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The **saint**

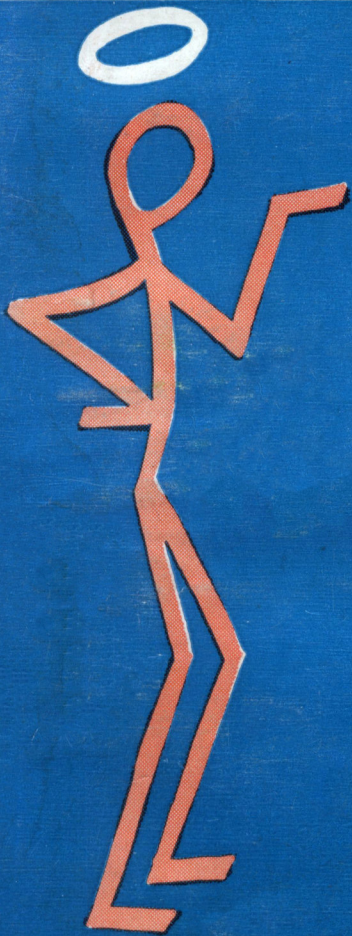
JUNE

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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Edited by **LESLIE CHARTERIS**



In this issue

MANNING COLES

STUART PALMER

JOAN FLEMING

ROBERT L. FISH

LESLIE CHARTERIS

WATCH FOR The **saint** **ON TV**

marked for death

A New Novel by **WENZELL BROWN**

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

Of course the question I get asked most often of all – even more often than “How did you come to think of the Saint figure?” (which I dealt with last month) and much harder to cope with – is “How did you come to think of the Saint?”

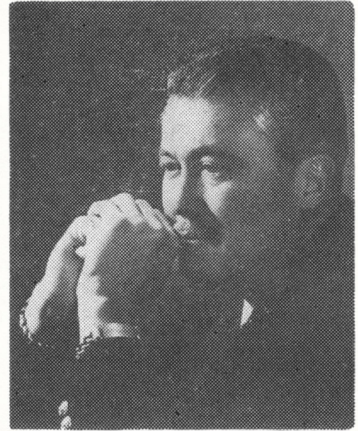
I must eventually try to dispose of this one for all time, but I doubt if the answer will satisfy anyone.

After I discovered that I could stamp out symbols on paper with a mechanical writing machine which looked like the same collections of wordage which I found in books and magazines, I started trying to do this on the same commercial basis with my little home-made boyish magazine. In a few years, I realized that the yield from this operation, being based on the indulgence of relatives who unfortunately were never excessively loaded, could not go far towards providing the luxuries to which I hoped to become accustomed. I therefore had to try to sell to the markets which had access to wider circulation.

Perhaps the sale of a piece of highly derivative doggerel to a juvenile magazine, at the age of 12, turned my head. Anyway, from then on, despite or between the handicaps of a rigorous school curriculum, I bombarded every conceivable outlet with a flood of outpourings of every conceivable variety, mostly as spurious as my youth and inexperience could make them. I was prepared to write about anything for which there might be a buyer, even the most obscure and specialized publications where a penny a line would have been unthinkable munificence. I wrote, and occasionally sold, dissertations on art and music, while barely knowing the difference between Puccini and Pissaro. In the field of fiction, I tore off at least one short story every day, and sent them on the rounds of every imaginable magazine. I sold the first one at 17 and the next at 19, so you can estimate for yourselves how far they went towards paying the postage on the ones which nobody wanted. The first story was about adventure in exotic parts, a subject on which there was probably fewer readers to question my authority; but at about that time I became seriously interested in sex, on which I suppose I was considerably less convincing. My very first full-length novel, in fact, was one of those “daring” jobs designed to be profitably denounced and banned; but all the publishers who saw it unanimously declined to be impressed.

(But when aspirants ask me how to become a writer, as if there were some magic formula, I can only say that all I know is to write something, and then write something else, and keep on until something sells or you finally decide you haven't got it.)

Belatedly, like any frustrated and misunderstood misfit, I turned to crime, and sold my first “detective” story, followed by four more. The Saint was the leading man in the third one. But when it came to the sixth, even I was slowing down and getting lazy. To avoid having to create yet another character, I reviewed those I had already hatched, decided I liked Simon Templar best, and went on with him. Which I'm still doing.



Leslie Charlton

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JUNE, 1964

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the revolution racket

by Leslie Charteris



"IN MY TIME, I've had all kinds of receptions from the police," Simon Templar remarked. "Sometimes they want to give me a personal escort out of town. Sometimes they see me as a Heaven-sent fall guy for the latest big crime that they haven't been able to pin on anybody else. Sometimes they just rumble hideous warnings of what they'll do to me if I get out of line while I'm in their bailiwick. But your approach is certainly out of the ordinary."

"I try not to be an ordinary policeman," said Captain Carlos Xavier.

They sat in the Restaurant Larue, which has become almost as hardworked and undefinitive a name as Ritz among ambitious food purveyors: this one was in Mexico City, but it made a courageous attempt to live up to the glamorous cosmopolitan connotations of its patronymic. There was nothing traditionally Mexican about its décor, which was rather shinily international, and the menu strove to achieve the same expensive neutrality. However, at Xavier's suggestion, they were eating *pescados blancos*, the delicate little fish of Lake Pátzcuaro

SOME REVOLUTIONS ARE IDEALISTIC, SOME ARE MERCENARY; MOST OF THEM HAVE TO COPE WITH BOTH ELEMENTS. SO DID THE SAINT, WHEN HE WAS TAPPED FOR THIS ONE.

which are not quite like anything else in the world, washed down with a bottle of Chilean Riesling; and this, it had already been established, was at the sole invitation and expense of Captain Carlos Xavier.

"Sometimes," Simon suggested cautiously, "I've actually been asked to help the police with a problem. But the build-up has never been as lavish as this."

"I have nothing to ask, except the pleasure of your company," said Captain Xavier.

He was a large fleshy man with a balding head and a compensatingly luxuriant mustache. He ate with gusto and talked with gestures. His small black eyes were humorous and very bright, but even to Simon's critical scrutiny they seemed to beam honestly.

"All my life I must have been reading about you," Xavier said. "Or perhaps I should say, about a person called the Saint. But your identity is no secret now, is it?"

"Hardly."

"And for almost as long, I have hoped that one day I might have the chance to meet you. I am what I suppose you would call a fan."

"Coming from a policeman," said the Saint, "I guess that tops everything."

Xavier shook his head vigorously.

"In most countries, perhaps. But not in Mexico."

"Why?"

"This country was created by revolutions. Many of the men who founded it, our heroes, began as little more than bandits. To this very day, the party in power officially calls itself the Revolutionary Party. So, I think, we Mexicans will always have a not-so-secret sympathy in our hearts for the outlaw—what you call the Robin Hood. For although they say you have broken many laws, you have always been the righter of wrongs—is that not true?"

"More or less, I suppose."

"And now that I see you," Xavier went on enthusiastically, and with a total lack of self-consciousness, "I am even happier. I know that what a man looks like often tells nothing of what he really is. But you are exactly as I had pictured you—tall and strong and handsome, and with the air of a pirate! It is wonderful just to be looking at you!"

The Saint modestly averted his eyes.

This was especially easy to do because the shift permitted him to gaze again at a woman who sat alone at a table across the room. He had noticed her as soon as she entered, and had been glancing at her as often as he could without seeming too inattentive to his host.

With her fair coloring and the unobtrusive elegance of her clothes, she was obviously an American. She was still stretching out her first cocktail, and referring occasionally to the plain gold watch on her wrist: she was, of course, waiting for somebody. The wedding ring on her left hand suggested that it was probably a husband—no lover worthy of her time would be likely to keep such a delectable dish waiting. But, there was no harm in considering, married women did travel alone, and sometimes wait for female friends; they also came to Mexico to divorce husbands; and, as a matter of final realism, an attractive woman wearing a wedding ring abroad was not necessarily even married at all, but might wear it just as a kind of flimsy chastity belt, in the hope of discouraging a certain percentage of unwanted Casanovas. The chances were tenuous enough, but an incorrigible optimist like the Saint could always dream. . . .

"And now," Xavier was saying, "tell me what you are going to do in Mexico."

Simon brought his eyes and his ideas back reluctantly.

"I'm just a tourist." He had said it so often, in so many places, that it was getting to be like a recitation. "I'm not planning to make any trouble, or

get into any. I want to see that new sensation, El Loco, fight bulls. And I'll probably go to Cuernavaca, and Oaxaca, and try the fishing at Acapulco. Just like all the other *gringos*."

"That is almost disappointing."

"It ought to make you happy."

"It is not very exciting, being a policeman here. I should have enjoyed matching wits with you. Of course, in the end I should catch you, but for a time it would be interesting."

"Of course," Simon agreed politely.

"It would have been a great privilege to observe you in action," Xavier said. "I have always been an admirer of your methods. Besides, before I caught you, you might even have done some good."

The Saint raised his eyebrows.

"With anyone so efficient as you on the job, there can't be much left to do."

"I do my best. But unfortunately, when I make an arrest, I have not always accomplished much."

"You mean—the court doesn't always take it from there?"

"Much too often."

"Your candor keeps taking my breath away."

Xavier shrugged.

"It is the truth. It is not exactly a rare complaint, even in your country. And absolute justice is a much younger idea

here. We are still inclined to accept graft as the prerogative of those in power—perhaps it is the legacy of our bandit tradition. It will change, some day. But at the present, there are many times when I would personally like to see a man like you taking the law into his own hands. You will have coffee? And brandy?”

He snapped his fingers at a waiter and gave the order; and the Saint lighted a cigarette and stole another glance at the honey-blonde young woman across the room. She was still alone, and looking a good deal more impatient. It would not be much longer before the moment would be most propitious for venturing a move—if he had only been alone himself. The thought made an irksome subtraction from his full enjoyment of the fact that a police officer was not only buying his dinner but seemed to be handing him an open invitation to resume his career of outlawry.

With a slight effort, he turned again to the more uncommon of the two attractions.

“Are you really wishing I’d un-reform myself,” he asked curiously, “or are you just dissatisfied with the Government? Maybe another revolution would produce a better system.”

“By no means,” Xavier said quickly. Then, as the Saint’s blue

eyes continued to rest on him levelly, he received their unspoken question, and said: “No, I do not say that because I am forced to. The change must come with time and education and growing up. I believe that the Government we have today is as good as any other we would get. No, it is better. In fact, it is already too honest for the people who are most anxious to change it. There is only one party which could seriously threaten a revolution today—and who are its sponsors?”

“You mean José Jalisco?”

“A figurehead — an orator who blows hot air wherever the most pesos tell him! I mean the men behind Jalisco.”

“Who are they?”

“The Enriquez brothers. But I do not suppose your newspapers have room for our scandals. For many years they were making millions, at the expense of the Mexican people, out of Government construction contracts. It was our new President who ordered the investigation which exposed them, and who threw out the officials who helped them. Even now, they may face imprisonment, and fines that would ruin them. They are the ones who would like to see a revolution for Jalisco They are sitting opposite you now, at the table next to the young woman you have been

staring at for the last hour."

Simon winced very slightly, and looked carefully past the blonde.

He had noticed the two men before, observing that they also had been watching the girl and obviously discussing her assets and potentialities, but he had not paid them much attention beyond that. As competition for her favor, he figured that they would not have given him too much trouble. They were excessively well groomed and tailored and manicured, with ostentatious jewelry in their neckties and on their fingers, but their pockmarked features had a cruel and wilful cast that would hardly appeal to a nice girl at first sight. Now that Xavier identified them, the family resemblance was evident.

"The bigger one is Manuel," Xavier said. "The smaller is Pablo. But one is as bad as the other. To protect their millions, and to make more, they would not care how many suffered."

Waiters poured coffee and brought brandy, and Simon took advantage of the diversion to study the Enriquez brothers again. This also allowed him to keep track of the trim young blonde. And this time, when he was not looking directly at her, he was able to see that she was looking at him, with what seemed to be considerable inter-

est. It was an effort for him to suppress a growing feeling of frustration.

"Do you seriously believe they could start a revolution?" he asked Xavier.

"I know they have talked of it. Jalisco has a large following. He has the gift, which Hitler and Mussolini had, of inflaming mobs. But a mob, today, can do nothing without modern weapons. That is where the Enriquez brothers come in. They have the money to provide them. One day, I think, they will try to do that. They could be plotting it now, while we look at them."

"For a couple of desperate conspirators," Simon commented, "they don't seem very embarrassed to have you watching them."

Xavier laughed till his mustache quivered and his second chin shook. But when he could speak again, his voice was as discreetly pitched as it had been all along.

"Me? They have no idea who I am. Any more than you would have known, if I had not introduced myself at your hotel. Who knows an insignificant captain of the police? They deal with chiefs—if they can. They are too big to care whether I exist. But I know about them, as I knew about you, because it is my business to know."

"And yet there isn't a thing you can do."

"It takes much proof to accuse such important men. And the bigger they are, the harder it is to get. Probably before I ever get it, it is too late. Another civil war will not be good for Mexico. But I cannot stop a flood, like the Dutch boy, with my little finger." Xavier shrugged heavily. "That is why I can be sorry the Saint has become so respectable."

The Saint gazed at him with an assemblage of conflicting reactions that added up to a poker-faced blankness which could hardly have been improved on deliberately. But before Simon could decide which of a dozen possible replies to make, a waiter bustled up to Xavier with a folded slip of paper on a tray.

Xavier opened it, frowned at it, and pursed his lips over it for several seconds.

"This is a tragedy," he announced at length, and tucked the note into his pocket.

"Has the shooting started already?" Simon inquired.

"Oh, no. Merely a simple robbery. But it is at the house of a politician, so I must give it my personal attention. My lieutenant is downstairs, and I must go with him."

Xavier stood up, but put out a restraining hand as the Saint started to rise with him.

"No, Please stay here. It is only a routine matter, and would not interest you. Take time to finish your brandy. And have another. I will pay the bill as I go out. I insist." The bright black eyes twinkled. "And perhaps after all you will be able to meet the young lady. I shall call you at your hotel soon. *Hasta luego!*"

And with an effusive sequence of handshakes that kept time with the somewhat frantic deluge of his parting speech, he was gone.

Simon Templar sat down again, feeling a trifle breathless by contagion, and poured himself another cup of coffee.

Not too hurriedly, he looked at the lonely young blonde again.

He was just in time to see her greeting a shmoe who had to be her husband.

Well, that was the way life was, Simon reflected, as he chain-lit another cigarette. You could spend weeks waiting for a little gentle excitement; and then, when things started happening, there were more of them than you could handle.

A police captain, of all people, points out a couple of apparently ideal candidates for free-lance euthanasia, gives you the why and wherefore, and practically invites you to go ahead and take a crack at them—adding the al-

most irresistible bait that, although he will thoroughly approve of whatever you do, he is also sure that he will be able to pinch you for it afterwards. But you can't really give your all to this sublime proposition, because you are wishing half the time that he would go away so that you could concentrate on an equally inviting but entirely different temptation to adventure.

So finally he does go away, but only after staying just long enough for the other attraction to slip out of reach.

Then you gripe because you've only got one thing left, and you wanted both. Quite forgetting that you started the evening with nothing.

Oh, what the hell, the Saint thought. He could still murder the Enriquez brothers. And maybe he should murder the blonde's husband too.

There was no doubt about their marital status. The man was far too typical a hard-driving Babbitt to be any girl's secret romance. A good husband, perhaps, but too busy to be a Lothario. He was still in his forties, and not unprepossessing, with a square jaw and horn-rimmed glasses and distinguished flecks of gray at his temples; but you could see that he never left business behind, even as he brought a bulging

briefcase with him to dinner.

"Whatever kept you so long?" she asked—not anxiously, not pettishly, but with the controlled and privileged edginess of a longsuffering wife.

"My taxi had a little fender scrape, but it had to be with a police car. You never saw so much commotion and red tape. I almost got locked up as a material witness. I'm sorry, dear—it wasn't my fault."

He turned to the waiter and ordered two Martinis. The Enriquez brothers looked disappointed, but went on watching them with a kind of morbid curiosity.

"Well," she said graciously, but after a suitable pause, "what's the news?"

"I'm getting nowhere. I tell you, Doris, I'm about ready to give up and go home."

"That isn't like you, Sherm."

"I know when I'm licked. I've always heard there was a trick to doing business with these South American governments. Now I can vouch for it. You've just got to know the right people—and I don't know them. That seems to be the end of it."

The Saint was not making any effort to eavesdrop, but he didn't have to. The restaurant was quiet, and they were talking in clear normal voices, as if they were confident in the security of speaking a foreign language;

but that very contrast made it easier for him to separate their conversation from the background tones of Spanish.

The waiter brought him another snifter of Rémy Martin, with the parting compliments of Captain Xavier, and went on to deliver two Martinis across the room. Simon gazed innocently into space, and let his ears receive what came to them.

"What an incredible hard-luck story it is," the husband said glumly. "First I get a contract to supply all those rifles and machine-guns to Iran—over the heads of all the big arms companies. Then I pull all the strings in Washington to get an export permit, which everyone said couldn't be done. Then I manage to charter a boat to carry them, which isn't so easy these days. And then, two days after the boat sails, they have a revolution in Iran and the new government cancels the order!"

"And you've paid for the guns, haven't you? Your money's tied up."

"It sure is. But I wasn't worried until now. I'd gotten them legally out of the States, so I could still sell them anywhere in the world where I could find a buyer. And I thought Mexico would be a cinch. Their Army equipment is nearly all out of date anyhow. And yet I can't even get to talk to anyone. I've

got fifty thousand late-model rifles and five thousand machine-guns cruising around the Caribbean, with five million rounds of ammunition—and nobody seems to want 'em!"

It should be recorded as a major testimonial to Simon Templar's phenomenal self-control that for an appreciable time he did not move a muscle. But he felt as unreal as if he had been sitting still in the midst of an earthquake. It required a conscious adjustment for him to realize that the seismic shock he experienced was purely subjective, that the mutter of other voices around had not changed key or missed a beat, that the ceiling had not fallen in and all the glassware shattered in one cataclysmic crash.

But nothing of the sort had happened. Nothing at all. Of course not.

"It's not your fault, Sherm," the wife was saying. "You'll just have to try somewhere else. There are plenty of other countries, and I've always wanted to see them."

"I don't know what'd make it better anywhere else. I guess I don't know the right way to approach these people."

It began to dawn on the Saint that his continued immobility could eventually become as conspicuous, to a watchful eye, as if he had jumped out of his skin.

With infinite casualness, he removed a length of ash from his cigarette, and inhaled with heroic moderation.

Then he lifted his brandy glass, and let his eyes wander across the room.

The Enriquez brothers were watching the American couple too, and their expression made him think of a couple of Walt Disney wolves discovering a hole in the fence of a sheep corral.

"For two cents," said the husband morosely, "I'd start looking around for someone who wants to organize a revolution here, and offer to sell *him* the guns. It might do me a lot more good."

Manuel Enriquez spoke earnestly to Pablo, and Pablo nodded vehemently.

Manuel stood up and approached the adjacent table.

"Please excuse me," he said in good English, "but I could not help hearing what you were saying."

The couple exchanged guilty glances, but Manuel smiled reassuringly.

"I appreciate your problem. As you said, it is important to know the right people. I believe my brother and I could help you."

"Gosh," said the husband. "That sounds wonderful! Are you serious?"

"Absolutely. May I introduce

myself? I am Manuel Enriquez. That is my brother Pablo."

"Sherman Inkler," said the husband, whipping out a wallet and a card from the wallet. "And of course this is Mrs Inkler."

"Oh, Sherm!" Doris Inkler gasped. "This could be the break you've been waiting for!"

"We can soon find out," Manuel said. "But this is not a good place to discuss business. You have not yet ordered your dinner. May I invite you to another place where we can talk more privately? My car is outside, and you shall be my guests."

As the Inklers and Pablo stood up simultaneously, he waved imperiously to the head waiter and shepherded them towards the stairs, pausing only to take both checks and sign them on the way out. It was during that brief stoppage that the blonde turned and looked at the Saint again, so intently that he knew, with utter certainty, that something had clicked in her memory, and that she knew who he was.

The implications of that long deliberate look would have sprinkled goose-pimples up his spine—if there had been room for any more. But he had just so much capacity for horripilation, and all of it had already been preempted by the scene he had witnessed just previously.

The Saint had long ago conditioned himself to accept coincidences unblinkingly that would have staggered anyone who was less accustomed to them; it was much the same as a prizefighter becoming inured to punishment, except that it was more pleasant. He had come to regard them as no more than the recurrent evidence of his unique and blessed destiny, which had ordained that wherever he turned, whether he sought it or not, he must always collide with adventure. But the supernatural precision and consecutiveness with which everything had unfolded that evening would have been enough to send spooky tingles up a totem pole.

And yet the immediate result was to leave him sitting as impotently apart as the spectator of a play when the first-act curtain comes down. With the departure of the Enriquez brothers and the Inklers, he was as effectively cut off from the action as if it were unrolling in another world. The instinctive impulse, of course, was to follow; but cold reason instantaneously knocked that on the head. Manuel Enriquez had said they would go to a place where they could talk privately, and the Saint felt sure it would be just that. If any of them saw him again in their vicinity, it was a ten-to-one bet that they would have remem-

bered him from the restaurant anyway, and drawn the obvious conclusion. But that last long look from the blonde had taken it out of the realm of risk into the confines of stark certainty.

He tried to analyze that look again in retrospect, to determine what else might have been in it beyond simple recognition, while another department of his mind reached for philosophical consolation for the quirk of circumstance that kept him pinned to his chair.

Why did he have to follow, anyhow? He could predict exactly what would happen next. The Enriquez brothers would offer to buy the shipload of guns. And Sherman Inkler, of course, would have his price. . . .

The full significance of the blonde's look eluded him. Each time he tried to reconstruct and re-assess it, he was halted before an intangible wall of inscrutability.

He finished his cognac and coffee and stood up at last, and went down the stairs and through the bar out to the Paseo de la Reforma. It was raining, as it can do in Mexico City even in late spring, and the moist air had an exotic aroma of overloaded drains. One day, they say, the whole city will sink back and disappear into the swampy depths of the crater from which it arose. On such nights, as in

any other city, there is always a dearth of taxis, but the Saint was fortunate enough to meet one unloading customers for the movie theater next door.

He had had plans to go prowling in search of distraction later that evening, whenever he got rid of Xavier; but now the drive has evaporated. Opportunity had already knocked as often as it was likely to do in one night.

