords without cutting edges, and strolling doves and chickens an improvised office. The death of Venancio had injected disorder into the entire company; however, Juliet occupied herself solely and unaffectedly with her gown and personal appearance.

Dr. Cóppola, with scientific pomposity, spoke first, saying:

"I suggest, Judge, that you take particular note of this detail of . . ."

He was one of those persons who repeatedly say, "I suggest" without using an appropriate tone of suggestion. The judge heard him out patiently and had his remarks recorded. Cóppola said that, according to his scientific knowledge, the only manner in which a dagger could have entered Venancio's chest at the angle observed was directly in a line from the blue bag, that is, from Fang.

Dr. Giménez conceded some credit to Cóppola's suggestion,

then called Fang and initiated his questioning. The latter made clear his reticence before the questions relating to his profession, which was understandable, and he began to become nervous when he noted that a theory about the crime was floating in the atmosphere of the dressing room.

"I was inside a bag, closed and sealed with assistance from the audience," said Fang in emphatic Spanish, now completely void of Chinese flourishes.

Dr. Giménez requested the bag and a stage hand went to look for it. It was still knotted at the top with all the wax seals intact. These were broken by the judge, with the purpose of making an examination of the interior. The material was closely woven and there were no signs of its having been perforated. Dr. Cóppola intervened again.

"Ever since my childhood," he said, "I have been fascinated by magic. Even now, burdened with responsibilities, I frequently perform tricks for my nephews and the children in my neighborhood. If the judge will permit me saying so, it is completely useless to examine that bag."

The judge turned about and regarded him with surprise.

"We want to know if there are any marks inside. Why not examine it?"

"I said *that* bag," persisted the doctor with heavy irony.

"Why do you accentuate *that* bag?"

"Because there is another one."

Fang was glaring at the doctor as if he would have liked to decimate him.

"My dear judge, I myself have performed this trick many times. Today I came to the theatre to study the execution of it and correct any of my own defects. The fact of the matter is, there are two bags. When Fang is introduced in the one which the public sees, he carries folded up in his pocket another one. Once completely inside the outer bag, and before his assistant has tied up the mouth of it, Fang takes out the second identical bag from his pocket and sticks out its upper edge so that it is this second one that is tied and sealed and not the first. In order to accomplish this the collaboration of a practised assistant is required, someone who pretends to help the witnesses from the audience in carrying out their task but who actually performs, unobserved, this fundamental part of the trick. When the curtain comes down, Fang has nothing more to do than detach one bag from the other, pulling down the first which has been lightly attached to the top of the second, hop out of it, fold it up quickly and place it in his pocket. In this way he is able to display the second bag with the seal perfectly intact."

"Then this bag is the one Fang was initially hiding in his pocket?"

"That is right. You must find the other one."

In the face of the doctor's words, Fang's expression suddenly turned to that of a person caught cheating. He reached into his pocket and took out the missing bag, holding it out to the judge. The latter examined it at length, but it was as free of marks as the other.

"It could not be this one," the doctor said, "since generally these fellows have three or four extras."

The judge ordered a search begun to carry forth to the farthest corners of the theatre. For a solid hour Fang's bags were searched, the dressing rooms gone over from top to bottom as well as the stage sets which were piled up on the stage; but the outcome was fruitless.

Besides, the certainty that Fang used only the two bags for his trick was substantiated by the theatre manager, the stagehands and by Juliet.

At this point, the newspaperman Lilienfeld spoke for the first time.

"Why should Venancio have said: 'The bird has escaped'?"

Then he wrinkled his bleached eyebrows and looked steadily at Fang. The latter stepped forward to explain the motive.

"I didn't hear the sentence clearly," he said, "but generally Venancio said something when he was ready to receive the mouth of the bag from me and tie it up."

"Yes, but he said 'The bird has escaped' when the bag was already sealed. . . ."

The judge had remained silent, with his gaze lost somewhere on the ceiling of the dressing room. García Garrido knew that he was thinking about his meal back at the Círculo de Armas, but the rest believed that he was concentrating on the mysterious nature of the crime. Finally, he seemed to react to something:

"There is one important fact," the judge said. "Venancio Peralta cried out before dying: 'Don't blame anyone; I killed myself.' That is attested to by Cóppola, Gómez Terry and Lilienfeld as well as by Fang's wife. Nothing can erase this fact. I am not unaware that a man has to be very deranged to stab himself to death in the middle of a stage. It is a spectacular act; it indicates an undisputable morbidity, whose exact character must be determined by a scientific judgment. For this reason, I don't believe we should detain ourselves any longer. I am requesting that each of you, on your word of honor, agree not to leave the capital until the judicial investigation is completed. I see no need to arrest anyone at this time."