"Al Hotel Comee," he said.

The Comee is not the plushest hotel in Mexico City, being a few minutes' drive from the fashionable center of town; but its entirely relative remoteness makes it quieter than the more publicized caravanserais, and the Saint preferred it for that reason.

He sat on his bed and turned the pages of the telephone directory.

Would Carlos Xavier have an unlisted number? But Xavier was sure to be still tied up with a burgled politico, in any case. And the Saint was far from obsessed with the idea of talking to Xavier again—just yet.

What kind of hotel would the Inklers be staying at? There could only be a limited number of possibilities.

He picked up the telephone.

"The Reforma Hotel, please," he said.

After the usual routine of sound effects, the connection was made.

"Mr Inkler, please," he said. "Mr Sherman Inkler. I-n-k-l-e-r."

"One moment, please."

It was longer than that. Then the Reforma operator said: "I'm sorry, there is no Mr Inkler here."

"Thank you," said the Saint.

He lighted a cigarette and stretched himself out more comfortably on the bed while he jiggled the telephone bracket. This method of search might take some time. But it was bound to succeed eventually. When he got the Comee operator back, he said: "Get me the Del Prado."

He drew another blank there. But all it would take was patience.

He was starting to recall his own operator again when there was a knock on the door. He hung up with a frown, and stood up and opened it.

Doris Inkler stood outside.

"You don't have to try any longer, unless you particularly want to," she said. "May I come in?"

The Saint was not given to exaggerated reactions. He did not fall over backwards in an explosion of sparks and stars like a character in the funny papers, with his eyebrows shooting up through his hair. He may have felt rather like it, but he was able to resist the inclination. In his memoirs, he would probably list it among the finest jobs of resisting he ever did.

He waved his cigarette with an aplomb that had no counterpart in his internal sensations.

"But of course," he said cordially. "This proves that telepathy is still better than telephones."

She stepped in just as calmly, and he closed the door.

"I could have let you work a lot longer, if I'd wanted to make it tough for you," she said. "But I tired of standing outside."

Her head and eyes made an indicative movement back and upwards, and he followed their direction to the open transom above the door. He shut it.

"You must have a very big kind heart," he said.

"It's a pretty tedious way to track anyone down," she said, "I know. That's how I located you."

"Did you make a deal or wash out with the Enriquez brothers so quickly?"

"They dropped me off first, and just took Sherman along. I think they have an old-world prejudice against having wives sit in on business conferences. So I was probably able to start calling sooner than you did. Besides, I was lucky."

"Where, as a matter of interest, are you staying?"

"In Room 611."

The Saint sighed.

"And this is probably the last

hotel I'd have tried. It would have seemed too easy. Whereas you, being a simple-minded woman, probably tried it first."

"Correct. But let's change that 'simple-minded' to 'economical.' This was the one place I could try before I started to run up a telephone bill."

He cleared some things from a chair, and she sat down. He gave her a cigarette, lighted it, and sat on the end of the bed. At last he was actually as relaxed and at ease as he had contrived to seem from the beginning. He wondered why he had ever allowed himself to get in a stew about the apparent dead end he had run into. He should have known that such a fantastically pat and promising beginning could not possibly peter out, so long as there was such an obviously plot-conscious genius at work. Inevitably the thread would have been brought back to him even if he had done nothing but sit and wait for it.

But underneath his coolly interested repose he was as wary as if he had been closeted with a coy young tigress. Perhaps everything would remain cosy and kitteny; but he had no illusions about the basic hazards of the situation.

"It's nice to feel that our hearts are so in tune," he remarked. "I was determined to find you again, regardless of cost. You

were a little thriftier about it, but no less determined. And so we meet. Fate failed to keep us apart, and at this moment is probably gnashing the few teeth it can have left. However, there's still one small point. I had plenty of opportunities to hear your name. But how did you know mine?"

"I recognized you, Mr. Temp-lar—as I think you knew."

"We haven't met before."

"No."

"So you've seen my picture and read about me."

"Right. And now it's time you let me ask a question. Why were you so anxious to find me?"

Simon considered his reply.

"Any mirror would tell you better than I can. But let's say that when I first saw you alone, I was hoping you'd stay that way for long enough for us to get acquainted. I was sort of tied up at the moment, if you remember. Then, when your husband showed up, I could see you were much too good for him. After thinking it over, I decided that he's the dull type that it's almost a public duty to cuckold. I was planning to find out if you agreed."

Her eyes widened a fraction but did not blink. They were a darker blue than his own, and there was smoky shadows in their depths. Blue is conventionally a cool color, but he realized

that her shade could have the heat potential of a blowtorch flame.

"You don't try very hard to be subtle, do you?" she said, and said it without any indignation.

"Not always. Especially when a gal seems to have similar ideas of her own. You didn't track me down just to ask for my autograph, did you?"

"No. My turn again. What do you know about the Enriquez brothers?"

"That they're big tycoons down here, and tough babies. That they've specialized in robbing the Mexican public through government contracts obtained by graft and corruption. That they were recently investigated and exposed by the present administration, and are temporarily out of business and facing a possible rest period in the hoosegow. That they would therefore like to see a fast change in the régime. That they are backing a fast-changer named José Jalisco, who has the necessary wind to rouse the rabble, and would love to buy some toys that go bang for his followers. That this makes them ideal customers for a homeless shipload of arms and ammunition."

"You seem to have found out a lot."

"It was poured into my ear, on what I believe to be excellent authority. Shouldn't that make

it my turn next? Why were you looking for me, if it wasn't just to tell me how wonderful you think I am?"

"I wanted to ask how you felt about that gun deal."

The Saint grinned.

"That's a neat reverse," he said appreciatively.

"Well?"

She was not smiling. The dusky warmth in her eyes was stilled and held back, perhaps like a force in reserve.

Simon gazed at her directly for several seconds while he made a decision. He snubbed out his cigarette gently in an ashtray.

"I don't like it," he answered.

"Do you really care whether they have one more revolution here?"

"Yes, I do," he said. "It may be rather dreamy and sentimental of me, but I care. If I thought it had a chance of doing some good, I might feel differently. But I know about this one. Its only real objective would be to get a couple of top-flight grafters off the hook and put them back in business. To achieve that, a lot of wretched citizens and stooges would be killed and maimed, and thousands more would be made even more miserable than they are. I wouldn't like that."

"Not even if it dropped a very nice piece of change into your own lap?"

His mouth hardened.

"Not even if it dropped me the keys to Fort Knox," he said coldly. "I can always steal a few million without killing anyone, or making nearly so many people unhappy."

She flicked her cigarette jerkily. The ash made a gray splash on the carpet.

"So if you could, you'd try to stop Sherman making a deal."

"I'll go further. I intend to do my God-damnedest to louse it up."

"I had an idea that was what you'd say."

"If you'd read anything about me worth reading, you wouldn't even have had to ask."

She took a slow deep breath. It stirred fascinating contours under the soft silk of her dress.

"That's good," she said. "I just had to be sure. Now I know you'll be with us. We don't have any cargo of guns to sell. We're just trying to clean up in the bunko racket, with a bit of that Robin Hood touch you used to specialize in. The whole pitch was just a build-up to take the Enriquez brothers."

Simon Templar stood up, unfolding his length inch by inch. He felt for the pack of cigarettes in his shirt pocket. He drew out a cigarette and placed it between his lips. He stroked his lighter and put it to the ciga-

rette. He exhaled a thin jet of smoke and put the lighter back in his pocket. All his movements were extremely slow and careful, as if he had been balancing on a tightrope over a whirling void. They had to be, while he waited for his fragmented coordinates to settle down, like a spun kaleidoscope, into a new pattern. But by this time his capacity for dizziness was fortunately a little numbed. The human system can only absorb so many jolts in one evening without losing some of its pristine vigor of response.

"I see," he said. "I suppose I should have guessed it when your husband came bouncing in and spilled all the beans so loudly and clearly at the very next table to Manuel and Pablo — after you'd kept them watching you long enough to be quite sure they'd be listening."

"He wasn't meant to wait quite so long," she said, "but he did get held up."

"So there is no ship. And no guns."

She shook her head.

"There is a ship. It's cruising in the Gulf of Mexico right now. It has lots of crates on board — full of rocks. There are also two or three on top which do have rifles and machine-guns in them, which can be opened for inspection. We weren't expecting the Enriquez brothers to put out a lot of cash without being pretty

convinced about what they were buying."

"That sounds like quite an investment."

"It was. But we can afford it. If it works out, we'll pick up at least half a million dollars."

The Saint rubbed his hands softly together, just once.

"A truly noble swindle," he murmured with restrained rapture. "Boldly conceived, ingeniously contrived, unstintingly financed, slickly dramatized, professionally played — and one of the classics of all time for size. I wish I'd thought of it myself."

For the first time in a long while, a trace of a smile touched her lips.

"You approve?"

"Especially in the choice of pigeons."

"I'm glad of that. I picked them myself, and planned it all for them. I thought it made quite a Saintly set-up. In fact, I should really give you most of the credit. I was thinking of things I'd read about you, and the way you used to do jobs like this, all the time I was figuring it out."

He studied her again, for the first time with purely intellectual appraisal.

"It begins to sound as if you were the brains of the Inkler partnership."

"Sometimes I am. Of course, Sherm wasn't doing so badly when I teamed up with him. But

this one was my very own brain-child."

"And was it your own idea, too, to come and talk to me just now?"

"We agreed on it. I had a chance to get in a word with him alone, when they dropped me off. I told him I'd recognized you, and who you were. We both knew we'd have to do some fresh figuring, fast. He left it to me. As a matter of fact, he didn't have much choice. The Enriquez brothers were waiting. He said whatever I did was okay with him, but for Christ's sake do something."

"Well," said the Saint helpfully, "what are you going to do?"

She raised her eyes to his face.

"I've told you the whole story. And I'm hoping you're not sore at me for trying to imitate your act."

"Of course not," Simon assured her heartily. "If you mean, for baiting such a beautiful trap to skin a pair of sidewinders like Manuel and Pablo. I wish a lot more people would take up the sport. However . . ." His brows drew together and his gaze slanted at her shrewdly. "I had my eye on them too, even if you saw them first."

"And you should get a royalty for being my inspiration." She put out her cigarette, escaping his steady scrutiny only for a

moment, and looked at him again. "All right. Would you be satisfied if we split three ways?"

He didn't move.

"You, me, and Sherman?" he said.

"Yes. After all, we've spent a lot of money, and done a lot of groundwork."

Simon walked over to the window and looked out. It seemed to have stopped raining, but the streets below were shiny with water. He gazed over the nearer rooftops and the scattered lights to the hazy glow of illumination that hung over the city's center. He had seldom felt that life was so rich and bountiful.

There may well be among the varied devotees of these chronicles some favored individual who has once experienced a certain feeling of elation upon learning that a hitherto undreamed-of uncle has gone to join the heavenly choir, leaving him a half-dozen assorted oil wells. Such a one might have a faint conception of the incandescent beatitude that was welling up in the Saint's ecstatic soul. A very faint and protopathic conception. For the fundamentally dreary mechanics of inheriting a few mere fountains of liquid lucre cannot really be compared with the blissful largesse that the Saint saw Providence decanting on him from its upturned cornucopia. This had poetry; this fell

into the kind of artistic pattern that made music in his heart.

He turned at least.

"Will you just mail me my share," he asked, "or am I expected to help?"

"Is the deal okay?"

"You must remind me some day to warn you about being too generous, in this racket."

She let out breath in an almost inaudible sigh, sinking a little deeper in the chair. It was the first proof she had given that she had been under tension before.

"You could help a lot."

"Tell me."

"Frankly," she said, "the only thing I've been worried about is the payoff. First, they'll want to be sure that we've really got the guns. That's taken care of. They can take a motor-boat and go out a few miles from Vera Cruz or Tampico, and meet our boat. All right. Then we'll come to the question of delivery. That cargo can't be unloaded at a regular port. So I expect them to pick some quiet spot along the coast where it can be brought in at dead of night."

"How do you manage to be so beautiful and have this kind of brain?" he asked admiringly.

"I'm only thinking it out the way you would." There was nothing coy about her now: it was all business. "So we agree to do that. But we can't count on them giving us the money and

trusting that we'll deliver. Most probably, they'll want to pay off at the landing place, when the cargo starts coming ashore. We'd have to agree to that too. And then suppose they decided to double-cross us — to take the cargo and keep their money?"

"They'd be afraid of you tipping off the cops. . . . But of course, if they were going that far, they could shut you up permanently."

"And Sherman isn't the fighting type. Even if he had a gun, he wouldn't know how to use it."

"How about your crew on the boat?"

"They're only half in on the caper. We told them we were only trying to run in a batch of illegal slot machines, and hired them for a flat price. You can imagine what a cut they'd have wanted if we'd said anything about guns. They don't think they're taking much of a risk, and I'd hate to rely on them in a real jam."

"But you're paying them out of your share?"

"Call it part of the investment I mentioned. That's why I couldn't offer you better than a three-way split. When you work it out, you'll really be getting closer to half of the net."

He nodded.

"I'm afraid my lecture on the folly of being too generous isn't going to do you much good

when I get around to it, Doris." The twist of his mouth was humorously speculative. "However, since you made the terms, I guess a little bodyguarding isn't too much help to ask in return for a cut like that."

She stood up from the chair and moved towards him. She kept on coming towards him, slowly, until the tips of her breasts touched his chest.

"If that isn't enough," she said, "there might be a personal bonus. . . Sherman won't be back for a long while yet. You've got time to think it over."

Doris Inkler phoned him at nine o'clock, as he was stepping out of the shower, and asked him to join them in their suite for breakfast. A few minutes later he knocked on the door, and she opened it. She looked fresh and cool in a light cotton print, and her eyes were only warm and intimate for an instant, before she turned to introduce him to her husband.

"Doris has told me the deal," Inkler said, shaking hands in the brisk businesslike way which was so much a part of his act that it must have become a part of himself. "This caper is all her baby, so it's okay with me. Glad to have you on our side."

He looked a little tired and nervous.

"I didn't get in till three this

morning," he explained. "These Mexicans don't seem to care about bedtime. I guess they make up for it with their siestas in the afternoon. However, everything's set."

A waiter wheeled in a table set with three places.

"We ordered bacon and eggs for you," Inkler said. "Hope that's all right."

"I'm starved," Doris said, "While you were dining and winning with the brothers, you'd politely got rid of me."

"I thought you'd get yourself something here," Inkler said.

"I was too busy locating Mr. Templar. And after that—too busy."

She was pouring coffee as she said it, and she didn't look at Simon.

"I'm sorry," said the Saint. "I forgot all about that. I was too interested myself."

The waiter was gone, and they ate.

"The Enriquez boys are calling for us at half past eleven," Inkler said. "By that time they'll have arranged for the cash. They'll drive us to Vera Cruz. They've got a fishing boat there, and we'll go out and look at the cargo. I sent a radiogram to our captain last night, telling him to meet us twenty miles out. I just hope it isn't too rough."

"How are you going to account for me?" Simon asked.

"That's easy," Doris said. "You're Sherman's partner, just arrived from the States. You were worried about him making no progress, and flew down unexpectedly to see whether you could help."

"Your faith in me is almost embarrassing. How did you know I'd have the equipment to disguise myself, in case one of the brothers happened to remember seeing me at another table last night?"

"If you hadn't, we could have lent it to you. But I couldn't imagine the Saint being without it. I expect you have another name with you, too."

"Tombs," said the Saint. "Sebastian Tombs."

He still had a sentimental attachment to the absurd alias that he had used so often, but he felt reasonably confident that the Enriquez brothers would not have heard of it.

"Have you got a gun?" Inkler asked.

Simon patted his left side, under the arm.

"I can take care of Manuel and Pablo, and maybe some of their friends, if they try any funny business," he said. "But whether I can take care of the whole Mexican *gendarmierie* is another matter. Even if everything goes according to plan, it may not be long before they find out that your packing cases aren't all full

of artillery. Then they might have the cops looking for us on some phony charge — as well as Jalisco's bully boys. I don't think Mexico will be the ideal vacation spot for us after this. What were your plans for after you got the dough?"

Inkler looked at his wife, leaving her to answer.

"I've found out that there's a night plane from here to Havana that stops at Vera Cruz at two o'clock in the morning," she said. "It should be just right for us. I'll make the reservations while you're getting disguised, if that suits you."

The Saint seldom used an elaborate disguise, and in this case he did not have to conceal his identity from anyone who knew him but only from two men who might possibly have recalled him from having casually noticed him the night before. With plenty of gray combed into his dark hair, and the addition of a neat gray mustache and tinted glasses, he was sure that the Enriquez brothers would see nothing familiar about him. Even the Inklers, when he first met them again, looked at him blankly.

The Enriquez brothers arrived with un-Mexican punctuality. Simon was introduced to them in the lobby, and they accepted Inkler's explanation of his presence with no signs of suspicion.

Outside, they had two matching light yellow Cadillacs. Chauffeurs opened the doors simultaneously as they came out. Manuel Enriquez ushered them into one of the cars; and Simon, always considerate of his own comfort on a long trip, quietly slipped into the front seat. Manuel followed the Inklers into the back. Pablo waved to them and turned away.

"He goes in the other car," Manuel explained. "He has the money."

He said it with a smile, almost passing it off as a joke, so that the implication was inoffensive. But it left no doubt, if there had ever been any, that the Enriquez brothers were not babes in the woods. Nor, Simon believed, were their chauffeurs. The one beside him, whom he was able to study at more length, had the shoulders of a prizefighter and a face that had not led a sheltered life.

On the other hand, these evidences of sensible caution did not necessarily mean that there was a double-cross in prospect, and the Saint saw no reason why he should not let himself at least enjoy the trip. Manuel was a good host in his way, even if he made Simon think of a hospitable alligator, pointing out the landmarks along the way and making agreeable small talk about Mexican customs and conditions, without any reference to

politics. Nor was there any mention of the object of their journey — but after all, there was no more at that moment to discuss.

They had lunch at Puebla, and then rolled on down the long serpentine road to the coast. After a while the Saint went to sleep.

It was early evening when they reached Vera Cruz, and drove through the hot noisy streets out to the comparative tranquillity of the Mocambo.

"We will stay here tonight," Manuel said. "While they take in our bags we will get something to eat. It may be late before we can have dinner."

After sandwiches and cold beer they got into Manuel's car again. A short drive took them to the Club Nautico. As they got out, Simon observed that Pablo's twin Cadillac was no longer behind them.

"If all is well, we shall meet him presently," Manuel said.

He guided them to the dock where a shiny new Chris-Craft with fishing chairs and outriggers was tied up. The crew of two who helped them aboard were identical in type with the chauffeurs, and no less efficiently taciturn. The lines were cast off at once, and the big engines came to life, one after the other, with deep hollow roars. The boat idled out into the darkening harbor.

"Tell us where we are to go," Manuel said.

"North-east," Inkler said, "and twenty miles out."

Enriquez translated to the captain at the wheel.

"Let us go inside and be comfortable," he said. "I have whisky, gin, and tequila. In an hour we should be able to see your boat."

The time did not pass too badly, although Simon would have preferred to stay on deck. It was noisy in the cabin, with the steady drone of the engines and the rush of water, so that a certain effort had to be made to talk and to listen. But fortunately for their comfort there was very little sea, and the speeding boat did not bounce much.

He was checking his watch for the exact end of the estimated hour when the engines reduced their volume of sound suddenly and the boat sagged down off the step and surged heavily as its own wake overtook it. They all went out with unanimous accord into the after cockpit, and Simon saw the lights and silhouette of a ship ahead of them. A moment later, Enriquez switched on a spotlight and sent its beam sweeping over the other vessel. It was a squat and very dilapidated little coastal freighter of scarcely three hundred tons

which would certainly have looked like having a rough voyage to Iran, if anybody but the Saint had been critical of such details at that moment. An answering light blinked from her bridge, three times.

"That's it," Inkler said.

"What you call, on the nose?" Enriquez said with solid satisfaction.

As the Chris-Craft drew alongside, the freighter lowered a boarding ladder. Doris Inkler stood beside the Saint.

"We'll wait for you here," she said.

They watched Inkler and Enriquez clamber up over the side and disappear. Simon lighted two cigarettes and gave her one. She stayed close to him, watching the Mexican captain and mate as they made a rope fast to the ladder and hung fenders over the rubbing strake.

"This is the first place we could have trouble," she said in a low voice. "If Manuel wants one of the wrong cases opened

"Don't worry until it happens," he said.

But he could feel her tenseness, and he was a little tense himself for what seemed like an interminable time, but by his watch was less than a half-hour, until at last Inkler and Enriquez came down the ladder again and joined them in the smaller boat's

cockpit. Then he could tell by the subtly different confidence of both men that there had been no trouble.

Manuel spoke briefly to the captain, who yelled at the mate, and the bow line was cast off. Water widened between the two hulls, and the Chris-Craft engines grumbled again. Manuel shepherded the Inklers and the Saint below.

He poured four drinks in four clean glasses, and raised one of them.

"To our good fortunes," he said.

"Is everything all right?" Doris asked, holding on to her glass.

"Your husband is a good business man. He has the right things for the right customers."

Only the most captious analyst might have thought she was a fraction slow with her response.

"Oh, Sherman!"

She flung her arms around Inkler's neck and kissed him joyously. Then she turned to the Saint and did the same to him. Inkler watched this with a steady smile.

"Your boat is now following us to a little fishing village, where I have men waiting to unload the cargo," Manuel said.

"Is it far?"

"We have to go slower, of course. But it will not be too long. About three hours. And we have plenty to drink."

"Pablo Enriquez is waiting there with the money," Inkler said to the Saint.

Simon remembered that he had the privileged role of a partner.

"Exactly when is it to be paid?" he inquired. "I hope Mr. Enriquez won't be offended, but business is business. He wanted to see what we had to offer before he committed himself, and quite rightly. Now I don't think we should have to unload all that stuff until it's paid for."

Manuel grinned like a genial saurian.

"As soon as I tell Pablo it's okay, he gives you the money. Five hundred thousand American dollars. In cash!"

There was nothing more to be said; but the rest of the voyage seemed to take far more than three times as long as the trip out. The Chris-Craft wallowed along sluggishly, rolling a little with the swell: they all realized that her speed had to be cut down to let the freighter keep up with her, but still their nerves chafed against the restraint, aching impatiently and impossibly for the throttles to open and the exhaust to belch in booming crescendo and the ship to lighten and lift up and skim with all the throbbing speed of which she was capable, lancing through the time between them and the climax ahead. That was how Simon

felt, and he knew that two others felt exactly as he did and worse.

There was plenty to drink, as Manuel said, but they could not even take advantage of that to deaden the consciousness of crawling minutes. Sipping lightly and at a studiously sober pace himself, Simon noted that the Inklers were doing the same. Once Sherman emptied his glass rather hurriedly, and earned an unmistakable cold stare from his wife; after that he left the refill untouched for a long time. Only Enriquez was under no inhibition, but the alcohol seemed to have no effect on him, unless it was to confirm his hard-lipped good humor.

"Perhaps one day we do some more business, but in the open," was the closest he came to referring to the lawless purpose of their association. "It is like Prohibition in your country, is it not? When the law changes, the bootleggers become importers. But until then, it is better you forget all about tonight."

Watching him with ruthless detachment, the Saint was unable to detect any foreshadowing of a double-cross. And after all, it was entirely possible that the Enriquez brothers would be prepared to pay for what they thought they were getting, and even consider it cheap at the price. At the infinite end of three hours, he was almost convinced

that Manuel was prepared to complete his infamous bargain. Yet he could not relax.

At last, after three eternities, there was a change of volume in the purr of the engines, and the boat seemed to be rolling less, and muffled voices shouted on deck. Manuel put down his glass and went out quickly, and they followed.

The night air was still warm and humid, but it was refreshing after the stuffy cabin. The sky overhead was an awning of rich velvet sprinkled with unrealistically brilliant stars, and on both sides Simon saw the black profiles of land sharply cut out against it; over the bow, at the end of the bay, he saw the scattered yellow window lights of a small village, and closer than that there were other lights down by the water, flashlights that moved and danced. Searching around for the ugly shape of the little freighter, he found it looming so close astern that it was momentarily alarming, until he realized that it was hardly moving. The Mexican captain was yelling up at it and waving his arms. Enriquez took over, translating: "Stop here! You can't go any farther!"

The anchor came down from the freighter with a clanking of chain and a splash. Enriquez turned to Inkler.

"We can go in to the dock, but

he is too big. My men will come out in smaller boats to unload."

Inkler relayed the information, shouting upwards at the freighter's bridge. He added: "Don't let 'em have the stuff till I give the signal!"

A voice shouted back, unnautically: "Okey-doke."

The Mexican captain shoved the clutches forward, and the Chris-Craft purred away.

In a few minutes they were alongside the ramshackle dock where the flashlights bobbed. There were at least a dozen men on it, and a slight aroma of fish and sweat and garlic; the silent shadowy figures gave an impression of roughness and toughness, but only on occasional glimpse of detail could be seen when a light moved. Manuel stepped ashore first, and the Saint followed him and gave his hand to Doris Inkler to help her. Her hand was cold, and kept hold of his even after she had joined him on the rickety timbers. Sherman Inkler stumbled on to the pier after them.

Enriquez seemed to sense the defensiveness of their grouping, for he said reassuringly: "They are all friends of our friend Jalisco. Don't worry. This village is one of ours."

He guided them through the opening ranks and off the dock. It felt good to the Saint to stretch his legs again on solid

ground. The dim square outlines of several parked trucks loomed around them; then another man alone, whose face was faintly spotlighted in the darkness by the glow of a cigar. It was Pablo.

The two brothers talked quickly and briefly in Spanish, and Manuel said mostly "Si, si," and "*Está bien.*"

"This way," Pablo said.

He led them a little distance from the trucks, to where one of the yellow Cadillacs was parked under a tree, with one of the burly chauffeurs beside it. He went around to the back and unlocked the trunk. An automatic light went on as it opened, illuminating one medium-sized suitcase inside.

"That is for you," Pablo said.

Inkler stepped slowly forward. He opened the suitcase gingerly, as if half expecting it to be booby-trapped. Simon felt Doris tremble a little at his shoulder. Then they saw the neat bundles of green bills that filled the bag.

"You may count it," Manuel said.

Inkler took out one of the packages of currency and thumbed through it methodically. He compared it with the others for thickness. Doris joined him and began to count packages, rummaging to the very bottom of the bag. Sherman pulled out occasional bills and examined them very closely under the

light. Most of them were twenties and fifties.

Simon Templar watched from where he stood, and also let his eyes travel all around and turned his head casually to look behind him. His muscles and reflexes were poised on a hair trigger. But he could neither see nor hear any hint of a closing ambush. The husky chauffeur stood a little apart, like a statue. The Enriquez brothers talked together in low tones, and the only scraps of their conversation that the Saint could catch were concerned entirely with their arrangements for storing and distributing the ordnance that they thought they were buying.

"I'm satisfied," Sherman Inkler said at last.

Manuel lighted a cigar.

"Good. Then you will give the signal to your boat?"

"Of course."

Manuel led him back into the gloom, in the direction of the pier.

Doris Inkler closed and fastened the suitcase and pulled it out of the car trunk. She unbalanced a little as the full weight came on her arm, and put it down on the ground.

"It's heavy," she said with a nervous laugh; and as the Saint stepped up to feel it, out of curiosity, she said: "Give me a cigarette."

He gave her one, and Pablo lighted it.

"It is a lot of money," Pablo said. "It will buy many pretty things, if you have an appreciative husband."

"I'll feel safer with it when it's turned into traveler's checks," said the Saint.

Pablo laughed.

They made forced and trivial conversation until Simon heard Manuel and Sherman returning.

Now, if there was to be any treachery on the part of the Enriquez brothers, it would have to show itself. The Saint's weight was on the balls of his feet, his right hand ready to move like a striking snake; but still the movement that he was alert for did not come.

"I am afraid it will take several hours to unload everything," Manuel said. "Would you like to go back to the boat and have some more drinks?"

Doris looked at her husband.

"Can't we go back to the hotel? I'm tired, and famished — and I think some mosquitoes are eating me."

"Pablo and I must stay here," Manuel said. "And we need all our men. Even the chauffeur should be helping. However . . . Would you like to take the car? One of you can drive. It is an easy road to Vera Cruz. You cannot get lost."

He gave directions.

"But what about you?" Inkler protested half-heartedly.

"We will come later, on one of the trucks. Do not wait up for us."

Almost incredulously, they found themselves getting into the Cadillac. Sherman picked up the suitcase full of money and put it in the front seat, and got in beside it, behind the wheel. "Don't want to let it out of my sight," he said with an empty grin. Manuel and Pablo kissed the hand of Doris, and she got in the back seat. Simon shook hands with them and got in after her. In a mere matter of seconds they were on their way.

They must have driven more than a mile in unbelieving silence. It was as if they were afraid that even there the Enriquez brothers might overhear them, or that a careless word might shatter a fragile spell . . .

And then suddenly, uncontrollably, Doris electrified the stillness with a wild banshee shriek.

"We did it!" she screamed. "We've got the money, and we're off. *We did it!*"

She leaned forward and grasped her husband's shoulders and shook them.

"Better than I ever hoped for," Sherman said shakily. "I thought at the very least we'd have a chauffeur to get rid of. But we're on our own already. Now pull yourself together!"

Doris fell back, giggling hysterically.

The Saint's right hand slid unobtrusively under his coat, fingered the butt of the holstered automatic that he had not had to touch. Then it moved to the pocket where he kept his cigarettes.

"So you didn't really need me," he said. "The Enriquez brothers were on the level, after a fashion. They may swindle the government and send peasants out to kill and be killed for them, but they pay their own bills. I guess there *is* honor among certain kinds of thieves."

Doris stopped squirming and sat up with a final cathartic gasp.

"Oh, no," she said. "I'm glad we ran into you. Terribly glad."

And suddenly her lips were on his mouth, hot and hungry, and her body against him and her arms winding around him, groping . . . And then just as quickly she tore herself away, back to the far side of the seat; and he looked down and saw the gleam of his own gun in her hand, pointing at him.

"You didn't have to use it," she said, a little breathlessly. "But I will, if you try anything. Pull over, Sherm. I've got him covered."

The Saint didn't move. He gazed at her steadily, and rather sadly, while the car lost speed without any abruptness that might have spoiled her aim.

"A perfect stranger," he said, "a person who didn't know your sweet loyal soul, would think you were going to take a mean advantage of me — to toss me aside like an old squeezed-out toothpaste tube."

"A perfect stranger would be right," she said. "It was mighty nice to have you with us while there was a real chance that the Enriquez brothers might have been planning to pull a fast one. But now we're out of that danger, you're too expensive a partner. But you can still be useful. I figure that if we leave you for them or the cops to catch, when they find out who you are they won't care so much about trying to find us."

"That's how I thought you had it figured."

She peered at him sharply, then gave a short grating laugh.

"You did?"

The car had stopped now, and Inkler turned around in the front seat.

"Don't let's waste any more time, Doris."

"Hold it, Sherm. This I have got to hear!"

"You remember the lecture I promised you about your extravagant generosity, darling?" said the Saint. "That was the tip-off. When you came and offered me a third share of a prize like this, after you'd done all the groundwork, and with you and Sherman

paying all the expenses out of your end, you overplayed it to a fare-thee-well. They just don't make fairy godparents like that in the racket. If you offered me about twenty grand, say, just to keep my mouth shut and do this little walk-on in the last act, I might have fallen for it. But more than a hundred and sixty thousand, free and clear — that just had to be sucker bait."

"Then why did you go for it?"

"I had to see how it would work out. And there was always an outside chance that you might just be a little crazy. But if you were a thoroughly bad girl — if you really were trying to pull something like this on the old maestro — then I'd have to teach you a lesson."

"I'll look forward to that," she said.

She fumbled behind her and opened the door on her side. She got out, without ever turning away from him, and held the door open, still keeping him covered. At the same time, Sherman got out on his side.

"Come on outside, Saint," she said.

"That's a fighting phrase," Simon remarked mildly.

But he followed her out, and she made him step a little away from the car. She handled the gun like a professional, and kept a safe distance from a sudden leap.

He gave her a last chance.

"You seemed to rather like me last night, if I may be so ungentlemanly as to mention it," he said. "Why don't we ditch your husband instead, and start a new team?"

She shook her head.

"Not my husband," she said. "My brother. We only work as husband and wife because it makes a better act. I like you a lot that way, Saint, but you just aren't in the running."

"I'm sorry," he said.

He caught the flicker of her eyes and the almost imperceptible whisper of movement behind him at the same instant, and spun around. He saw Sherman Inkler with something like a blackjack in his right hand raised and already falling, and stepped in under it like a cat. The Saint's left came up under the man's chin with a snap like a collision of pool balls, and Sherman was probably already unconscious before the right cross that followed the uppercut slammed him against the car and dropped him at the enforced limit of his horizontal travel.

The Saint turned. And quite deliberately, Doris Inkler shot at him. He heard the click of the firing pin, but that was all.

Then he took the gun out of her hand.

"You shouldn't have done that," he said. "It deprives you of

your last hope of sympathy. You'd have killed me if I hadn't been careful." He was doing something to the gun and putting it back in his shoulder holster. "You knew where I had a gun, so I knew the first thing you'd do would be to take it, so I took out the magazine while we were driving," he explained calmly.

She spat obscenities at him, and flew at him with her fingernails, so that he had to clip her on the jaw with a loose fist, just hard enough to knock her cold for a few seconds, rather than have his last remaining pleasant memories of her ruined.

He took the airplane tickets, but left them some money and their tourist cards, without which they would have found it very complicated indeed to cross any Mexican border. He felt that that was pretty Saintly, considering what they would have done to him, but that would always be his weakness. Even so, their chances would be none too good.

He got into the Cadillac and drove on.

At the outskirts of Vera Cruz he stopped for long enough to peel off his mustache and rub the gray out of his hair with a handkerchief; he put the tinted glasses in his pocket. Then he drove on again, slowly, until he found himself within a couple of blocks of bright lights. He

parked the car in a dark yard, took out the suitcase of loot, and walked on. In a little while he found a taxi, and ordered it to drive him to the airport. He saw no need to risk going back to the Mocambo for his overnight bag: with what he carried in his hand, he could cheerfully consider everything it contained expendable. His watch told him he had just a comfortable margin of time to catch the plane.

He checked in at the ticket counter, but kept possession of the suitcase. It was a little larger than the size which passengers are normally permitted to carry with them, but the clerk was sleepy and let him get away with it. He was passed on to another official who stamped his tourist card.

Then a hand fell on his shoulder.

"You are leaving us so soon?" said Captain Carlos Xavier.

"Just for a few days," said the Saint, with superhuman blandness. "Some friends of mine are honeymooning in Havana, and they begged me to hop over and see them."

Xavier nodded.

"We still have so much to talk about. Come with me."

He took the Saint's arm and led him past the customs counter, under the eyes of the uniformed officer, through a door marked *Entrada prohibida*, and

into a small shabby office. He shut the door, and pointed to the Saint's suitcase.

"You know that if you had gone on, the officer outside would have made you open that?"

"I was just figuring how much it would cost to discourage him," said the Saint blandly, "when you interrupted me."

"You will let me look in it, please?"

Simon laid the bag on the desk and released the locks, but did not open it. He stepped back and let Xavier raise the lid. He unbuttoned his coat, and was glad he had reloaded his gun.

Xavier stared at the money for a long time.

"I suppose this belongs to the Enriquez brothers?" he said.

"It did," Simon replied steadily. "But they paid it over quite voluntarily, for what they thought was a shipment of arms and ammunition for Jalisco's revolution."

"To be supplied by the Inklers?"

It was the Saint's turn to stare.

"How did you know?"

"Why do you think I took you to Larue last night, where I knew the Enriquez brothers would be, and where I hoped the Inklers would try to contact them? If they had not done it that night, I would have taken you wherever they went the next

night. Why do you think I arranged for Inkler to be delayed, until I had had time to tell you about Manuel and Pablo? Why do you think I arranged to be called away afterwards so that you would be free to observe what happened and to act as you chose? Why do you think I have never been far away from you since then, even to watching you at sea this afternoon from an airplane, until it got too dark? Meeting you here, of course, was easy: I knew about your reservations as soon as they were made. But you should be grateful to me, instead of wondering whether to use the gun you have under your arm."

"Excuse me," said the Saint, and leaned against the wall.

"I told you I was an unusual policeman," Xavier said. "I received word from your FBI that the Inklers were here, and what to expect from them. They have been in other Central American countries, always working on the discontented element, and usually with the story that they could influence assistance from Washington. So I knew that the Enriquez brothers would be perfect for them. I had a problem. It was my duty not to let the

Inklers swindle anyone; yet I did not have much desire to protect Manuel and Pablo. That is why I was most happy that you were here. I was sure I could rely on you for a solution."

Simon's eyes widened in a blinding smile.

"Is anything wrong with this one?"

"It is a lot of money." Xavier pursed his lips over it judicially. "But I have no report of any such sum being stolen. And no one has made any accusations against you. I do not see how I can prevent you leaving with it. On the other hand, I am not very well paid, and I think you owe me something." He took out six of the neat bundles of green paper and distributed them in different pockets of his clothing. "I should like to retire, and buy a small hotel in Fortín."

Simon Templar drew a deep breath, and straightened up.

"One day I must visit you there," he said.

Captain Xavier closed the suitcase, and Simon picked it up. Xavier opened another door, and the Saint found himself out on the landing field. In front of him, the first passengers were boarding the plane.



here
lies—

by Manning Coles

ON AN AUTUMN evening in 1950 Tommy Hambledon was driving up from Devon to London.

He was not certain where he was except that he was somewhere in Hampshire; the clock on the dashboard told him that it was past nine o'clock, and his common sense added that if he went driving doggedly on for much longer every sort of place of refreshment would be shut and he would go hungry. At this point he found himself entering a village called — on the roadside name-boards — Tegdown.

He slowed down and came to a church on his left. On his right a turning led into a village warm with lighted windows and something more, a long low building with a sign swinging above the door, a square sign with a picture on it.

"Ha," said Hambledon, and turned the car towards it.

He parked the car under the sign, which showed an energetic St. George fighting a bright green dragon, and went in to find a long bar almost opposite

Most of the thirty novels by Manning Coles dealt with the exploits of Thomas Elphinstone Hambledon of British Intelligence, one of the most pleasant practitioners of that far from pleasant profession. NIGHT TRAIN TO PARIS, ALIAS UNCLE HUGO, THE BASLE EXPRESS, DEATH OF AN AMBASSADOR, GREEN HAZARD, and the thoroughly delightful BRIEF CANDLES (though this had nothing to do with TEH), are all among the classics of the genre. . . . H.S.S.

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to him in a long room running away to right and left. No nonsense about chromium plating and certainly no squalling espresso machines; the place was quietly lit and warm. There was even an inglenook fireplace away to the left with actually a log-fire burning.

Hambledon walked across to the bar and asked for a glass of ale. The pleasant-faced middle-aged man behind the bar was plainly the landlord, for the dozen or so men in the room treated him with some respect. Conversation had died down as Hambledon came in, as was natural, since he was a stranger; but nobody stared at him and soon they were all talking again, mostly in the slow accents of the southern English. But there were exceptions.

Two of them sat in an alcove at the far end of the room away from the fire. One was unmistakably a foreigner in appearance and clothes, and although his companion looked English enough, Hambledon's quick ears told him they were speaking German.

Nor were they in any particular harmony together. They were bickering in short, acid little sentences with long pauses in between, during which each in turn composed the next biting riposte. They were not sober and were drinking more and more

whisky. Hambledon began to wish that he had dropped in somewhere else for his half-pint, but hoped that perhaps they would get up and go; he caught the landlord's eye and saw his eyebrows go up apologetically.

The other two immigrants from the great world outside Tegdown were a small neat Frenchman and a tall and skinny Pole who were talking together at the end of the bar in not very fluent English. They were not saying much and their attention was evidently upon the pair in the alcove.

The clock went on past the half-hour and some of the customers began to drift out, exchanging good nights. One very ancient man rose stiffly from a chair by the fire, picked up his stick, and came across to Hambledon. "Good evening, sir."

"Good evening to you," said Hambledon, cheering up. He liked the weathered old face and the complete self-possession.

"Going to be a storm, I reckon," said the ancient. "I'm going to take me old bones home afore it starts."

"Quite right," said Hambledon. "You don't want to get soaking wet."

"No, that's right. Good night, sir. Good night, all."

He went out. Hambledon asked for another half-pint and added, "Who is that?"

"That's old Amos Paradine, sir," said the landlord. "He's a grand old gentleman, so he is. Ninety-four last birthday."

A younger man got up to follow old Paradine out, and one of the three countrymen at the bar turned to speak to him. "You're going early tonight, Bert?"

"That's right. Young Billy isn't to well and I told Sue I'd be back early. He's ate something as disagreed with him, I think, myself."

They nodded and he went out. Hambledon attended to his second glass and listened to the conversation in the alcove.

No one in the room could help hearing it now, since the voices were rising; Tommy wondered how many of the half-dozen still in the room, besides himself, understood German.

"You will be wise to take care," said the German angrily. "If I tell all I know about you, you go to gaol for ten years, I think. Yes, ten years, quite."

"If I talked about *you*," said the other fiercely, "you would go inside and never come out again! They *hang* people like you."

The landlord slipped out from behind the bar with a duster in his hand and went to wipe off the table in the alcove. He only apologized for the table being unsteady—so easy for drinks

to slop over—but his mere presence had a calming influence. The German looked contemptuously at him, but the Englishman moderated his voice.

"Do not let us quarrel now," he said. "You have come over for poor Magda's funeral—"

"She should not have died. She should have married a decent German, not an English pig. I do not . . ."

Hambledon missed the next few exchanges because he had suddenly remembered something about a man whose sister was said to have married an Englishman, as so many German women did after the war. But this particular German brother figured on a list so familiar to Hambledon that he could, as it were, turn over its pages in his mind, reread the damning particulars, and look again at the unflattering photographs.

The list was that of wanted war criminals; and if this was Erich Schlacht, he had lost the little finger of his left hand and his crime was shooting down disarmed British prisoners-of-war. He looked across at him. Yes, it could be; coarser and more paunchy, deteriorated naturally with the passing years, but it could be. The left hand was not in sight.

The three young men were talking quietly with their heads close together. "That ruddy Ger-

man," said one. "God, how I hate Germans!"

"We've good reason to, haven't we?" said another.

"Listen, chaps," said a third. "What say we follow them out, pick up this chap, give him a hiding, and chuck him in the river?"

"That's an idea . . ." The heads came closer together and the voices dropped to a whisper.

Hambledon, having thought things over, decided that it would be advisable to stay the night in Tegdown and look a little more closely at Herr Schlacht, if it were he, in the morning; and when next the landlord, whose name was Ricketts, came near, Hambledon asked if he could stay the night at the George. Even as he spoke, there was a flicker outside the uncurtained window and a faint mutter of far-distant thunder.

"Well, we aren't the Ritz, you know," said Ricketts doubtfully, "but we can put you up and pleased to do it if you don't mind no running-'ot-and-cold basin in the bedroom and all that."

"Thank you very much," said Hambledon. "I am most grateful. I don't want to drive another yard—except, of course, to put the car away. Can I put her in somewhere?"

"Round at the back, sir, there's a long open shed; nobody won't

touch her there. Come back in through this door behind me here; it'll save you going round the house."

Hambledon nodded, went across to the front door and opened it, and was greeted by a steady pattering noise. He came in again a few minutes later by the door at the back, his suitcase in his hand and his raincoat draped over his head.

"Raining like blazes," he said cheerfully, "and the storm nowhere near yet. What happens when it does get here?"

"It'll stop again in a minute," said a man from the group by the fire. He had moved across and was looking out of the window. "This is only the forerunner, like. Maybe we shan't get the storm here at all." He flattened his nose against the windowpane.

Ricketts came over to take his suitcase, and Hambledon asked if he could have something to eat.

"What would you like, sir? Potato crisps? Or something a bit more solid—a plate of cold meat?"

"I tell you what I would really like, if you've got it. A nice new crusty loaf and a hunk of cheese and some more beer, in a pot this time."

"We can do that, sir. Excuse me, it's just on ten. Let me get these people out first and then we can be quiet."

Ricketts moved about, tidying up and putting things away until the minute hand came square to the hour, when he lifted his voice in the ritual cry, "Time, gentlemen, please!"

Conversations came to an end as his clients finished their drinks and the window-watcher said that it had come just right—the rain had stopped for the time being. "Might get home with dry jackets now if we're lucky." He emptied the glass he was still holding, set it down, and opened the door. It was true that the pattering sound had stopped, and there was only a scatter of drips from where St. George was thrusting a long black lance against the writhing dragon.