Fang appeared effusively thankful for the doctor's words; and in the melancholy, slightly metallic eyes of Juliet shone a strange light, a sort of furtive glint. All present swore to keep themselves at the judge's disposition and the latter, excusing himself, left, followed by his secretary.

The police officer effected the removal of Venancio's body, in keeping with the judge's order, and initiated the last formal steps required for the preparation of the official summary.

At three o'clock in the morning, Dr. Cóppola, Gómez Terry and Máximo Lilienfeld found themselves out on the street. The wives of the first two had waited for their husbands in the theatre lobby and now rejoined them. Lilienfeld's stomach was empty and he suggested that they go for a drink. Dr. Coppola observed the journalist with the air of one performing a scientific examination and hesitated for a few minutes. He believed that Lilienfeld was trying to get him to pay for a meal; besides, the idea of letting himself be seen in a public place with an individual of the newspaperman's appearance was vaguely distasteful to him. The encounter, a few steps further on, of an alehouse removed that burden from his mind; there he could not possibly run into anyone.

Lilienfeld ordered a beer; Gómez Terry a cup of coffee and the doctor a soda. The women had coffee. It appeared to be a contest of economy. Presently, Lilienfeld ordered another beer and a sandwich. Dr. Cóppola had an atrocious appetite, but he contained himself; he reasoned that if he ate, the newspaperman would take advantage of this move to pass the entire bill onto him.

"It'll be less of a mess if it were suicide," opened Gómez Terry, in order to have something to say.

Lilienfeld ordered another beer and another sandwich, and while he was avidly chewing to the accompaniment of his tirelessly wrinkling eyebrows, he exclaimed:

"What nonsense! The one sure thing is that it wasn't suicide!"

"But he said 'Don't blame anyone; I killed myself.' "

"That's exactly what I mean," Lilienfeld continued. "He said: 'I killed myself,' that is to say, I made a fatal mistake, I had this coming, it's my own fault or whatever other similar statement you wish. No one has sought a logical relation between the events of tonight and these words."

"Then you have a theory? Why didn't you speak up?" questioned the doctor reproachfully.

"You were talking all the time and didn't give me a chance; besides, the judge was regarding me with pity," said Lilienfeld. He ordered another beer, to the doctor's alarm, and continued: "There are three unusual things which break the routine tonight: Venancio says: 'The bird has escaped,' and Fang lies about the moment at which he heard these words. The truth is that he didn't *understand* the sentence very well, since if he had, the tragedy would not have occurred. In the second place, the order of the persons who surrounded Fang was altered at the

last moment and Juliet switches to Venancio's place. And thirdly, Venancio says: 'Don't blame me; I killed myself.'

"This is the solution: Fang was driven to desperation over Juliet (for reasons which we may suspect) and plotted to murder her. However, he could not commit a common crime: everyone knew of their quarrels, apparently, and he would have been immediately under suspicion. The only solution was a murder in full view of everyone, with an unbreakable alibi for himself. He needed an accomplice for the crime in the same way that he needed one for his tricks. Venancio was his ally, virtually his slave, we understand. He accepted his benefactor's idea with enthusiasm because his devotion for Fang had inspired him to imitate the latter in even his hates and sympathies. They agreed, then, that Venancio, *after* Fang had been closed in the bag, would press a dagger into the magician's hand *from the outside,* a weapon that could be easily concealed in a fold of the material. For years they had practised the trick and Juliet always had occupied the same spot. During the time that the bag was being sealed with wax, everyone was very close to Fang and remained so until the operation was over. Fang was able, therefore, to calculate exactly the height of Juliet's heart. The girl had perceived, perhaps by intuition, that something was being planned against her; it is not unlikely that Venancio demonstrated excessive nervouness. At the moment when they were about to tie the mouth of the bag, Juliet slipped away and occupied Venancio's position; the latter could do nothing but take the girl's spot. Confused and undecided, Venancio finally managed to communicate a warning to Fang by saying 'The bird has escaped'; but the magician, nervous for the first time during a stunt, heard the voice but didn't understand the meaning. Poor Venancio paid for his loyalty with his life."

Doc Cóppola and Gómez Terry regarded Lilienfeld for the first time with respect.

"We must advise the judge," Cóppola said.

"I would prefer that you didn't; I don't like to get mixed up in tangles with the law," replied Lilienfeld. "Besides, Fang is condemned. Juliet knows that he tried to kill her and she has him in her power. The poor fellow has no way out but suicide. Perhaps he'll invent a good trick for that one."

To the astonishment of Cóppola and Gómez Terry, Lilienfeld produced a brand new hundred *peso* note and called the waiter. He had drunk ten glasses of beer.

"Excuse me, please, but I have a matter to attend to," he said, paying the bill.

"Going home to sleep?" asked the doctor.

"No; I must go and have a few beers with a friend," he replied.

—Continued from Back Cover

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