The room emptied fairly quickly, the group round the fire leaving in a loose bunch followed by the unamiable pair from the alcove. The Englishman stared momentarily at Hambledon in passing and said good night to Ricketts; the German stalked out, looking neither right nor left, and Tommy suspected that the unwavering stride was something of an effort. The man's left hand was in his pocket. Never mind, there was always tomorrow.

The three young men at the bar went out almost at once; Hambledon, having heard their comments earlier, was wondering what would happen outside,

but there was no particular air of purpose about them and they were discussing local football as they went. Last of all the little Frenchman and his tall friend the Pole ducked their heads in farewell to Ricketts and Hambledon, and disappeared into the night.

Ricketts locked the door, switched off the outside light, drew the blinds, and gathered up glasses from tables in that smooth flow of uninterrupted movement which tells of years of habit.

"Why not come and sit by the fire, sir? It's pleasant in the chimney corner. That's right, make yourself at home while I bring a tray. I'll draw your beer. Bread and cheese makes a good supper, so it does. I think I'll follow your example and have mine by the fire with you, if you don't mind?"

Hambledon encouraged the idea, and Ricketts left the room to return a few minutes later with a large tin tray charged with plates, knives, butter, a thick wedge of cheese, and a golden crusty loaf such as townsmen seldom see and steam ovens never produce. "Ha," said Hambledon greedily.

"English butter," said Ricketts, "and English Cheddar. You carry on, sir. I'll just draw myself a half, and I think I'll have some pickles too. Pickles for you, sir?"

"No thanks," said Hambledon with his mouth full.

A quarter of an hour later he said, "That's better," and cut himself another wedge of bread. Ricketts threw more logs on the fire and replenished the beer.

Ten minutes later Hambledon said, "Ah," and leaned back in his chair to light a cigarette. "I'm so glad I stopped here. The storm is coming nearer."

"Yes, sir. No night to be out in, but I reckon my people got home dry; they all live nearby—bar the little Frenchman, and I daresay he's got his bike."

"He lives farther out?"

"Couple of miles. He's chauffeur up at the big house."

"And the two in the alcove?"

"Ah. By rights, I shouldn't have gone on serving them, but in a village it's difficult to refuse. There'd only have been a row and I like peace in my bar. He can turn nasty when he's had a few, Mr. Greenacre."

"Greenacre?"

"Captain, he calls himself. Lives just up the road, that corner house by the church. Church Corner, it's called. Hasn't been here long, not by our standards. Three years or so, that's all. . . . His wife lies dead in the house; the funeral's tomorrow." Ricketts laughed a little apologetically. "I expect you saw some of the villagers looking at him a bit old-fashioned, sir. They didn't think

he ought to be here tonight."

"I noticed a sort of feeling. Surely they didn't think he was celebrating?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Ricketts in a faintly shocked voice. "No, but you know what they are. You shouldn't leave a corpse alone in an empty house, so they say."

"Oh? Now you mention it, I have heard that. Who was the German?"

"His brother-in-law, come over for the funeral. Mrs. Greenacre was a German; he met her when he was in Germany with the Army of Occupation. He was in Germany a lot after the war, by what he says. She was a nice lady, the little we knew of her. I reckon she had something to put up with, with him."

"Is he always as tight as that?"

"Oh no, he gets fits of it."

"Those three young men near me didn't seem to like Germans," said Hambledon casually.

"They've reason not to. Remember that nasty business outside Calais when a mixed bunch of British soldiers were overrun and surrounded, and a German officer had them all shot down with machine-guns? Disgraceful, that was. Those three were all wounded and shammed dead, and were picked up after and taken to hospital. Of course they were all prisoners, but they came home in the end. Two was

from here and one from the Midlands somewhere, but he came back here with them and they're always together."

Years of practice enabled Hambledon to hear the most unexpected tidings without any change of expression, but his mind was sprouting exclamation marks. The "nasty business outside Calais" was that for which Erich Schlacht was "wanted." That, and other things.

Hambledon did not think that the three survivors had recognized Schlacht. A man looks very different out of a smart uniform and in a suit of loose-woven green tweed which bulges on the shoulder-blades—and bareheaded and going bald instead of wearing a stiff-peaked cap. There would have been more reaction, though countrymen do not show their feelings if they don't mean to. If they had recognized him, the "hiding" might be serious.

"The Frenchy and the Pole don't like Germans either," went on Ricketts, accepting another of Hambledon's cigarettes. "Dupont, that's the chauffeur, was in the Resistance as a lad with his father. He got caught—the father, that is—and he died in a concentration camp. Jingle-jangle—that's what we call the Pole, because nobody can pronounce whatever his name is—he was in Warsaw when the Germans came in."

"Oh dear," said Hambledon.

"Yes, sir. When he first come here he nearly used to burst trying to tell us about it, but his English wouldn't rise to it."

"Just as well, probably."

"So I think, myself. He doesn't talk very well even now."

"So I noticed. The storm is getting nearer."

"May go on for hours in the valley; it does sometimes."

"Have you got a policeman in the village?" asked Hambledon, tearing strips of crust off the loaf and chewing them thoughtfully.

"Oh yes, sir. Name of Merton. Nice young chap, hasn't been a policeman long; in fact, this is his first post. I say he hasn't been a policeman long, but that's not quite true—he was a Military Policeman in the Army. Not that that helps a lot now. I reckon he's always running home to look things up in his little book. He'll be all right when he's settled down to it—he's only been here—what, three-four months."

"Married?"

"Yes, sir, shortly before he came home. Married a girl from Winchester. They don't as a rule give a village post like this to a single man." Ricketts laughed. "Not only has he got a wife, he's got a dog too. Some dog! A hairy great blood'ound the size of a calf, he has. That storm!"

"Let's go out and look at it," suggested Hambledon. "I like watching lightning. What was that?"

"What, sir?"

"I thought I heard a shot fired."

"Surely not—who'd be out firing guns on a night like this?" They went out of the front door to stand upon the cobbled strip outside, and as they did so, the church clock struck eleven. "Not without it's those two up at Church Corner trying to murder each other. I wouldn't put it past them! I wish it would rain," added Ricketts uneasily, "there's not a drop falling. They do say it's safer when there's a down-pour of rain with a storm."

"I don't know that there's much in—"

Hambledon was interrupted by a lightning flash so near and so brilliant as to blind them both for the moment, and right upon the flash came a roar of thunder just overhead which seemed to shake the ground. In the momentary silence which followed there sounded two sharp cracks, and immediately all the lights went out.

"Those were shots," said Hambledon abruptly. "Up the road, that way."

"Just a moment, sir; I'll get a torch." Ricketts shot indoors, striking a match as he went, and he lit a candle on the bar. Before

the flame had burnt up he was back with an electric torch. "I expect I'd better go and see," he said. "It might be as someone's hurt."

"I'll come with you. You might want a hand."

They ran up the road towards the church, and the darkness was intense except when the lightning flashed, farther off now.

At the gate of Church Corner, Ricketts stopped. "Best have a look around, I suppose."

"I suppose the shots did come from here?" said Hambledon.

"Where else would they come from? We're decent folk here."

They went in through the gate, walking quietly on the flagged path which led up to the front door and then forked left around the house. Ricketts led the way round the corner, along the side of the house and round another corner—

He stopped suddenly, for a man was lying face up across the path.

"It's the German," said Ricketts softly. "Is he—"

Hambledon passed him to bend over the man, who had a wound in the middle of his chest. The wound was no longer bleeding. Beside him, on the ground, was a Luger automatic.

"I think he's dead," said Hambledon and he lifted the left hand, apparently feeling for a pulse, though it was plain that

the man was no longer breathing. The hand had the little finger missing.

The light of another torch more powerful than Ricketts' shone suddenly upon them and a deep voice said, "What goes on here?"

Ricketts looked round and said it looked like murder, Mr. Merton.

"Oh? Stand away, please." The constable turned his torch upon Hambledon, the stranger, and kept it there.

"Did I see you touch him, sir?"

"I only lifted his hand to feel his pulse, that's all."

"This gentleman," said Ricketts, "is Mr. Hambledon, who is staying with me at the George. We heard the shots and came on up to see if there'd been an accident or something."

"Very natural you should. Well, I'll take over now. If you gentlemen will go back to the George I'll just have a look round here and follow you down. I'll have to ring up Mark, and it'll be quicker from the George than going back to my place."

Hambledon stepped back and bumped into something large, soft, and solid which snuffed his shoes. Hambledon patted the dog's vast shoulders.

"What's his name?"

"Pluto, sir."

There came another brilliant

flash which lit up the scene, and as though it were a signal the rain fell in torrents.

"Come on, sir," said Ricketts, "you'll be soaked."

They ran for the gate, cantered down the road to the George, and dodged thankfully indoors. Ricketts lit several more candles while Hambledon took his jacket off and shook it.

"Whisky, sir?"

"If you'll join me."

There was the sound of pounding feet outside and the young man called Bert, he who had gone home early because his child was ill, put a dripping head in at the open door.

"Beg pardon— Oh, Mr. Ricketts. Could you please lend me a penny and a box of matches?"

Ricketts looked faintly amused. "Certainly," he said. "Are you sure that's all I can do for you?" He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a penny.

"It's for the telephone. My nipper's got the belly-ache so bad he's fair screaming, and I come hurrying down to call the doctor, and like a fool I drops a penny in all that coarse grass and all I had was tuppence and it's threepence, and I can't find the darned penny. There isn't a soul about, I looked all up and down the street. And a box of matches, please. Then there come that awful flash and all the lights went out and I used up

all me matches hunting for that damn penny, and our Sue'll have my head off—"

"Telephone from here, man. I'll call him for you, shall I?"

"Yes, please." Bert grinned shamefacedly at Hambledon. "I'm not all that used to the telephone." He sidled round the end of the bar to Ricketts, who was talking to a Dr. Brotherton. "Here he is. Go on, Bert."

Ricketts came back to the fireplace and said that there was no doctor in Tegdown—he lived at Westover, four miles off. "Should I tell Doctor about that business?"—jerking his head in the general direction of Church Corner.

"No, I wouldn't. The police will bring their own doctor when they come."

Ricketts nodded. Bert drew to a close an unskilful attempt to describe symptoms, and hung up with a clatter. "He's coming straight away. Thanks ever so much, Mr. Ricketts."

"Have something before you go, Bert?"

"No, thanks all the same, I must get back, Sue'll be fair ramping. Good night, good night, sir."

Bert dodged out and ran off through the rain, and Hambledon and Ricketts went to the door to look at the weather.

"Storm's gone over, I reckon, if it doesn't come back."

"The rain's lessening too," said Hambledon. "I should—"

He stopped abruptly as a wild and mournful sound came to their ears, wavering, long-drawn-out, and miserable.

"God love us!" gasped Ricketts. "What was that?"

"Dog howling. Yes"—as the sound came again—"it is."

"It's up in the churchyard, of all places! Too many blasted dogs in the place—everybody's got one. You never 'ad your whisky, sir. Let's have it now. They do say as dogs howl for a death, don't they?" He shut the door firmly.

"Let's have the whisky, shall we?"

"Constable Merton's a long time," said Hambledon after an interval for refreshment. He yawned widely.

"Maybe he's examining clues, sir," said Ricketts, taking off his coat and proceeding to wash glasses.

The door opened and the constable came in and spoke in a rather breathless voice. "You said I could telephone—"

"Round here, Mr. Merton. Are you all right? You look a bit white and shaken now I see you in the light. Would you like a spot of something?"

"No, thanks very much. I'm all right."

"Seeing that nasty corpse on an empty stomach," suggested

Ricketts. "I daresay you won't have seen many yet, not being in the police long?"

Merton grinned. "I was in the war," he said, and retired into the cupboard which served the George as a telephone box. He talked for some time and then came out looking rueful.

"I've got to go back," he said. "Got a proper ticking off from the sergeant for leaving the body." He hitched his dripping mackintosh cape close round him and went to the door.

"What a thing," said Ricketts sympathetically. "He won't get up and walk no more, and who'd want a corpse anyway?"

"Ah," said the policeman, and went out. They heard him speaking to Pluto outside, and then all was quiet except for Ricketts rinsing glasses in the sink. Hambledon yawned again.

"I'll just finish this cigarette and then there seems no reason why I shouldn't go up to bed," he remarked.

"I'll take you up whenever you like, sir; you've only to say."

"In a minute."

But before the minute was up the door was flung open and Merton came in, staring at them.

"He was dead, wasn't he?" he said, like a child protesting.

"Who? That German?" said Hambledon. "Dead as mutton. Why?"

"Can't have been," said Merton. "He's got up and walked away. I've looked around but I can't find him. He's gone. He's not there any more."

"Perhaps Greenacre came out and dragged him indoors," suggested Ricketts.

"No. He was dead drunk on the kitchen floor before I came down to telephone, and he's still there. It's only the corpse that's got up and run away."

"This is ridiculous," said Hambledon. "He was stone dead. Pull yourself together, Merton."

"What the Super will say," said Merton dismally, "I can't bear to think, and he'll be out here in a minute." He leaned against the doorpost and Pluto emerged from the shadows to lean comfortingly against him. "I'd best go back."

He patted the dog and went heavily away.

"What a to-do," said Ricketts blankly. "What d'you reckon's happened, sir?" He walked across the room and picked up a green Homburg hat under one of the chairs in the alcove. This was that German's. He must have forgotten it." He looked at it distastefully and hung it up on a peg. "That'll do in the morning."

"All I can think of is that Greenacre is not nearly so drunk as he looked. Shamming, in fact," said Hambledon.

Constable Merton had not long to wait before the police car from Mark drew up at the gate of Church Corner. He showed a light and walked down to meet Superintendent Austin and Sergeant Jackman.

"Somewhere here, Merton, is it?"

"Yes, sir. But the corpse is gone."

"Gone! What d'you mean?"

"I mean, it was there and it's gone, but I don't know how. I've covered up the blood, sir, against the rain washing it away."

"Show me."

They went round the house on the flagged path, and Merton lifted his cape from the ground to show some goutts of blood on the flagstones and the Luger still lying where it had fallen.

"That was sensible of you, Merton. Are you sure he's not been taken into the house?"

Merton took them to the kitchen window to show them Greenacre snoring on the kitchen floor. "He was like that before the body disappeared. Besides, I went in the house and had a look round since that French window was open, and it isn't in the house, sir."

"We'll have another look in a minute. Where were you when all this happened? When did it happen?"

"Just directly after the church clock struck eleven. I was up by

the telephone box making my point at that time, sir."

"That's the box on the road left past the George, is it? Yes. Sergeant, is that right? Did he make his point?"

"I didn't ring him, sir. There was a report come in of that tree struck on the London road and an obstruction —"

"I know. Go on, Merton."

"Then there was a flash and a bang right overhead, and then I heard two shots fired almost together and then all the lights went out. It all happened practically at once, sir. I ran down the road this way and round by the George, and I saw two men running ahead of me with a torch. They turned in here and I came in after — it was Ricketts from the George and a gentleman staying there. They heard the shots and come up to see.

"I found the gentleman bending over the body and touching it, so I sent them off down and had a look round myself. I thought I heard someone in the bushes, but I couldn't be sure. The rain just come on hard then. Captain Greenacre was just like he is now, but I didn't go in the house then. I looked about, sir, and then came down and rung the Station from the George. Sergeant told me to come back here and stand by the corpse, so I came straight back and it had gone, sir."

"You are perfectly certain the man was dead?"

Merton said yes and added, "The gentleman thought so too."

"Oh, did he? I'll see him in a minute. We'll go into the house first. . . ."

Hambledon yawned again and Ricketts said, "Why not go up to bed, sir?"

"What's the use? The Super will be down any minute and want to see us both. Besides, I'm curious. Aren't you?"

"Who wouldn't be?" said Ricketts, throwing some more logs on the fire.

When the police came into the George the Superintendent at last saw Merton in the light.

"Merton, you're wet through. Get off home and go to bed. You'd better take that cape of yours to the cleaner's in the morning."

"Very good, sir, thank you."

Merton went out and shut the door behind him.

"What a to-do," said Ricketts. "Superintendent, a spot of whisky?"

"Policemen don't drink on duty, Ricketts, and anyway, I'd rather have beer."

Ricketts grinned, and the Sergeant said that beer was his choice too. Hambledon took his official card from his pocket and showed it to the Superintendent.

"Oh. Oh, that's who you are.

I've heard of you, Mr. Hambledon. It's a pleasure to meet you. From what I've heard, you'd know a dead man when you saw one."

"I have seen one or two, Superintendent, and that one was dead all right. I think I can tell you something about him. I think he was a wanted war criminal named Erich Schlacht, the man who had those British prisoners machine-gunned outside Calais." Hambledon gave his reasons and added, "There might be his fingerprints on that Luger if we're lucky."

"You think it was his gun?"

"There were two shots and I don't think they were from the same gun. I was outside and heard them plainly. Besides, the murderer wouldn't leave his behind, would he?"

"We've got the Luger in the car," said Superintendent Austin.

"And Records have got Schlacht's fingerprints. He was in our hands and got away.

"I know," said Austin. "And there's an odd coincidence for you. When Merton was in the Military Police it was *he* whom Schlacht got away from. Slugged him on the head with his own revolver, I understand. Merton got his leg pulled so unmercifully that he got out as soon as he could, and he joined us. You don't mean to say he's lost the same man twice! What a thing.

I'll send the prints up to Records; they'll tell us. How long has this German been in the village? Ricketts, do you know?"

Ricketts emerged from his tactful retirement behind the bar. "Only arrived this afternoon. He was in the bar this evening, getting tight, he and Captain Greenacre."

"Did Merton look in at all while he was here?"

"No, sir."

"I was wondering whether Merton had recognized him," said Austin to Hambledon in a low voice. "But if he only saw him after he was dead, by torchlight in a thunderstorm —"

"It doesn't seem likely," finished Hambledon. "And the man had altered a good deal. Gone fat around the jaw, you know."

The Superintendent nodded. "Now, Ricketts. I want you to come and tell me whether there's anyone in this village who has a particular dislike of Germans, or any connection with Germany."

Ricketts came forward, clasped his hands behind his back — having been in the Navy — and began, "Well, there's Captain Greenacre, and they were quarrelling here tonight, as Mr. Hambledon can tell you."

Hambledon did so, and Sergeant Jackman took notes.

Ricketts resumed. There were the three young men who were at Calais, there was the French-

man Dupont and the Pole with the unpronounceable name, who all disliked Germans for reasons which Ricketts gave.

"Quite a choice," said Austin. "Got all that, Jackman? We'll have to see these people in the morning."

"I suppose there's no doubt Greenacre really was as drunk as he looked?" said Hambledon.

"Drunk as David's son, whoever he was," said Austin cheerfully. "I know *all* about drunks. We left him. I am much obliged to both of you for all your help."

Hambledon did not see the police to speak to next morning, although the police car was about the village and outside Church Corner. The body of Erich Schlacht was not found.

At ten-thirty the late Mrs. Greenacre was laid to rest. Besides the undertaker's men, the only mourners were her husband, very bleary-eyed and shaky, a couple of women who had worked in the house at different times, and old Amos Paradine, taking a professional interest. His grandson and successor lurked shyly in the background until it was time for him to get to work again.

Hambledon entered the bar a little before noon to find young George Paradine and his grandfather there. The old gentleman was evidently in a critical mood.

"I know it was a pretty miser-

able kind of funeral,” said George, “but it weren’t my fault there was only three following, and next to no flowers. There’s no doubt as flowers do set off a funeral. Morning, sir” — to Hambledon.

“Good morning,” said Hambledon. “Good morning, Mr. Paradine. Funeral go off all right?”

George, in the act of emptying his half-pint, cast his eyes upward in resignation, but old Amos said he supposed funeral went off all right but he wasn’t standing for this modern habit of scamping work. There was only one way to do a job and that was the right way. “Six foot a grave ought to be dug by law and that one wasn’t much over five foot. Two-three inches over, if that, and you did ought to know better, George, after all me training.”

“It were six foot,” said George mildly. “I took stick and measured it.”

“It were not,” said the old man obstinately. “I saw coffin before you filled in. Think I can’t tell with all my experience?”

Hambledon went outside where, in a patch of sunshine, there sprawled the vast sleeping bulk of the bloodhound. Tommy stood looking down at him for some moments and an idea occurred to him. You gave bloodhounds some article belonging to a missing person, they sniffed it

and thereafter followed the trail. Probably the policeman had tried this last night in vain, but Hambledon had nothing particular to do; it was a lovely morning and there was Schlacht’s felt hat hanging up in the bar. He went in, got the hat, and eventually succeeded in arousing the dog.

“Come on, Pluto. We’re going for a walk.”

Pluto looked up at him, thumped his heavy tail, and rose slowly to his feet in instalments. Hambledon took him round to the back of Church Corner to the place where the body had lain the night before, and applied Schlacht’s hat to Pluto’s sensitive nose. Pluto inhaled deeply several times, turned away, and began to cast about with loud snuffles. The first cast took him to the French window, but this was shut.

“That’s where he came from, Pluto, not where he went to.”

Pluto returned to the spot, snuffed loudly, and began to walk slowly down the path towards the gate with Hambledon following meekly behind. “I am a fool,” he said to himself. “If the body was carried, there won’t be a trail on the ground.”

However, Pluto persevered as far as the gate, where he plainly derived fresh inspiration both metaphorically and literally from the left gatepost, nearly two feet from the ground.

"He was carried," murmured Hambledon, "and he brushed against that post in passing. Now what?"

Pluto cast about outside the gate, took a few paces forward, threw up his head, and sat down. Sat, not lay down. Hambledon waited a little and then patted him, murmuring encouraging words, and the dog turned his great head and looked at him. The typical bloodhound wrinkles and the usual puzzled frown were deepened; the heavy eyes were full of a mental effort almost painful to witness. Pluto was trying to think.

Presently he got up again and walked slowly across the road to the lych gate, which had a single gate at one side as well as the double ones which opened for brides and the dead. The single, narrow gate was open. Pluto ran his nose along it and was encouraged to utter his deep throaty "honk."

The church stood well back from the road, and a long path led up to the north door, near which a mound of freshly turned earth and two or three wreaths marked the grave of Magda Greenacre. Pluto was in difficulties again upon the path. He wavered and cast about and once more sat down to think, and this time Hambledon did not interrupt him.

Farther up the path, Pluto

gave another honk of recognition and Hambledon, looking sideways at the grassy bank, could see that something heavy had lain there. Pluto's tail rose confidently, and there was only one more pause before the journey's end at the new-made grave. Pluto pawed one of the wreaths out of his way but Hambledon stopped him and put the wreath back.

"That will do, Pluto, you've told me enough. Good dog, clever dog. *Very* good Pluto. You don't look half so worried now, do you? I don't know whether one smokes in churchyards, but I'm going to."

Hambledon sat down upon a flat stone warmed by the sun and thought. Pluto became bored and strolled off, but Hambledon did not notice it: when he returned to the George the dog was back in his favorite spot and once more profoundly asleep.

The Superintendent came in to see Hambledon late that afternoon and said he supposed the affair was progressing, though he was not sure in which direction. "I saw the three survivors of the Calais affair separately, and they all tell the same story. They went out from here last night and followed Greenacre and Schlacht up the road at a distance. At Greenacre's gate he and Schlacht had stopped and were arguing in

German, and our three came along and 'said a word or two.' Rude ones, I'm sure. Greenacre cursed them into heaps, they bawled him out, and the German stood by sneering and saying foreign words. Just before the party got rough, Merton arrived and broke it up. He told our three to go home and they say that that's where they went, straight home and got there before the storm broke. The mother of two of them and the landlady of the other support their stories, for what that's worth. They all said they didn't possess a gun, but they may have. Plenty of men brought souvenirs home."

"But these men spent the war as prisoners," said Hambleton.

"They did, yes, but they might have armed themselves later. They said they went straight home, but they could have cut round across a couple of fields and come in over Greenacre's back garden wall. They were only giving alibis to each other. Asked if they recognized the German, they said no, he was just a German to them. Told that he was almost certainly Erich Schlacht, they looked surprised, and said that the man who did him in had the right ideas and they'd like to shake him by the hand. All quite plausible but no proof, and I'm still looking at them."

"Greenacre?" said Hambleton.

"Greenacre's got a hangover and is not too friendly. Merton's bit comes first. Merton said that he'd been out to old Colonel Vyne-Smith's house; he died recently and the old lady, his widow, had asked Merton to go and see her. He was on his way back from there when he came upon this row at Greenacre's gate, so he sent the three young men off, and to the best of his knowledge, they went. Greenacre admits he and Schlacht were quarrelling but says he was trying to calm him down. Admits they were both drunk and had some more. Erich lost his temper, lugged out the Luger, and took a pop at Greenacre, who dodged round the doorpost and went to ground in the kitchen, taking the whisky with him. He didn't know where the German went and didn't care. The light went out and he had a job lighting the candle. Doesn't remember any more —"

"If anybody's after me with a gun," said Hambleton, "I don't sit down somewhere accessible and go to sleep. It could equally well have been Greenacre's gun, and he could have done all the shooting. Were there any fingerprints on the Luger?"

"None, only smears. No good. Greenacre had the opportunity, Mr. Hambleton, and the motive, if Schlacht was threatening him with exposure. He could have

hidden the body if he wasn't so drunk as he made out, and half a glass of neat whisky at the last minute would put him out like a light. What I don't see is why he should have hidden the body."

"Schlacht's fingerprints," said Hambledon. "I mean the ones actually on his fingers. What did he call himself? Not Schlacht, presumably."

"What? Oh, no, Roederer, I think it was. I've got a note of it."

"Greenacre would know Schlacht's prints were on file. He wouldn't want it known he was connected with the notorious Schlacht. Besides, if we started backtracking Schlacht, Greenacre's own evil deeds might come to light, whatever they were."

"Yes, probably. I wonder why Schlacht risked coming to England just to attend a funeral."

"At a guess, I'd say he thought his sister left him some money," said Hambledon. "So Greenacre is your prime suspect?"

"You wait," said Superintendent Austin. "I took Greenacre into Mark, detained for questioning, and went to see the Frenchman and the Pole. They both said they'd gone away together as far as the place where the Pole lodges, then he'd gone in and Dupont had walked on to his own place — he lives farther out. Neither of them had seen or heard anything and were oh, so

surprised when they heard the news this morning. So I went to see the Pole's landlady. She said that he came in, very wet, some little time after the big flash which put the lights out. She had to give him a candle. She asked him the time — her clock was out of order — and he said it was about ten-thirty."

"But the flash ——" began Hambledon.

"Was just after eleven, so he was lying. A few minutes later Dupont came to the door and asked if the Pole had come in yet. Mrs. Webb let him in and went on ironing — she takes in washing. She heard them talking, and presently they went out together in the rain; and up the garden, not into the road. So Mrs. Webb was curious and slipped upstairs to look out of a back window. She couldn't see anything, but she thought she heard them digging. So we went and found the dug patch and unearthed this."

The Superintendent produced a large-bore pin-fire revolver of Belgian make and a half-empty packet of cartridges.

"Golly," said Hambledon. "Ought to be in a museum."

"I daresay, but it probably works quite well. So they're detained for questioning, too. Their motive isn't so clear as Greenacre's or, come to that, the other three's, but for hiding the body

they're just as good. Two to carry him and an identifiable bullet somewhere inside him. Like to come in and hear them talk?"

The Superintendent drove Hambledon to Mark and left him in the charge-room for a few minutes while he did some telephoning. The desk sergeant was in the act of affixing a tie-on label to an old-type .45 revolver such as was carried by officers in the South African war, and an imposing piece of artillery it was. When the knots had been firmly tied, he unlocked a cupboard and put the revolver away among others of various kinds.

"The Castle Armoury?" suggested Hambledon.

The sergeant laughed. "We get them handed in, usually when people are turning out after someone has died. That one had been beautifully kept and was still loaded. Belonged to an old Army man, as you might expect."

The Superintendent opened his door and said, "Mr. Hambledon? Shall we start with the Pole?"

The Pole took some time to unravel from a tangle of lies, terror, and language difficulties, but eventually it appeared that the gun was his, that he had bought it in London. It took even longer to induce him to admit that he had been in Greenacre's garden

on the night of the murder — but he had only gone to steal a bottle of whisky. There was whisky all over the place in that house always, and the *Gospodarz* never heard anything when he was drunk.

The Pole was waiting in the bushes opposite the French window when the *Gospodarz* and the guest began quarrelling again. The Pole got behind a tree; one of the two men fired, the bullet whistling through the leaves above the Pole's head.

He threw himself flat and heard one of the men come out into the garden. He was shouting something, and the Pole thought the man, whichever it was, was after him. There was an awful flash and he thought there were two men outside, but he couldn't be sure. Two more shots were fired and all the lights went out. He got up, went over the garden wall, and ran all the way home.

No, he did not fire any gun; he had not brought his gun with him. By all the saints, it was at home in his room. He and Dupont used it sometimes for target practice, but not much, because he had not got many cartridges left. Then Dupont had come in and said the German had been shot dead, and as they had been about they had better bury the gun. So they did, and that was all. The saints to witness, that was all.

"And what was Dupont doing all this time?"

"Not viz me. Gone to see a girl."

He was removed, and Dupont was brought in.

Dupont testified that they had left the George together, and that then he had gone to see a girl while the Pole had gone to Greenacre's house to try to sneak a bottle of whisky. He had done that before. Twice before.

But Dupont's girl had evidently gone to bed, as all the lights were out and there was no answer to his whistling underneath her window. So he gave that up; and he was coming away when the big flash came, and he heard two shots fired in Greenacre's garden. He was passing by there at that moment. The lights went out but he was afraid the Pole was in trouble, so he went in and ran around the house. At the back he fell over a body.

It might have been the Pole's, so Dupont struck a match to see, and it was the German just dying. So Dupont ran away as fast as he could to where the Pole lived, and they were so frightened that they decided to bury the gun.

And that was all.

"And the devil of it was, Bagshott," Hambleton said sleepily

some time later, "that really *was* all."

"All?" said Chief Superintendent Bagshott, sitting straight up. "You mean you never found out who did it?" He looked at Tommy sideways. "But then of course I suppose it wasn't really in your line."

"Now there's gratitude for you." Tommy said reproachfully. "After all these years. How often but for my perception and acumen. . . . Oh yes, I knew who killed Schlacht, all right."

"And were *they* grateful?" Bagshott asked. "The police, I mean."

"Grateful?" Tommy looked surprised. "I didn't tell them. Naturally not. Nothing to do with me. Nobody can accuse me of ingratitude, Bagshott, and whatever Erich Schlacht had coming to him that night had my blessing.

"Let's go over the case again. Merton had called at the house of the late Colonel Vyne-Smith, at the request of the widow, and had collected a loaded revolver, the property of the late Colonel. The revolver was to be handed in to the police station. Merton was used to firearms, having been a Military Policeman, and put the gun in his pocket.

"On his way back to the village he came upon Schlacht, Greenacre, and the three young men quarrelling. He did not immediately recognize the German,

though it seems to me quite probable that Schlacht remembered him. Merton broke up the party and sent the young men about their business. Schlacht and Greenacre went into the house.

“Merton had second thoughts about Schlacht and returned to the house at Church Corner. He certainly did not make his point at eleven P.M., for Bert was in the vicinity of the call box at the time, and stated that he saw no one. Merton was outside the house at the Church Corner when Schlacht had a drunken quarrel with Greenacre and fired at him. Hearing the shot, Merton rushed up the path and encountered Schlacht, who fired at him and missed. Instinctively Merton drew the Colonel’s gun and fired. He didn’t miss.

“Immediately afterwards Merton heard the Pole moving about, so he had no time to move the body. Then Dupont arrived and fell over the corpse. He left in a hurry. Directly after that Ricketts and I arrived on the scene. Merton must have been there, for we did not hear him arrive, though later he told the Superintendent that he had followed us down the road. He asked us to go back to the inn. That aroused my suspicions, Bagshott, for it would have been more

natural if he had asked us to stand by the body while he telephoned Headquarters.

“When we had gone back to the inn Merton went into the house and found Greenacre in a drunken sleep. In fact Greenacre had passed out cold. Merton then had to get rid of the body, for once the bullet was extracted from the corpse and compared with the revolver he had to hand in, he would be in for it. It seems a pity that our police must not fire when fired on, but that is the rule, though a truncheon is no match for a .45. So Merton half dragged and half carried the body of Schlacht to the open grave and covered it with earth. That was when Pluto howled. Directly after this Merton hurried back to the inn to telephone Headquarters, looking breathless and rather shaken, and no wonder.

“Old Amos Paradine gave me the clue to the whereabouts of the body when he had the argument with his son over the depth of the grave. And Pluto confirmed it all when I took him for a walk.

“And that is really all there was to it. The case is now having the undivided attention of the Superintendent at Mark, and who am I to butt in? Don’t look so horrified, Bagshott.”

*cat
on
the
trail*

by Joan Fleming

IT WASN'T as though there was any reason for killing his wife. He told the police over and over again: "I adored my wife." It's the sort of thing that goes without saying, really, but he felt he had to say it because they suspected him.

He knew it. The husband is always the Number One suspect, he thought bitterly, even if he was not there at the time of the murder and could not possibly have been there; they still suspected him. And when you come to think about it, it throws a very, very strange light on human nature.

Of course they had their rows, but what married couples don't? It was perfectly possible the people next door heard them rowing. But then, *they* had often heard the people next door rowing.

They had fetched him home from work in the afternoon to view the body. The gas-meter man had found it; he had opened the back door and called, shouted to show he was there and he saw her feet in the pink furry moc-

Joan Fleming's WHEN I GROW RICH, which Anthony Boucher called "my favorite suspense novel of 1962 . . . a model of the modern suspense novel", was a thoroughly delightful story of life in today's Turkey — in-between upheavals. Her most recent novel is reviewed in this issue. . . .

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casins, sticking out from behind the kitchen door.

He had dropped his book and run like a stag to the nearest telephone box and there he had stood shivering beside it until the police picked him up and he guided them to the house.

She had been bashed about the head with the little pointed coal hammer which they always kept in the bucket inside the coal shed. The terrible sight had knocked the gas-meter man silly and he had been taken away in an ambulance suffering from shock. And if a perfect stranger could be so affected what about the husband?

They hadn't been too considerate with him; they started asking questions straight away, long before he'd had time to get over the shock.

For a while the shock had been so great that he had had a kind of loss of memory, trauma the doctor had called it; the first half hour or so he couldn't remember anything.

And then memory had returned. They had had a row that morning; sad, but true. He was quite frank about it. It was over a letter that had come by the early post. They'd argued about it at breakfast and he hadn't kissed his wife goodbye, as usual. No, alas, he had put on his raincoat and stamped out of the house. Oh, the pity of it; that

they should have parted in anger!

The lady-next-door, who had been their neighbour for six years, had been talking to her at eight-thirty. His wife had gone out in the front to call in their great big sandy cat "Carpenter." The lady-next-door had been shaking out a duster, standing under the brick arch of their front door.

"Have you seen Carpenter?" his wife had called out, and the lady-next-door had called back that she hadn't. He had always gone to work by then, eight-fifteen on the dot for the last six years, she had told the police; he had left the house in his car this morning the same as always because the garage doors were left wide open and she knew the car had gone because his wife went into the garage calling for the cat.

It was the vacuum cleaner, standing outside the cupboard under the stairs that made him think: "What's that doing there?" He asked the police and they said they had no idea. "She'd never leave it there," he said, "When she finished using it she pushed it away out of sight. I mean, look how neat and tidy the house is! That's the way she was!"

He thought even more: one of these vacuum-cleaner salesmen could have called, one of these smooth young men with an inch

of spotless, whiter-than-white cuff showing below the ends of their jacket sleeve. Good looking they always were, with flashy cars. . . .

"It could have been one of these door-to-door salesmen," he told the police. "They are always coming; my wife would ask them in and sometimes they stayed for a cup of coffee but that was all. If one of them ever got familiar she'd soon show them the door. There might have been one who simply couldn't take it."

So the police made enquiries at the nearest depot and found no representative of theirs had been in that street all day.

He beat his brow; he could go mad thinking about it. It could have been anyone . . . anyone. The neighbours didn't spend their whole life looking out of the windows and an itinerant salesman could have called, or *anyone posing as a salesman*. And that's why she had taken the cleaner out: to show him she'd got a nearly new one on which they were still paying installments.

"It could have been anyone," he told them, "any good-looking, smooth young man."

They raised their eyebrows: "Could it?" they murmured.

He flushed deeply and was angry when he thought how it could have been, how easily she was taken in by people. That let-

ter that had come, for instance, was from a man she'd met in the supermarket, who had carried her basket home for her.

Oh, that was nothing very much, simply thanking her for the cup of coffee she'd given him but it went to show how very gullible his young wife had been; taken in by anybody, just anybody!

They changed the subject and asked him what time he'd arrived at work and, of course, it had been the usual time. He owned his own garage and he'd always been most particular to arrive in good time as an example to the staff. It was only five minutes' drive to work and when he arrived the typist had been there and the two mechanics and they'd started at once on the maintenance of his car, which was due that day.

"It's not fair," he told them, "a husband is at a disadvantage since you suspect him right from the start. What about the man she met at the super-market? There's his address; you can question him as to his movements."

And so they did because they were reasonable men and would listen to anything within reason, or even without. And the man had an alibi all right; he was three hundred miles away and had been for the past two days.

"But where is dear Carpen-

ter?" the lady-next-door asked. "I have brought him a little piece of haddock he always has and I've cooked it in the way his poor dear mistress cooked it for him. Where is the cat?"

And when she said it she looked at the front of his business suit covered with orange hairs. The police looked, too, and for some reason or other they started a search for the cat.

LOST, A BIG SANDY TOMCAT

No one answered the advertisement but some children found the body in the hedge alongside the footpath leading to the town and a hundred yards from the garage. They asked him how the cat came to be found there and he couldn't tell them; he'd no idea at all. Absolutely no idea.

So they had to guess. Could it have been, they asked, that after he left his car to be maintained he hurried back home on foot to continue the row and found his wife answering the letter from the man in the super-market?

Could it be that he had torn up that letter in a fit of jealousy and thrown the fragments all over the floor?

Could it be that she had taken out the vacuum cleaner to clear up the scraps but before she was

able to complete the job he had found the hammer in the coal shed and beaten her about the head?

Absolutely fanciful and completely impossible, because he had adored his wife.

But the cat had adored him, hadn't it? And it had followed him back to work because for once he was on foot, going out the back way and along the lane behind the houses. And when he got near the garage he had panicked because the cat would not return and they would all know he had been back home. So he had strangled the cat Carpenter and thrown him in the hedge.

Then he broke down and cried because he had been as fond of the cat Carpenter as the cat had been of him.

Maybe, they said, but it had happened, hadn't it? And they showed him the few fragments of the letter they had found in the dust bag of the vacuum cleaner. "There's only half of it there," they said, "where could the rest be?"

He couldn't think of an answer to that one and brought the remaining scraps out of his pocket because with all the worry of disposing of the blood-stained rain-coat he had forgotten the scraps of paper.

*the
pluperfect
murder*

by Stuart Palmer

IT ALL STARTED with a most tremendous bang — and ended with a whimper, eleven days later. In fact, the (Charles) Henry Schwartz case has been called “The Eleven Days Wonder”, and it might well have remained an unsolved mystery to this day if it had not been for the fact that a too-clever criminal had the misfortune to cross swords with a detective, in the form of a quiet, thorough, laboratory chemist and criminologist, who outclassed him.

Quite literally, it all *did* start with a bang — a tremendous explosion which in the middle of a summer evening rocked the little town of Walnut Creek, Contra Costa County, California, on July 30th, 1925. The new chemical plant and factory of the Pacific Cellulose Company was burning!

The fire department, mostly of the volunteer variety, rushed to the scene in time to save the buildings (which had originally housed a glove factory and which had been vacant until a few months ago) but though firemen forced their way up the stairs through fire and smoke to

This is the story of the strange circumstances attendant upon the untimely death of Henry Schwartz, Ph.D., who had the misfortune to run up against a far better chemist with only a B.Sc. degree. . . Stuart Palmer, while best known as the creator of Hildegarde Withers (his and Craig Rice's PEOPLE VS. WITHERS & MALONE was reviewed in this magazine recently), has worked in Hollywood and covered murder trials for the L.A. newspapers.

the second floor laboratory, where the locked door had been blown off its hinges by the blast, they were too late to do anything about the man who lay dead on the floor, in a passage between two heavy benches. They had to withdraw, for the place was filled with a strange and acrid yellow gas, and hotter than an inferno.

But the fire was soon smothered out. On the scene was a very excited night-watchman, Walter Gonzales by name, who claimed to have been taking a brief siesta in one of the out-buildings. We must not leap to the conclusion that Gonzales had been derelict in his duty; he explained that Mr. Henry Schwartz, chief chemist for the new company, had been working late in the laboratory — as he often did — and had kindly told the watchman to take a couple of hours nap.

The chemist had been working on a very delicate experiment, and didn't want anybody around. In fact, earlier that evening he had twice sent Gonzales into the village (a five-minute walk) on minor errands.

Gonzales took one look at the charred, terribly-burned corpse on the laboratory floor amid a

good deal of blackened debris, and unhesitatingly pronounced it to be Schwartz. Shortly thereafter Mrs. Alice Schwartz, the grieving widow, appeared on the scene, having been summoned by phone and driven over from the home in Oakland by friends. "That's him, that's him!" she cried, also without hesitation. She also said that she had talked to her husband on the telephone shortly after nine o'clock, and that he had said he was just finishing up a final experiment and would be home soon. According to one historian, the lady then broke down in hysterics and had to be taken home; there is some disagreement on this point, for it was also said that firemen and others on the scene noted her "iron composure".*

Sheriff R. R. Veale arrived at the scene, to find nothing out of line besides the unfortunate accident. A coroner's jury met on the spot, and the findings were that "Henry Schwartz met death by misadventure", and that was that. The only autopsy was an extremely superficial one made by Schwartz's own doctor, A. H. Reedy, M.D., who — in spite of the charred condition of the body — recognized his former patient and pointed out that the

*Reminding us of Miss Lizzie Borden, Fall River, 1892. One of the main reasons Lizzie was brought to trial was her failure to show proper grief at the time of the discovery of the bodies of her parents — according to a neighbor, whose testimony is open to some doubt. See *Lizzie Borden, The Untold Story* by Edward D. Radin.

body not only had Schwartz's small and delicate hands and feet, but showed gaps in the mouth where Schwartz had had teeth extracted and had worn a removable bridge until recently when it had fallen into the plumbing.

Everything fitted very neatly, and the case was marked "closed" even before the president of the Pacific Cellulose Company, an elderly San Francisco financier named H. M. Kleinjung, appeared in Walnut Grove to make another identification, and to explain that only that day Chemist Schwartz had phoned to tell him the good news that he had just ironed out the last bugs in his secret formula for making silk out of redwood scraps, and that tonight would wind up the long series of tests and experiments.

It was a sad blow to Mr. Kleinjung and to the other officers of the firm, and of course to the investors. The company and its projected operations rested firmly on one man — Schwartz. Of course, his formulas were locked safely in the vaults of Kleinjung's bank, so perhaps the work could be taken up by a successor. But Schwartz was almost irreplaceable, and for that reason had taken out certain life insurance policies, with the usual double-indemnity clauses, in favor of the company. The total amount was

in the neighborhood of \$190,000, with a smaller life policy of \$25,000 in favor of Mrs. Schwartz (which hardly seems unreasonable for a man who had a wife and three small sons).

These policies had been taken out two years ago, at the time the company was formed. This would rule out any "suicide clause", but still there appeared in Walnut Creek an investigator for the insurance firm, assigned to try somehow to get the company off the hook. This gentleman took the liberty of measuring the dead body, and announced the discovery that it was a couple of inches shorter than Schwartz's listed height of five-feet-four.

The sheriff, a political appointee, sensibly pointed out that of course a body so terribly burned would shrink; after all, the clothes and shoes were identifiable as Schwartz's, it had his personal papers and notes and driver's license in the pockets, also Schwartz's second-best watch and chain. And just to cinch the identification, night-watchman Gonzales announced that earlier on the evening of the explosion, he and Schwartz had been engaged in a kidding conversation about which of them had the most money, and the chemist had proved his point by turning out his pockets. "He had

just \$1.73 in silver," said Gonzales.

Which was the exact change in the dead man's pocket. (The billfold on the corpse, however, contained no paper money. It was not until several days later that Schwartz's private secretary, Mrs. Esther Hatfield, remembered that her employer was a man who always liked to carry around \$1000 in his pockets, and that on July 30th, to her certain knowledge, he was carrying at least \$900.) Mrs. Hatfield also "remembered" certain other things as time went on, putting herself in the category of the late Edmund Pearson's "MFW"*.

Sheriff Veale ordered the funeral delayed, and for his pains was bitterly berated by Mrs. Schwartz, who burst into his office crying "This is an outrage!" She also brought up the interesting suggestion that her husband had lived in terror of enemies among certain German chemical cliques (presumably I. G. Farben), who had threatened to ruin him or taken his life in an effort to get his secret formula or at least to prevent its ever being used in artificial silk production.

It was all too much for the country sheriff, and after a consultation with District Attorney A. B. Twinning, it was decided to call in Professor Oscar Heinrich of the University of Cali-

fornia at Berkeley, only 15 miles to the west, over a range of hills. While ostensibly only a teacher of chemistry, Heinrich was just beginning to make a name for himself as a forensic and criminological chemist.

Heinrich came to the lab, took a few bits and pieces of debris, had a good look at the body, and then retreated into the fastness of his laboratory — a quiet, balding, immaculate man in a high Herbert Hoover collar.

Meanwhile the Schwartz case was receiving a great deal of space in the San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland newspapers. And swiftly the past life — or lives — of the ubiquitous Mr. Schwartz began to come to light.

He had been born in Colmar, Alsace-Lorraine, in the year 1887, making him 48 now. He had been christened Leon Henri Schwartzhoff, had obtained a Ph.D. in chemistry at the University of Heidelberg and sported degrees from several French colleges and citations from Societes de Chimistres. He had also been a captain in the French army during the late war, had then gone over to England and worked as head chemist for a big textile company in Derby, and had there married a pretty young war widow, Alice Warden, a lady of some means.

With her and their three sons

*Marvelous Female Witness — found in most major murder cases.

he had emigrated to the United States and wound up in the East Bay area of greater San Francisco, seeking a beneficial climate for his asthma. He was also looking for a job suitable for his abilities and attainments, and in 1921 he found one, as chemist and vice president of the California Fibre Company, engaged in the manufacture of synthetic rubber for auto tires out of "Chinese grass", whatever that was. The venture failed, and in the breakup of the company Schwartz was accused of getting away with a bottling-machine (they were bottling tires?) and of 1,800 pounds of scrap iron. After threats of legal action, he returned the bottling machine, but claimed that the sale of the junk was one of the prerequisites of his position as an officer of the company.

There had been so many threats and so much hard feeling about all this that Schwartz was accused of threatening the life of one of the other company officials—in this matter no police action was taken but Schwartz had to surrender a .25 calibre pistol to the police. It is interesting to note here that at the time the police chief of Oakland was August Vollmer, later to take over after Heinrich as head of the Criminological School at Berkeley.

Here for the first time there

had been mention of the villainous combine of German chemists who were dedicated to destroy Schwartz, a threat which Chief Vollmer did not take too seriously. However, he and his fellow officers got on friendly terms with Schwartz, who became something of a police buff and used to drop in at the station and show evidences of a real scientific interest in crime, criminology, and police methods.

We might pause here to take a look at Henry Schwartz, self-styled Ph.D., ex-Captain, husband, father, and—as it soon turned out—great lover. He was a smallish man standing five-four with his elevator heels; hair curly and soft as silk, the face "handsome in a sort of European way", and his hands and feet were delicate as a girl's. He held himself stiffly erect, walking in almost a goose-step (which led some to suggest that he must have been in the Boche army rather than with the poilus). He had, however, many of the mannerisms of the French boulevardier—the shrugs, the gestures, the volatile personality.

And he had the traditional attitude of the Frenchman toward the opposite sex, hand-kissing and all the rest of it. It now came to light that he had for some time been "trifling with the affections" of a pretty young manicurist by the name of Eliza-

beth Adam. According to available reports, she was a beautiful, respectable girl of 22, of Swiss birth and nationality in spite of the surname. He had met her as "Mr Klein" and had wooed and to some extent won her.

And he had made the mistake of taking Elizabeth *and her mother* out to Walnut Creek on a pleasant May Sunday to show them the new factory!

A few weeks later Miss Adam made another trip out to Walnut Creek, entered the offices of Pacific Cellulose, and demanded to see Mr. Klein, the chief chemist. Mrs. Esther Hatfield, the gorgon of a secretary, inadvertently or not blurted out the real name of the chemist in charge, and Elizabeth Adam returned to Oakland with blood in her eye.

She had called at the Schwartz home (a small rented frame house into which the family had just moved, and where Alice Schwartz, tired and disgusted with three moves within the last year, hadn't bothered even to hang pictures or put up curtains). Elizabeth cried and Alice Schwartz cried and Henry Schwartz cried too, when he arrived a little late upon the scene. It was a touching hour, right out of soap-opera. But Alice forgave her dear Henry, and later Henry tried to smooth

things over with Elizabeth too. He explained that his wife was English, and like all English-women was cold, reserved, and frigid. He loved only his darling little manicurist and one day soon they would run away together to begin a new life, he thought in Algiers. That was a comfortable distance from Oakland and Alice, and life there would present few problems—they needed chemists, and he had an uncle who luckily happened to be "mayor of Algiers"! According to Elizabeth, he said that his uncle was very "influential" in that city.

But Elizabeth, after talking it all over with mother and with the Swiss Consul-general in San Francisco, who had to some extent appointed himself her guardian and attorney, wasn't having any of this. She immediately brought suit for breach of promise, asking \$50,000 heart-balm plus \$25,000 punitive damages. It seemed that Schwartz had tried to lead the manicurist astray by gifts of \$1,060 in cash, a couple of dresses (one a wedding dress), had ordered but not yet paid for a new automobile for her, and had given her case upon case of rare, imported wines (no trifle in those days of Prohibition).

The reporters had had a field day with Elizabeth Adam, and most of them remarked in print

about her beauty, her respectability, and her "sweet and completely virginal" appearance, which was nice, but largely a matter of guesswork at best. Elizabeth herself weakened her case a bit by announcing that while she and Mr. Klein-Schwartz had had an understanding, there had been no "sectual intercourse". (One reporter claimed she said "sectional"!)

It might be noted that while Miss Adam's case was not a particularly strong one, if she had won any verdict at all in her favor it would have ruined Henry Schwartz, who had no income apart from his salary from the company, and whose wife had invested almost all her remaining funds in Pacific Cellulose and was at least in name the secretary-treasurer of the firm.

It is also a matter of record that Schwartz did try to buy off the lovely but furious manicurist with a cash offer of \$1,500., pointing out that with this and with the previous money he had given her, she could "return to the place of her birth and live in luxury the rest of her life"!

She indignantly refused to settle for this, and on June 24th of that year Schwartz filed a deposition with the court, alleging that Miss Adam was a tool of European chemists still thirsting

for his ruin. And the case remained pending on the court docket.

Meanwile, Oscar Heinrich had been busy. He popped up to report that the explosion in the chemical laboratory had been no accident. Highly-inflammable fluids had been poured over the body, and a trail left which ran to and outside the laboratory door! There was even the faint outline of a match, which had protected the floor during the explosion's flash.

The fire had been superficial through the laboratory, but very severe on and around the body, though benches and a cabinet a few feet away were almost un-singed. Moreover, there was no chemical in the world which could have had any possible use in Schwartz's experiments that could have been of so explosive a nature. There were traces of benzol, however.

Heinrich took a very dim view of Schwartz's laboratory anyway. It had no electricity (illumination was furnished by a kerosene lamp), no gas (for Bunsen burners), and not even water laid on! What chemical equipment was there was primitive — Heinrich said it looked as if it had been chosen at random by a student in the midst of flunking second-year college chemistry. True, there was a big tank in which redwood chips and bark were

steeping in a foul-smelling witches' brew of lye and ammonia and other household cleaners, but no signs of any advanced experiments in the field of cellulose or colloid chemistry. There was space in another room for an expensive weaving machine that had been ordered from Germany and which had not and was never to arrive.

But Heinrich had discovered blood in a closet off the lab—blood of a strangely bright red color, and a good deal of it too. It had even seeped down to the beams below. The sheriff had been of the opinion that, as is typical in cases of an explosion, Schwartz had had a lung hemorrhage, but Heinrich pointed out that in that case the blood should have been near the body and not some feet away in a closet.

But he had more directly pertinent things to report. Charred debris found over, around, and under the body had proved interesting. Under his microscope Heinrich had found the remains of a "bindle" such as tramps and itinerants use, a little sewing kit for clothing repairs, a bag of coffee which could be folded up as used, plus bits of charred paper which proved to be religious tracts.

"Give me a book that a person has read and used, and I will describe the man," Heinrich said.

Anyway, it was his expert opinion that this was neither accident, nor suicide, nor murder—at least not murder of chemist Schwartz. He asked for a real autopsy, not being satisfied with the appearance of the back of the skull of the deceased. Moreover, he had examined the jawbone of the corpse and discovered that, while the certain teeth were missing, they had not been extracted but had been knocked out forcibly, and the roots had been broken off deep in the bone!

The police under Sheriff Veale and the district attorney's investigators under Mr. Twinning were now running off in all directions. It took them only a day to settle upon the real identity of the corpse. On the very day of the explosion, one "Portugese Joe", real name Joe Rodriguez, had disappeared. The disappearance of a lowly laborer, addicted to irregular habits and to the regular use of the product of certain local vineyards, would not ordinarily seem unusual, but the physical description fitted that of the inconvenient corpse, which by this time Sheriff Veale had sent over to the San Francisco authorities. At the instigation of Portugese Joe's friends (mostly of the Cannery Row variety, but loyal to their own) Sheriff Veale now issued a warrant for

the arrest of Henry Schwartz. One of the reasons for his taking this step was the discovery that on the day of the explosion Alice Schwartz had called the Oakland Police to report a robbery in the home—while a baby-sitter had been taking care of the three Schwartz boys, a thief had entered the house through a window. Oddly enough, no valuables had been taken—only every single existing photograph of Schwartz, plus a few clothes!

The photos had all showed Schwartz with his partial plate in his mouth, and sporting a luxurious cavalry-type moustache, though he had shaved it off a few weeks before the explosion.

Heinrich kept digging. He gave as his verdict the fact that the body of whoever it was had lain in the closet for some hours before the explosion, had been dragged on a blanket across the floor to the spot where it was found, and that the blood had been discolored by carbon monoxide freed by the explosion. The remains of the blanket itself were most interesting—it was a “tramp’s blanket”, very, very dirty from use along the highways, and embedded with burns and brambles and thorns and stick-me-tights.

Heinrich did not subscribe to the Portugese Joe theory. Joe had been an alcoholic, and the dead body showed no traces of

the use of liquor, at least habitually. Joe had been a laborer, and while the fingertips of the body had been destroyed by acid or flame, the palms showed less callouses than a laborer would have. Moreover, there were the religious tracts, with certain passages marked. That, to Heinrich, indicated someone other than Joe Rodriguez, who had been a Catholic if anything and would not have been likely to possess evangelistic tracts. The results of the final and real autopsy were now in—first, the man had come to his death as a results of blows on the back of the head with a blunt instrument; two, he had *not* been alive at the time of the explosion, for throat and lungs showed no trace of burning by fire or gas. The dead man, also had eaten ground meat some hours before his death. And Schwartz, who had not gone back to Oakland and Alice on the night of the explosion but briefly gone home with one of his co-workers who lived nearby, had eaten only beans and cucumbers for dinner. Evidently he had taken “pot luck” and received simple fare. A meatless day.

So began a state-wide man-hunt—extending even nationwide and with echoes in Mexico. A long and slightly poetic description of Schwartz was broadcast—there were no pictures,

but he was fully described. "Look for him where there are women," said the "flyer". "Look for an effervescent, nervous man who is always rattling the change in his pocket:"

There was also another broadcast, this time through radio and newspapers. Heinrich had come to a final conclusion about the dead man. "Missing, an itinerant preacher or evangelist, age about 45, small hands and feet, full set of ill-kept teeth probably a semi-invalid war veteran, studious, deeply religious, not too well-educated, etc., etc. "No rewards were offered, but anyone with any pertinent information was asked to get in touch with Sheriff Veale or D.A. Twinning of Contra Costa County.

There was one man who could have been of help, but was not. We refer to a Mr. Harold Warren, an engineer living in a small furnished apartment in the northern part of Oakland, almost on the Berkeley line. Warren, whose business kept him hopping all over California, had made the acquaintance of his landlord, a Mr. Heywood, almost two years before. A couple of days before the explosion over on the other side of the hills in Walnut Creek, he had walked in and rented the apartment, but had not taken possession until the night of the 30th, when he appeared late in the evening, some-

what disheveled and with a sprained ankle as the result of an automobile accident. He moved in bag and baggage, and being on friendly terms of long-standing with the Heywoods, he accepted their offer to take his meals with them too—his condition prevented his going out to restaurants or cooking for himself.

Warren spent his days pacing up and down the apartment, and his evenings playing cribbage with the Heywoods, where he was a persistent loser.

Now events moved thick and fast. Portugese Joe showed up, to the disappointment of his numerous friends and cronies who had been having a three-day wake for him. He had been off on a toot in San Francisco, and was not a man who had much interest in the daily papers. The reports of his death were, as Mark Twain reportedly said at another time, greatly exaggerated.

But Heinrich's "description" of the corpse bore sudden fruit. It came to the attention of a Placerville undertaker by the name of Cecil Barker, who had once employed a helper by the name of Barbe. The man was a shell-shocked veteran of the Argonne, who from time to time would quit any job he happened to have and go off on a preaching tour.

One of the passages in the bits of paper Heinrich had found was this, much underlined:

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles . . . but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Parker came down to Walnut Creek and at last the identity of the dead—the obviously murdered—man was established. Now there popped up a motorist who remembered giving a ride inland from Oakland to Walnut Creek to a man fitting Gilbert Barbe's description to the T, on the day of the explosion. Barbe had even said he had a job waiting there. It was all very apt—as was Mrs. Hatfield's suddenly remembering that a few weeks before Schwartz had asked her to place a Help Wanted ad in the newspapers, expressing a desire to hire a "middle-aged chemist with small hands and feet". No such ads were ever located in the newspaper files, and it is to be feared that with this remarkable statement Mrs. Hatfield cinched her right to the honor of being Miss Marvelous Female Witness of 1925.

How Schwartz found Barbe and lured him to his death, caching the body in the laboratory closet until it was time to set the fire and explosion, is anybody's guess. Newspapers at the time claimed that Barbe had lived in a deserted shack on the

outskirts of Oakland and that Schwartz had been seen visiting him there, but this seems to have been pure fantasy.

Anyway, Oscar Heinrich had it all nailed down. If Schwartz had even had an elementary knowledge of chemistry and of explosions, he would have waited until the fumes of his explosive mixture had risen *above* the level of the workbenches. *Then* the blast would have blown out both windows and doors, and with the fire well-started the evening breezes would have fanned the flames and probably completely destroyed both the laboratory building and the body of the "nobody" which the unhappy murderer fondly hoped would be taken for his own. At one stroke he would get rid of the irritating Elizabeth Adam and her breach-of-promise suit, he would get out of his financial difficulties and leave his wife and sons well-provided for (as chief stockholder in the Pacific Cellulose Company she would have a large share of all the insurance money) *and* more than that, he would get out of his predicament of having no formula, no process, and no earthly way of making silk out of redwood chips, or sow's ear, or anything else.

Like so many clever men—and women—who tried to create the perfect murder, Schwartz over-

did everything. Experts have said in print that the only way for a man to disappear is to have a previous identity well established, friends made and all that. This Schwartz followed to the letter—he had been Harold Warren on and off for two years, friends of the Heywoods and Mr. and Mrs. N. B. Edmunds, with whom they were close. He talked convincingly of his work as a structural engineer, and of big jobs he had worked upon.

But he had set up his hide-away much too close to home—within a couple of miles, in fact. The Edmundses and the Heywoods had dinner together on Saturday night—a dinner to which Warren was invited but which he refused due to his sprained ankle—and during the evening Mrs. Edmunds produced a copy of the Oakland Tribune of the Sunday before. Some enterprising reporter had dug up an ancient photo of Schwartz, cavalry-mustache and all—one which the “burglar” of the Schwartz home had missed. Edmunds looked again at the photo, and then placed his thumb over the moustache (as he had seen officers do down at the police station, he himself being something of a police buff). Then he gasped in astonishment. The eyes and nose and hair were very amazingly like those of

their mutual friend and Heywood’s new tenant in the second-rate little apartment house, which was called by the fancy name of the Nottingham Apartments. Later that same night Berkley police received an “anonymous” tip over the phone.

It was all over. Officer Ralph Pigeon and a supporting posse, consisting of other policemen plus the busy Mr. Heywood and Mr. Edmunds, banged on the door of Harold Warren’s apartment at around 3:15 AM Sunday. Someone moved about inside, but there was no answer to Heywood’s cheery “Open up, Harold, it’s me—Heywood!”.

The policemen rushed the door, just as in the movies, but all they got was a set of badly-bruised shoulders. Then they dashed around to the service porch and the rear door, which was of lighter construction and fell in at the first push. But just before it crashed, there was the sound of a shot inside. They found Henry Schwartz, a bullet through his right eye, sprawled across the kitchen table and dying.

His face lay almost upon a hastily-scribbled note—addressed to his wife Alice. It was, and was not, a confession. More a whimper, in fact. He had written:

"My dear wife:

I am writing you without making any excuses, but one thing I will tell you, I am not guilty of the crime they accuse me of.

Last Monday a man called at the factory for work. I was in the lab. He came straight in. We talked a little while, when suddenly the man told me if I didn't give him work, I would have to give him money. He attacked me. I gave him a blow on the head. He fell. I gave him another. Suddenly I knew he was dead. But I could not make up my mind to go to Bell (the company attorney, a friend of Schwartz's and his defense lawyer in the breach of promise case) and tell him.

I decided to run away, but made a dirty job of it. I put the man in the closet, got ready. Can you imagine how I felt all this time? Oh, God, how I suffered. If I had not this damned suit of Miss Adam's, I would have gone through with it, but it was impossible.

I wish to tell you, my dear little girl, I do not know the man (he refers to the unhappy Gilbert Barbe, his vic-

time) never looked how he was dressed (but somebody dressed him in Schwartz's own clothes), never touched him after that. The only thing I did was I tried to burn him, to wipe out and go — go. I do not know where. I went home to take all my photos and all I was in need of, hoping to have a few words with you.

I kiss this in bidding and kissing you goodbye. My last kiss is for you, Alice — **

With this evasive, mostly untrue, self-pitying message written in extremis, Henry Schwartz wrote his own epitaph. The perfect murder had been riddled with imperfections, and while the plot (which must have been formed in Schwartz's mind at least two years before the murder) might have fooled Sheriff Veale, Oscar Heinrich saw through it like a pane of glass.

The insurance company managed to wriggle out of paying the \$190,000. claim, but got stuck for the \$25,000. policy in favor of Alice Schwartz, after many delays and much litigation. The Pacific Cellulose company went out of business, its assets only the secret formula in the vaults (which was gibberish),

*Letter by courtesy of Lenore Glen Offord, whose account of "The Eleven Days' Wonder" in *San Francisco Murders*, edited by Joseph Henry Jackson (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947) is practically the only published material on the case, and well worth reading. In *The Wizard of Berkeley* (Coward-McCann, 1958) Eugene B. Block touches upon it rather lightly, once over.

and the partly-gutted building in Walnut Creek, which has since been remodelled into an apartment house and is still standing.

When she was finally allowed to take away the body of her husband, Alice Schwartz managed a rather ornate funeral. As in so many murder cases, the victim himself was lost sight of. No one came forward to claim the body of Gilbert Barbe, the wandering evangelist, and he was buried in the local equivalent of Potter's Field.

We can wonder now at the motives and purposes of the mysterious Henry Schwartz, who had certainly got himself far out on a limb. It has been suggested that because of his short stature (he was three inches shorter than his wife Alice, and almost equally so in regard to Elizabeth Adam) that he had long been suffering from what is called facetiously "Little Men's Disease" but is taken quite seriously by psychologists, who call it the Napoleonic Complex and find that it has driven many a little man onward and upward in an almost frantic desire to prove himself bigger and better than anybody else!

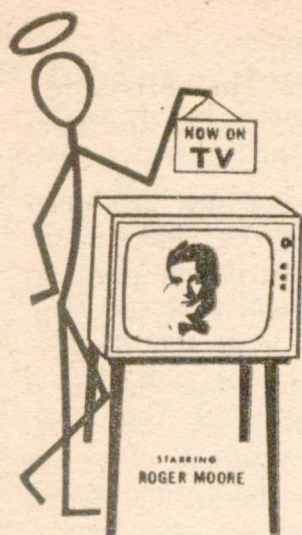
With Schwartz, outward appearances were tremendously important. The building in Walnut Creek had to have an imposing front, and a luxuriously

furnished office—though the laboratory was bare and dark. He carried around in his pocket a swatch of soft, glowing silk and exhibited as a sample of his work — but he kept the sales slip showing that he had purchased it from a local firm for \$8.50!

And he very nearly got by with the whole plot, too. Perhaps he expected Alice and the children to return to England after they had the insurance money, and to join them surreptitiously at some later date. The final outcome of it all might have been completely different had it not been for the quiet observations of a certain retiring professor of chemistry named Oscar Heinrich, who was to go on to handle almost a thousand more major criminal cases during his career, but who was always a little proud of the way he had wound up the Schwartz case.

Answer to puzzle on page 93

D	O	N	E		M	A	D		D	R	E	W	
I	R	O	N		U	S	E		S	O	R	E	
G	A	N	G	S	T	E	R	S	M	O	L	L	
S	L	O		I	E			A	W		M	E	T
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LESLIE CHARTERISⁱ

The **saint**

on TV
from **LAWRENCE OF**
ARABIA to THE SAINT

Long-time readers of the Saint's adventures will remember THE NOBLE SPORTSMAN in THE SAINT INTERVENES. One of England's most distinguished actors, Anthony Quayle, plays the title role in this episode in the present series.

Awarded the C.B.E. in 1952 for his contribution to the theatre, Quayle can look back on a career which has taken him all over the world (his most recent films include "Guns of Navarone" and "Lawrence of Arabia", in which he portrayed a military adviser to the Arabs) and ranged over almost every aspect of acting, with emphasis on the classics, to the extent that these pages should perhaps have been subtitled, "From Shakespeare to the Saint". But this, while obviously more topical, would obscure the reality that there *is* as much excitement, as much intrigue, as much deeds of daring, and as

much sheer joy of living in the pages of Shakespeare as there is, as we all know (particularly after reading VENDETTA FOR THE SAINT) in the saga of the Saint. . . .

There are after all two ways of approaching those words, "the classics" and "history". Both can be as dry as dust if learned by rote, with a disregard for the reality that these words have to do with flesh and blood people who, in their time, lived and loved and schemed and fought — and dreamed the dreams we ourselves still are capable of.

There is, in other words, no need for "the classics" to be dull, unless read — or recited — from a sense of duty and with no understanding of how they came to be written. The admitted errors of history in Shakespeare have a different meaning, for instance, if understood to be thinly disguised political pamphleteering.

The reality that he, as did so many painters of the day, wove into the fabric of his plots the men and women whom he knew — and their foibles and also their virtues — underlines this historical reality that these classics, which came to life at the hands of a John Barrymore, are very much akin to the chronicles of our own times. The words are different. Motivations may vary from century from century. But actors such as John Barrymore and Anthony Quayle, and for that matter Richard Burton, *are* therefore at home — both in “Hamlet” — and in an episode in this series.

Quayle, who went to New York for the first time in 1936 to appear in “The Country Wife” at the Henry Miller Theatre, appeared in “Hamlet” the following year, at Elsinore, with the Old Vic Company. Just before going into the Army (he served with the Royal Artillery from 1939 until 1945), he toured the Continent and Egypt with the Old Vic Company. In 1950 he toured Australia and New Zealand with the Shakespeare Memorial Company, returning to these countries for a further tour in 1953. Playing the part of Aaron in “Titus Andronicus” in 1957, he toured Paris, Venice, Belgrade, Zagreb, Vienna and Warsaw. The following year found him back here in this

country with “The Firstborn”, which he also directed and later took to Tel-Aviv.

In 1948, when he produced and acted with the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company at Stratford-on-Avon, he was appointed director of the theatre, remaining there for the next eight-and-a-half years, long, happy and productive years. At the same time, he recalls, when he finally did emerge from there, “people stared at me in astonishment as though they were wondering where I had sprung from!”

Much of Anthony Quayle’s television work has been in this country where the noted actor is in great demand. Films in which he has appeared in recent years include, “Hamlet” (naturally. . . .), “The Battle of the River Plate”, “The Man Who Wouldn’t Talk”, “The Defiants”, and — as previously noted, “The Guns of Navarone” and “Lawrence of Arabia”. Casting Anthony Quayle, C.B.E., as the sporting earl is characteristic of the attention to details and unusual thoughtfulness (certainly unusual for a TV series!) with which the producers of “The Saint” series have approached the casting for each episode. Here is one reason why the series have been so phenomenally successful, all over the world!

*lady
in
the
soup*

by Robert L. Fish

SHE SAGGED ACROSS the desk at me, her eyes as red as yesterday's traffic lights. Her nervous fingers twitched, stained with marijuana and ice cream. Kids! I thought bitterly, but then one look down her gaping blouse and I changed my mind. I packed dry-plug out of the humididor into my Medico and waited.

"You think you know all the answers, don't you?" she asked hopelessly, her eyes sweeping the empty walls like searchlights picking out bombers over the London sky. The pictures were out being cleaned, but I wasn't telling her.

I played it easy, scratching my jaw. I've seen a lot of them come and go. In my business you do. And you don't reach my age in this racket if you answer every question they throw at you. Or if your jaw doesn't itch every now and then, either.

She bared her bosom as if by accident, but I wasn't fooled.

"Save it," I said wearily. "Bosoms are nothing new to me. I was raised on them."

She adjusted her blouse, her eyes smouldering. Her voice

Captain José Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liaison officer between the Brazilian police and Interpol, has been one of the most delightful things to happen to this field in the 60's. The first Da Silva novel, THE FUGITIVE, won MWA's Edgar Allan Poe Award for the Best First Mystery Novel of 1962; the third Da Silva novel, THE SHRUNKEN HEAD, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. In between these, Mr. Fish has paused — and taken an amused look at a school of "writing" in this field — and gone on from there.

broke, scratching like old Caruso records. "You're hard. How do you tell things to a man like you?"

I shrugged, watching her carefully. She had something to say, but pushing her hard wasn't the way to get it. Or even twisting her arms, which hung over the edge of the desk like icicles from a feed-store roof. She'd break; it was only a question of time. And time was all I had since Lisbeth left me.

The silence spread itself across my dingy office like bubbles on a cheap paint job. I reached for my jaw again and then paused. Better to wait. The tension was building up in her; there was a moan in her throat like pigeons in an airshaft. It wouldn't be long. It wasn't. The tears came like sleet beating on cab-roof. I pushed the blotter over to her and got out my pencil.

"I'll give it to you straight," she finally said, her eyes dead as wet jaw-breakers, the tears crawling through her heavy make-up like ants on a trail. "I won't say I'm sorry he's dead. He was my father but he wasn't, if you know what I mean. Or if you don't. But that doesn't change the fact that he was murdered. And that's against the law. The murderer is . . ."

The window starred; the sharp crack of the bullet was like Cagney's hand on a blond cheek. I

hit the floor and rolled over, crawled to the watercooler, pulled myself up by the faucet.

"Better get down," I advised, but I was talking to myself. The slack jaw told the story; the bullet-hole above her temple confirmed it. Her dress had inched up over her thighs, revealing pink leotards, but I didn't pull it down. You don't hold a license long in this town if you touch dead bodies.

There was a sudden rap on the door, like riveters starting work at seven. I flung the hand-woven Persian rug over the body and combed my hair with my fingers. This wasn't the way I would have preferred it; I could only hope my new visitor would think I had a sloppy housekeeper.

The door whispered open; she drifted in like smoke from a smouldering mattress, stepped over the humped rug, dropped lazily into a chair. For a moment my heart almost stopped; it was Lisbeth, as beautiful and desirable as ever. Her eyes surveyed me coolly, sardonically. She reached over and gently pinched my cheek.

"My daughter," she said quietly. "What did she want?"

"Your daughter?" Surprise tinged my voice like bluing in a wash-tub.

She yawned. "My step-daughter, actually. I married again, you know." She smiled at me; all

the old memories came back, like kids sneaking home from the pool-room. "What did she say?"

I thumbed flame to a kitchen match, rode it to the corncob in my mouth with shaking fingers, puffed. You think you know a woman but you never really do. And then I noticed one thing; her lovely eyes avoided the humped rug deliberately. It could have only been politeness, but knowing Lisbeth I didn't think so.

"Well? What did she want?" Her throaty voice was wheedling.

I took the pipe from my mouth and dropped it into the wastebasket to gain time. A sudden thought struck me; I forced my voice to be noncommittal.

"How did you know she was here?"

She gave herself away. "Who?"

"Your daughter. Or rather, your step-daughter."

Her face became gray; I could see her mind working frantically, seeking an out like mice in a cake-box. She forced a smile on to her face.

"Why do you ask that?"

I got up, walked to the water-cooler, filled a cup and came back, pouring it into the burning wastebasket. Her eyes followed me desperately. I sat down again and stared at her.

"Just curious," I said evenly.

Her eyes dulled. "Let's forget

the whole thing. Let's just remember the past. I'm free again, and rich now. George — George had an accident . . ." She sighed brightly. "Do you remember how we used to come up here at dusk and look out of that window and hold hands as the sun went down?"

Her beautiful eyes stared at the window. I turned my head in nostalgia. It was a mistake. Pain came down on me like the fire curtain at the old Odeon in Middletown, Ohio. I was floating down a spiral coal-chute into the hungry maw of a ship's boiler. Darkness finally saved me, covering me like ketchup on a sixty-cent sandwich. The last thing I heard was her soft laugh.

I came out of the blackness like fish escaping from a flooded sewer. Dampness dripped down my cheek like sweat on a ten-cent beer-glass. I reached to staunch it; my hand was caught. For a moment I thought it was Lisbeth, but then I realized that other people have fingers, too. A starchy uniform leaned over me, blue eyes calm and reassuring.

"Wait until it dries." I tried to nod; it was my second mistake. Pain came back, twisting my neck, hammering at my temples like an extrovert kid with his first Christmas drum. A needle stung; I went back to the soft coal chute and the rhythmic boiler.

The Chief was waiting when I came to the second time. I never thought I'd be glad to see that fat, sweating face, but this time I was.

"We have it."

I swallowed. "You have what?"

"The footprint. A plaster-cast of your skull where you were kicked. Maybe it'll tell us something. Maybe not."

I inched myself up from the floor, forcing down the nausea that crawled up my throat like bilge through a scupper. I was afraid to look but I knew I had to. He handed me the plaster-cast; the four-inch French heel was all too familiar.

I turned my head; Lisbeth was still sitting there, her feet still avoiding the grisly lump under the Persian rug. She tried to smile at me but the effect was ghastly. I knew then I still loved her, but I also knew I could never live with her again without constantly suffering vague suspicions.

I cleared my throat painfully. "Do you want to confess, or must I tell them everything?"

"Confess?" Her voice tried to be amused, but nervousness had crept in like dust under a rug. "Confess to what? Any thing you have is only circumstantial."

"Maybe," I conceded. "That's up to the Chief here."

"Chief," she said. "Are you going to listen to him or to me?"

"I'll listen to him," the Chief said heavily. "He's been right once or twice."

Their eyes turned to me like headlights on a bakery-truck turning a street-corner at night. I swallowed the bile in my throat.

"Here's the way it was," I said, hating myself, hating my job. I ticked off the damning evidence on my fingers. "First, you made a mistake being found in a locked room with George's body, the smoking gun still in your hand. Secondly, your advertisement in yesterday's paper that you intended to kill him was a very strong point against you. Third, his daughter was a witness, and after you killed her you remained the only heir." I looked up; they were as quiet as spring-water in a cigarette-ad, watching me with narrowed eyes. I wished I was swimming west from San Pedro with a leaky life-belt.

"But the thing that really gave you away," I said dully, "was in going down to the post-office afterwards and mailing me the murder weapon for Christmas. It just came this afternoon." I shook my head. "It was your biggest mistake. You and I never exchanged gifts."

Silence hung in the room like salamis in an Italian cantina. I pushed myself to my feet, reached for my hat. "I'm sorry," I said quietly.

I swung the door closed behind me, trying to forget the hate in her eyes. I walked slowly down the street to my Elcar, slid wearily behind the wheel. I gunned the motor into obedience, headed up into the hills over the city. The flickering lights below glittered like gunflashes in a Korean night. I drove tensely, watching the Burma-

Shave signs whisk past, damp in the rain.

I flicked fire from a match, remembered I no longer had a pipe, and let it burn out in my fingers. I wiped sweat from my face. My chest felt as hollow as new waste-baskets. Another day, another dollar in a dirty racket. I shifted into low and headed for home.

NEXT MONTH—

THE ADVENTURE OF THE UNIQUE "HAMLET"

by VINCENT STARRETT



UNCLE WILLIE

by RICHARD DEMING

SHADOWS IN THE SUN

by HAL ELLSON

EVEN A WOMAN

by ANTHONY GILBERT

INSIDE THE SAINT — II

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE ADVENTURE OF THE CROUCHING DOG

A new Solar Pons story by AUGUST DERLETH

—in the July 1964 issue of **THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

*the
old
cat
woman*

by Elsa Marshall

YOU MIGHT CALL it one heck of a way for a girl to begin her married life, that first summer at the Beach with all the weird neighborhood feuds and then murder finally breaking out. But I look back on the place with real affection; it was endearing in a wild, colorful sort of way — when we weren't on the actual verge of death, arrest or lifelong disgrace, that is.

Nothing about it seemed very lovable, of course, on the day when I first met old Mrs. Mack by the Bay shore, hobbling along with her cats, and right after drunk Tom Rogers had gotten me good and shook up. Tom was part of a crazy bachelor set-up next door to our house; he had shifty eyes and a tangled beard that would jolt you even today when beards are a bit more common. (This wasn't so darned long ago, at that — three kids back, the way we figure things in our family. In real elapsed time it would be about — never mind.)

My new husband was a fresh-hatched doctor, then pulling a tour of naval duty, and I was a deep-dyed civilian far from home. Tom's base was near Nor-

There is an unusually warm quality to the people whom you will meet in this story by a writer new to the SMM — warm and credible . . . Elsa Marshall, who lives near Charlottesville, Virginia, here does not write about that lovely part of this country — but about murder — and about crabs

folk and we'd rented a little house practically on Chesapeake Bay — one end of a new monstrous bridge tunnel is somewhere around there now. Strange! Anyhow, nothing was in sight that afternoon but an endless fish net drying along the beach and I walked beside it, feeling lonely and sorry for myself.

Then I began to notice how many crabs had been left tangled, alive, in the meshes and slowly forgot my troubles as I wondered if they were free for the taking. We both like crab dishes.

I was looking vaguely around for someone to ask when Tom's voice out of nowhere scared me silly.

"A lady on the unknown, silent shore," he boomed, still invisible. It paralyzed me and I didn't feel a whole lot better when that shaggy face and head popped up at me from behind a dune. The rest of Tom Rogers was startlingly nude and lean by contrast as he stumbled down the sandhill in a pair of skimpy trunks, with a bottle in one hand.

"You are my neighbor, wed to a navy medic, and your name is —?"

"Joyce Sumner. Do you live next door . . . *all* the time?"

"Possibly. Hank Farmer has been my host there for several weeks. Hospitable Hank. He's

even provided me with employment of a sort. I load unwieldy objects, like refrigerators, onto trucks, at a worthy establishment where our Hank keeps the books."

"He's a *bookkeeper*?" I cried with altogether too much surprise. You couldn't picture Hank in the role — generally he wore trunks about like Tom's but was fat and balding, and a party seemed to run permanently on in his little log cabin. When would he have time?

Tom laughed and said, "Hank has led a free-wheeling life since his wife shed him a few years ago. But he's still in town with the books almost daily. Sneaks time out here and there. Fantastic."

A good thing for the rest of you, I thought; then wondered what kind of hours Tom put in loading trucks. Speaking of unlikely jobs.

"Excuse me," Tom said, "But the witch is coming, with her cats. Flee, if you can." He vanished back over the sand dunes and I saw old Mrs. Mack approaching, leaning on her cane and carrying a pail. She too lived on our little dead end street near the beach and I'd been treated to a hysterical outburst by another neighbor who claimed that Mrs. Mack kept her in a state of terror, and those cats

were an excuse for a petition. I guess, in my unhappy state, I'd picked up some of the lady's jitters and then the meeting with Tom hadn't helped. But I did feel afraid as I stood there, wishing I could run away too.

Mrs. Mack's short, wispy white hair looked, at a distance, as if a witch's peaked hat would sit naturally upon it. Some infirmity caused her to bend far forward, over her cane, and a couple of her many cats really did follow her around, like dogs. (And that day, one was *black*.) But as she drew nearer, I saw that this was a remarkably fresh-faced witch, with the kind of pink cheeks that a few lucky old ladies retain and the bluest eyes ever. True, there was something a bit wicked in the smile she gave me, but suddenly, I liked that smile.

"I'm letting my cats select dinner for themselves and all their family at home," she said. "Theoretically, at least." Mrs. Mack held up her bucket and I saw a few small fish at the bottom. "These were the only samples they would consider, out of all the left-overs from Captain Trott's last catch. My, how the crabs have torn this net. And there is Jim, mending it."

Up ahead, a Negro fisherman was working on a section of the net and I asked Mrs. Mack what customarily happened to the crabs.

"They are stepped on by big fisherman's boots," she said. "Then thrown away as a costly nuisance. This is a fishing, not a crabbing operation. My cats don't like them either."

"My husband does, though," I said timidly. "Could we have some?"

"Jim, this lady wonders if you'd *mind* if she took a few crabs," Mrs. Mack called to the fisherman who laughed and said, "Oh, we'd hate that. See how we love crabs around here," and he pointed to a couple of shattered carcasses nearby. Then Jim kindly began to help me untangle the things, which was difficult and even dangerous — these were live ones, with claws. Mrs. Mack loaned me her bucket, since the fish were so few, and the cats made playful passes at escaping crabs.

I left with an over-flowing bucket of seafood, feeling better than I had in days and remembering that I'd always loved the ocean. Never again must I associate it with worrisome Navy protocol, I thought — the old Bay itself was too mighty for that and certainly the awesome Atlantic was, there in plain view beyond Cape Henry Light. With a head full of such thoughts, and grateful to Mrs. Mack, I quite forgot that she'd ever seemed distasteful, either to me or the neighbors. We stopped outside

the tangled shrubbery which hid her house and the cats, Felice and Lochinvar, sat down.

"They sound like my family," I said. "French and Scottish names."

"Mine too, but we had complications. Father was a Scottish Canadian, Mother was a French one and I was born in the Province of New Brunswick where they go in for being more British than the British. Then I married an American and I've been one for years, but I will do things like saying just 'The Queen', as though I was still her subject! I still have relatives in Canada, including a son."

I said I was glad to have placed her accent (which I'd noticed because it was very attractive) and told her how much I'd always liked Canadians. Everything seemed so pleasant and I was totally unprepared, in leaving Mrs. Mack, to have Mrs. Captain Parrish pounce on me from the yard next door. All my troubles came rushing back.

"Did Mrs. Mack haul any more junk from the beach?" Mrs. Parrish asked frostily. She was the person who had frightened me about Mrs. Mack, although I was already even more scared of *her* — the proud wife of a retired naval captain. They knew "everyone" on Rob's base and they *could* even be as influential as she implied. I was a

young bride and serious about helping my husband. This naval phase of his career was my first challenge and sometimes too awful to face, as represented by Mrs. Russell Parrish. To cap it all, she was our landlady and a watchful one. Only Hank's run-down place separated us; the one good thing about the dizzy crew next door.

Hurriedly, I told Mrs. P. that no more driftwood or rotten planks had been added to the pile in Mrs. Mack's yard. She lived in dread that a fire would start there and consume us all. But it seemed the cats were smelling again and one had left tracks all over the shining hood of her car. (About the smell, I wondered chiefly that it wasn't worse.)

"I wish her son would come down and clean up. He can't know the place is going to rot while she hoards his support money."

"Maybe he will," I said feebly. "Would you like some crabs?"

"Very much, if you can spare them. We get plenty of good fish — as rent for the lots where they haul their nets, you know. That's our property. But they *will* throw the crabs away."

In exchange for my gift, I wound up with something big enough for the fish course at a Russian embassy banquet, but much prettier than a snouty old

sturgeon. A huge Chesapeake Bay speckled trout, newly netted and already cleaned, which Captain Parrish presented in person, all but clicking his heels. He was a big man with a moustache that might be said to bristle, but in a definitely tidy way. The Captain waved aside my tremulous thanks and marched back into the house while his wife talked on.

"I'd gladly swap all our fishing lots for the Mack and Farmer properties," she said bitterly. "Neither party will sell and here are we, caught between the two most disreputable places in the neighborhood. We'd never have bought here, had we known *both* would go downhill."

It was a little funny, all that Parrish spit-and-polish undone by the raffish establishments on either side. But I was now finding it hard to listen politely when Mrs. Mack was under attack. It occurred to me that even Hank Farmer might have his points, as I escaped Mrs. P. and came abreast of Hank's yard. Then I saw him, and doubted it.

"What kinda fish Cap'n Parrish give you?" Hank lay on a chaise longue that was near collapse, with a beer can in his hand and more on the ground. Some were full, some not, but Hank *was*. Definitely.

When I showed him the speckle, Hank mumbled, "Used

to give me that kind. Not any more." Then he staggered from the chaise, turning it over, and plunged off in the direction of his house. I headed for my own backyard, to leave the crab bucket near Bass Lake, a fresh water pond that skirted the rear of the four properties on Bass Court — our street. The little lake was very pretty and unexpected too, that close to the beach. A few largemouth bass and many, many turtles inhabited it.

Setting the bucket near a wooden bulkhead, I bent over to watch some minnows, when—Zi-i-ng! A bullet snapped past my head and hit the lake's surface. I leaped back with a half-scream and turned to glare at Hank's yard, terrified but also furious, because that gang did shoot carelessly at floating beer cans and turtle heads. Not a soul was in sight and it gave me the darnedest feeling of being a target, not a chance bystander. Beyond Hank's place was the Parrish yard, *pin* neat but too full of shrubbery, even if much of it was high class camellias and such, and the jungle of Mrs. Mack's backyard came next. Plenty of concealment everywhere, but I naturally assumed that the villain had ducked behind Hank's house, or even fired from a window. I headed over there in a rage, but drunken shouts and laughter stopped me.

Better wait for Rob.

Then I noticed the mailboxes at the corner. I'd been on the beach at mailtime, it was now 2 p.m. and — forgetting that I'd just missed being shot, I sprinted for the corner and found what I expected. Every box hung open, those of the Bass Court residents and two or three others from Bayshore Drive, the intersecting street. Four bright, devilish eyes peeped out at me from behind the boxes — Frank and Lucy, the neighborhood nemeses. I scolded them a little, but they always just stared back happily when you did that and it was obviously pretty futile. My box hadn't been rifled yet, so I extracted a couple of letters, then took an envelope from Mrs. Mack's box and gave it a good look before I saw her hobbling up.

"I was hoping this wasn't important, since it might have been on the ground in a minute," I said, handling the letter over.

The blank envelope resembled an ad, I thought — hand-addressed to fool you, the way they do. Mrs. Mack took it with thanks but no comment; then Mrs. Parrish marched up just as I was about to tell Mrs. M. about getting shot at. Funny how I kept thinking about it that way, when it was so plainly an accident.

"I've rented a postoffice box

and I advise you both to do the same," Mrs. Parrish announced. "If that's your son's check, Mrs. Mack, at least *one* of them will be safely in hand."

Mrs. Mack stared at her busy-body neighbor with a spiteful, witchy look in her bright eyes. It fitted some peoples' impression of her, but I also had a curious notion that she wanted to laugh, as she said, "My son's letter may well contain a check."

But Mrs. Parrish was getting wound up good and I had to escape her, so I excused myself and went home without telling anyone that a bullet had practically skimmed my head. Then Rob called and said they were extra busy at the hospital; even the doctors seemed to be falling ill, since he had to take over for somebody that evening and would not be home for dinner. I wouldn't be cooking the mammoth trout but the crabs must be tackled — hateful job, but it emptied Mrs. Mack's pail and gave me an excuse to return it, since I was feeling lonely and restless in the twilight. But when I entered Mrs. M's yard, night seemed to fall all at once.

Strange shapes loomed dimly around me and there were rustlings in the bushes — probably just cats but surely not friendly creatures with names like Felice and Lochinvar. I half forgave Mrs. Parrish her fears

of Mrs. Mack, and then I reached an old door — back or front? There was no telling, in that tangle, but I knocked extra loudly. A cat mewed somewhere, but that was all, in spite of my continued hammering. I left the bucket and started to pick my way out. Weeds tore at my bare legs — I was wearing shorts — and suddenly my foot caught on something that felt like a board, then I pitched forward in the darkness and a blow on the head half knocked me out. When I staggered to my feet again, I touched what appeared to be an old bureau and steadied myself on the thing. A rising lump, squarely on top of my head, seemed to be emitting a trickle of blood.

When I got out of there, it seemed strange to find some daylight left — regrettable too. Sure enough, Mrs. Parrish was waiting for me.

“Are you all right?” she sung out.

I remember raising my head, so the blood wouldn't run down my forehead, and at the same time pushing my front hair back; it was cut pretty short that summer. Woozy though I was, I couldn't let that woman know I'd had an accident in Mrs. Mack's yard; she would surely start the threatened petition and I could never sign it, which might be awkward for Rob.

In what I thought was quite a firm, natural voice, I explained that I was fine and had merely been returning Mrs. Mack's pail.

“What fell?” she persisted.

“I heard a — a cat knock something over, I think.” Now I was less sure of the firmness and wished it was darker, as I kept shoving back that piece of hair. I'm what they call a brownette and that means my hair is light enough to show blood, I guess; anyway it did show in the bathroom mirror back at the house. “Yes, indeed,” I'd said idiotically, when Mrs. P. asked if Mrs. Mack was at home. She always was, after dark — why had the old dragon inquired?

“Probably because she thought you were burying the body,” Rob said disgustedly. He was shaving out a small patch of my hair at the time, while I fought to keep it as small as possible. The final dressing didn't show too much — I hoped.

We woke up the next morning with the wind howling outside. Having worked late, Rob wasn't scheduled to report at the hospital until the afternoon so we'd looked forward to a morning at the beach. And we did go there, in spite of the weather, because Jim the fisherman had said the nets might be hauled early. Rob loves fishing and wanted to see if they really netted specimens, that

close to home, like the one in our refrigerator. (I believe he thought I'd bought it; then got my wits addled by that crack on the head.)

The beach and the water just off of it were crowded with people trying to save Captain Trott's loaded seine. A winch labored away on an old truck, slowly pulling the ends in but the waves were slapping the net about and most of the fishing crew and added volunteers were in rowboats or up to their waists in the water, trying to steady it. The catch might be only junk fish, but the whole business could go to pieces with the winch and the elements hauling blindly against each other. Captain Trott himself, a chunky man in hip-boots and an old yachting cap, directed operations as he stumped back and forth from his truck to the shore, where our *other* captain, Parrish, stood firm as Cape Henry Light. Naturally, his wife was beside him.

"Whoo-oo-ee!" a volunteer shouted, emerging from a wave which had knocked him down. "She'll go any minute at this rate!"

Rob offered his services, but Captain Trott said, "Too many hands out there already." Then he did a double take and added, "But yours we could maybe use, Doc. For artificial respiration. Any time now."

"There's a load of something here!" Jim shouted from a boat and the first fish began to appear, caught in the meshes which were dragging across the sand—alewives, a few small spot, toadfish and the inevitable crabs. The onlookers began to converge upon the "pocket" where the bulk of the catch would appear, when —

"What's *that*?" one of the men in the water cried, loosing his hold on the net and staggering back. Then we all saw it, a body surrounded by fish, floating in the shallow water; a human form with fish upon it, around it and no doubt, underneath. Rob and somebody else, I don't know who, carried it ashore. There before us lay old Mrs. Mack who would definitely never again forage for her cats upon these sands. They now blew wildly around her frozen face and would have given quick burial to the old body — but the local rescue squad got there too quickly for that. Not that there was anything they, or Rob, could do.

The county police gathered us all in the firehouse, headquarters of the rescue outfit. I was finding out what people mean by a "swimming head" because I had one. And it seemed altogether natural that Mrs. Parrish would be accusing me of something; people like her do such things in your dreams.

"See that bandage on her head! I thought I saw blood there last night when she came out of Mrs. Mack's yard, sort of stumbling. I don't doubt it was self-defense — that crazy old woman knocked her down, 'protecting' those cats. It isn't the first time such things have happened. She even shot at some boys once. Mrs. Sumner was merely terrified and grabbed the old thing by the throat —"

Rob shouted, "Just how is my wife supposed to have strangled a woman with her bare hands and then dragged the body to the beach? Officer, this is wild!" he said to a man who must be the head policeman. The questions started and I had to admit that I'd lied to Mrs. Parrish about seeing Mrs. Mack the night before — only what I was saying now sounded more like the lie.

I was crying when I said, "Honestly, I couldn't find her, then I tripped on something and hit my head but I didn't want Mrs. Parrish to know because she complained about the junk in that yard anyway. I thought it would make trouble for Mrs. Mack and I liked her!"

Silence. I guess it sounded like I was trying to shift the blame onto Mrs. P. But help of a sort came from an unexpected quarter.

"Iris, I have advised you

time and again to leave that poor old soul alone. She probably wouldn't have lived long anyway and you could have been fancying up her yard to your heart's content soon enough."

Good heavens, that was the terrifying, taciturn Captain Parrish! I'd assumed that he opposed Mrs. Mack at least as much as his wife did.

"And I've told *you*, Russell, that she could last forever. Besides, who knows what her son will do with the property?"

Captain Parrish cleared his throat and said, "Lieutenant Graham, the police are entitled to know that I hold a mortgage — or its equivalent — on the Mack place and am, in effect, the owner already. But I should hardly remove an old lady on that account!"

"Russell, this is impossible!" Mrs. Parrish looked as though someone had hit *her* on the head. The lieutenant was watching them both; probably trying to estimate just how much the value of their total holding had increased. But not out loud, if he could help it — the Parrishes were known, respectable citizens, the kind of retired Navy who belonged. We were only fly-by-night Navy, in spite of Rob's medical degree.

Meticulously, Captain Parrish explained that he had been helping Mrs. Mack in small

ways for years; some of them his wife knew of but for the most part, she didn't. To Mrs. P., all this must have been like thinking for half a lifetime that she was married to a certain man, then finding out he was someone else entirely. Behind the stern naval facade, the Captain had worked out a perfect technique for getting along with his wife. He did as he pleased, told her nothing, and she was too self-centered to realize it. Apparently, he too had liked Mrs. Mack!

"Some two years back, she came to me with a simple business proposition," the Captain explained. "But a vital one to her. The son had experienced difficulties, she said, and could no longer help her. Illness had wiped out her other resources. I did not press for details but Mrs. Mack said the doctors didn't give her long to live and I rather believe this. She wished a few thousands for subsistence until death, with her place then to be mine, free and clear."

He paused and Mrs. P. got a dreamy look on her face — "We own it! I can clean . . ." The Captain gave her an awful glare which I don't think she even saw, and resumed. "I told her that I would agree only if it was understood that an improvement in her son's finances would cancel the arrangement.

Mrs. Mack doubted that this could happen in the time left her, and apparently, it never did. Meanwhile, she felt he need not worry about her and she could go in peace, owing no one."

Mrs. Parrish said, "But she *was* getting money from her son! Mrs. Sumner, you saw the letter that came from him today. And she even said it might contain a check."

I was trying to figure out what was somehow wrong about that whole encounter at the mail-boxes, when the Captain broke in sharply.

"His letters did *not* contain checks. Mrs. Mack told people what she pleased, when she didn't fancy their questions."

The police lieutenant and one of his men were listening to all this; then another policeman walked in with Hank Farmer, Tom Rogers and a man named Wally Roane who was also a guest of Hank's. They were perhaps half-sober and Tom rather better than that.

Hank said. "Cap'n, do you sure enough own old lady Mack's place now? By God, I'm outnumbered. Maybe we can make a deal. But why the hell am I dragged over here on account of that old crone drowning?"

"Strangled, not drowned.

That's why you're *all* here," Graham said.

"George, gimme a break," Hank grumbled. I realized that, for all we knew, he might have been raised with the entire local constabulary. The man who brought him in must have clued him on Captain Parrish and the Mack property—I guess they couldn't help it, but Hank's guests were soon getting it just a bit harder than Hank himself. Then one of them, Wally turned out to be another Tidewater Virginian and Tom was that much more hemmed in. With us. Maybe it was mutual sympathy which made me feel that Tom mightn't be so bad after all, but I did remember that he talked well and literately. The finest kind of people get liquor problems, I thought, and if Rob and I were suspect as "foreign" South Carolinians, well, poor Tom had claimed New Hampshire as home!

But you couldn't say the police were really being unfair, and Graham's local knowledge certainly didn't spare anyone. Mrs. Parrish had to admit stating often enough that her neighbor must have a hoard, since she obviously didn't spend her alleged support payments.

"But I didn't mean buried in the yard!" she cried.

"For your sake, I pray that we never learn about someone

who badly misunderstood you," her husband said stiffly.

Other motives that we discussed were more like the one Mrs. P. had already provided for me. The killer struck back when attacked by Mrs. Mack, who thought harm was intended her cats. Or it might have been revenge for an earlier attack. Apparently, she did wield a stick rather freely, but *waving* it would probably be a better word. And generally, I suspected, at small boys. But what of the rumored shooting?

"Damn it, George, some folks *been* wanting the old woman out," Hank snapped. "Even getting hold of her place ahead of time. Cap'n, you're almighty high hat these days. Wouldn't even give a man a fish . . ." Rob muttered something about "the kind of stuff a drunk would brood over", but the Captain was saying, "I've tried to, Hank. Once, the noise just didn't sound like people who'd be interested in *fish*. Another time, I heard shooting out in back."

Then I burst out, for some reason, and told about *my* shooting.

"For God's sake," Hank said. "Just somebody after a turtle. Damn things have eaten most every bass in the lake."

"Whoever did it got out of sight pretty quick, instead of asking my pardon like they

should have," I said angrily.

"Somebody just might have it in for you, Mrs. Sumner," Lieutenant Graham said. "That crack on the top of your head would be hard to get falling *down*. You'd have to run headfirst into a wall, or more likely — get sapped from above. Could the bullet have come from Mrs. Mack's place?"

Rob answered, "Two yards full of bushes are in between. But if there is an opening for a straight shot, even a .22 would carry the distance."

Hank started picking on Tom then, and egging Wally on to do the same, until they sent us all home. For the next few days, we saw quite a bit of Tom, who stayed on with Hank but took refuge at our place whenever he could. He literally stopped drinking, apparently with no trouble at all, and as we learned his story, we developed rather a liking for the wanderer. He was that all right, but he'd put himself through a couple of years' college and was astonishingly well read in British and American literature. He joked about being the product of a "broken home" in a way that didn't sound like a plea for sympathy, so Rob and I both gave him some.

Tom was visiting me one evening — Rob was again working late but was then due home any

time — when everything suddenly blew up. With absolutely no warning. I remember thinking idly that Tom's voice was agreeable and wondering who it reminded me of, when he said, "God, those nuts in New Brunswick couldn't be more excited over the visit of the Princess than if it was the Queen herself."

New Brunswick. Mrs. Mack, who said "The Queen" and presumably "The Princess" and had a son who'd written her a letter but — Tom was talking on but my expression must have been odd. Suddenly I realized that he was watching me very hard and for the first time I noticed that Tom's eyes were an extremely bright blue. Generally he didn't look at you very straight — then I jumped up —

"You're Mrs. Mack's son!" I cried insanely. "The letter in her box had no Canadian stamp — probably an ad — she didn't know you were here or *where* you were but she'd never tell Mrs. Parrish . . ."

Now I was backing off because Tom Rogers was approaching me, slowly at first and saying, "Joyce, come off it," then I turned and ran through the front door and I could hear him running too, dropping all pretenses. With no time to think, I still understood that this man might be a murderer and I could never outrun him. But it was dark out

there — my only hope. And Hank, of all people, was my one possible refuge, I thought, huddling beside the bulkhead and listening to Tom moving softly about my yard. I was halfway between Hank's house and ours, but I knew he'd get me in the light from Hank's windows and I'd simply thrown myself down in a flower bed by the lake, where the top of the bulkhead half hid me. It was sheer luck, but the lake shone faintly beyond my hiding place, outlining the board that topped it and leaving the flower bed in total blackness — not that I knew it then. But instinct told me not to move a finger and I didn't. Soft footsteps were passing very close — should I grab his leg if a foot touched me and jerk it hard? If he fell I might make it to Hank's — maybe screaming would be better though. Would he run — and where oh where was Rob?

Then a probing foot did hit my leg and I doubled up and somehow threw myself forward, but a hand snatched at my shoe as I went; then I was up and racing along the bulkhead but I wasn't going to make it anywhere. There was another blow on my aching skull and I heard myself screaming and screaming and then going down, down, into blackness more complete than the bulkhead's shadow.

The next time I saw light, it

was in my own bedroom and my head ached worse than ever — also, my hair was wet. More blood? Yes, but even more lake water, from falling overboard. Tom Rogers, now Mack, had hit me with a silver candlestick snatched from our mantel. (A wedding present.) Then Rob drove up in time to hear my screams; fortunately Hank and Wally heard them too and the three of them nailed Tom. I'd possibly have saved myself that second crack on the head if I'd simply run screaming to Hank's in the first place.

"I suspected years ago that the Mack boy had never sent his mother a dime," Captain Parrish explained the next day. "That was her proud little fiction. She was sending *him* money as long as it lasted; then she sent him mine. But that got low too and finally Mrs. Mack saw that she'd have to keep the rest, even if she hadn't long to live. So she wrote Tom the news and he sneaked down here to reconnoiter. God knows what he'd been doing or where he was. His mother hadn't seen him in years so his beard was a fair disguise, especially when he let it go wild. But he was careful to keep his distance anyway — until the night he killed her. God, but wise women can be fools, when they love so much to take *care* of things. What will

we do with all those cats?"

Tom Mack got an awful jolt when he found out how broke his mother really was. Hank, incidentally, had no idea who he was taking in when Tom pretended to be such a great drinking buddy — but actually was a fake even as a booze hound. The set-up was a perfect cover, though; behind it Tom could dispose of the old lady and sell the property he expected to inherit — to the Parrishes, and for a good sum. He'd wait quietly until the excitement died down, then drift on and eventually claim his legacy from a distance. A local agent could handle the sale; if Tom's presence was required briefly, he'd simply shave, buy a good suit and get no closer to his recent neighbors than the bearded Tom had to his mother.

He first took alarm when Mrs. Mack made friends with me; my house was too close if she should start visiting and she *could* even let out something that might lead to him. (A surprisingly perceptive hunch, since she already had.) That's why he took a shot at me from Hank's kitchen window. Tom meant to tell Hank how he'd seen the crazy old cat

woman shoot at the gal next door and hadn't they better warn her? That surely would have parted me from Mrs. Mack but might have stirred up too much excitement; anyway, Tom changed his mind and decided to choke the poor thing that same evening and throw her body in the Bay at a later, safer hour.

The strangling had just been done when I blundered along with the crab bucket and then stumbled against the bureau Tom was hiding behind. He got me in the head with a convenient rock that time; a fairly "lucky" blow in the darkness. It befuddled me enough to cover Tom's return to Hank's house across the Parrish backyard, while Mrs. P. quizzed me in front.

All of it went for nothing, of course. Captain Parrish, not Tom, was Mrs. Mack's heir — besides, Tom hadn't expected her to return in a fishnet the very next morning. If she'd been out there longer, there would have been no strangler's marks left on the wrinkled throat. But Tom had not rowed the body out quite far enough, for the old Bay is tricky. *She* could have told him that.

"LOST PROPERTY"

One reason why the British Secret Service was able to save more than \$110,000. in operational costs last year appears to be that more than \$20,000. was realized through the sale, "discreetly, through the Railway Lost Property Stores", of obsolete equipment such as "old-model double-bottom suitcases and obsolescent steel-tipped shoes." The latter were apparently snapped up by women shoppers during the winter sales.

The **saint** CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Mission accomplished
5. Furious
8. Pulled a gun
12. Shooting —
13. Make a tool of
14. See 5. Across
15. Big boss' gal
18. Traffic sign
19. That is
20. — shucks
21. Came face to face with
22. Final scene
23. Doze off
25. Sound of 33. Down
28. The 'Brains'
32. Make public
33. Possibly 15. Across
34. Sticky stuff
35. Haloed adventurer
38. Throttle; strangle
40. Clamor of warfare
41. That female
42. Mental prowess
45. Note of scale
46. Sound of triumph
47. In the style of
50. Scotland Yard name of note
54. Identifying mark
55. Old gambling game
56. Seed case
57. The Saint, e.g.
58. Noun ending
59. Bloody

DOWN

1. Understands: colloq.
2. Spoken
3. Double negative
4. Simon's habitat: abbr.
5. Silenced, as a shot
6. Ibsen heroine
7. Baffle completely
8. British award
9. Prison cell
10. Mystery author's first name
11. Thrashing mark
16. Spill the beans
17. Loot; booty
22. English letter
24. Philosophy in a degree.
25. Jungle beast

26. Perjure
27. Supply weapons
28. Listen in
29. Type of maniac
30. Astronaut's 'roger'
31. Fleet animal
33. Handcuff
36. Gendarmes, cops
37. Criminal's sentence
38. Singe
39. That guy
41. Fire
42. Desire; hope
43. Playwright
44. Racket boss
47. Any plane
48. Hangout
49. Accomplice
51. Not an amateur
52. Heavy weight
53. Identify

Answer on Page 71

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11				
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*what's
new
in
crime*

by Stefan Santesson

Today's Africa is met with in three interesting novels, Bill Knox' *THE DRUM OF UNGARA* and Dagmar Edqvist's *BLACK SISTER*, both published last year by the Crime Club, and in the more recent novel by Elspeth Huxley, *THE INCIDENT AT THE MERRY HIPPO*, published by Morrow, which will no doubt outrage some well-meaning people who have had no opportunity, as obviously has the author, to meet the sort of people who are members of the Royal Commission on Constitutional Changes in the Protectorate of Hapana. But more about this in a moment.

Bill Knox' *THE DRUM OF UNGARA* (Doubleday, \$3.95), comes closer to the classic pattern of the adventure novel set in Africa. Obviously written with one eye on the movies, it is the story of the decidedly adventurous return to Yabanza of Robert Hartford who had served there before, first with the Colonial Service and then as Adviser on Northern Territory Affairs to the first African caretaker government, and then been deported, two weeks after Independence Day, at the order of the man whose life he had saved, for "un-

Mr. Santesson continues his column on recent novels and other books in which readers of SMM may be interested. The writer, editor of this magazine since 1956, edited the Unicorn Mystery Book Club during 1945-'52.

authorized interference in Yabanzan internal affairs". Prime Minister Shibuaru now has granted the concession to the combine which has brought Hartford back to Yabanza on condition that they employ him, not because of what the Concession can in time mean to the Yabanzan economy, but because of Shibuaru's need for Hartford.

Hartford is Shibuaru's choice of weapon in a situation which menaces the government he heads and—if it is agreed that he is the lesser of two evils—the survival of the country itself. It is Hartford's mission to first catch up with the people who are on the verge of overthrowing the Shibuaru government; after he has done so—and assuming he survives—he can then proceed to do the job for which he has been sent to the country.

The novel is toughly realistic. And good.

Dagmar Edqvist's **BLACK SISTER** (Doubleday, \$3.95), translated from the Swedish, is the story of the death of the wife of a minor British official in pre-Independence Tanganyika, and the part played in the discovery of the truth about her death by Richard Palmer, a "righteous magistrate" in the eyes of the natives (some of the local settlers have another word for him . . .) and by Martin L. Hansson, the adopted son of Swedes

who, as he puts it, is learning to be an African again". Hansson, who has returned to the country of his birth on a UNESCO research grant, is drawn into the case first as the defence counsel for Rosana Lutshaka, at first accused of the "murder" of the English-woman, and then by his growing sense of identification with the peoples of the area—his people.

The author, who has visited Tanganyika several times, is a well known Swedish writer. Her novels have been translated into seven languages; an Ingmar Bergman film was based on one of her books. She has an obvious understanding of the problems of the transition years about which she writes, and an empathy—albeit a clear eyed one—for the peoples who are a part of these years.

In many ways, therefore, this story by an observer of these years of the impact of one person's life and death on those who had known her comes close to being a distinguished novel in this genre, despite occasional false notes. Do read this.

Curiously enough, Elspeth Huxley's **THE INCIDENT AT THE MERRY HIPPO** (Morrow, \$3.95), although written by a woman who knows Africa infinitely better than does Dagmar Edqvist, will not convey either this knowledge—or this under-

standing—to those for whom the world is conveniently divided into Saints and Sinners. There are no greys, there are no shades, in the world of these well meaning and rather humorless people who would be confused by the thought processes of Miriam Adams in the Edqvist novel and will be aghast at the approach to life of both the Honorable Mansfield Matunda and the Reverend Goliath Zaza, members of the aforementioned Royal Commission on Constitutional Changes in Africa.

These are not the leaders of the New Africa of whom they know, and they are right of course. The political personalities met with in this decidedly ironical novel are at no time described as the leaders of Tomorrow's Hapana. But at the same time it must be kept in mind, unless you are dreadfully unrealistic, that it is with the aid of such men that progress has been made and is being made towards that same Tomorrow. The Edqvist novel, obviously carefully researched, had to do with the people for whom *Uhuru* ("Freedom") inevitably has so many meanings and yet, with rare exceptions, is usually understood in terms of the day-to-day life in the villages where they have been born and where, in due course, when the Gods so will it, they shall die. . . The Huxley

novel on the other hand, if I may misuse (with due apologies) an expression that has come to have another connotation, has in the main to do with "the high life", unknown to the villagers whom Martin "Lokele" Hansson comes to know. This is in other words another side of the medal, and this qualification should of course be kept in mind. *The Sunday Times* (London) pointed out in its review of the novel that the satire "is turned upon Africa emerging to political independence, and it is none the less sharp and informative for being affectionate." I would qualify that. There is a bitter-sweet quality to the affection. And this should emphatically not be assumed to be more than a wicked, and damnable realistic, series of portraits of men who are in the forefront, for the moment, in—Hapana. . .

I have read several articles by Elspeth Huxley in the British press, and also her *ON THE EDGE OF THE RIFT*. I must admit that I have myself not always agreed with her reasoning, but you do feel that she does love Africa, possibly the way the late Isaac Dinesen did (there is inevitably that comparison), but at the same time with infinitely greater understanding. This however is not an acquired understanding. This is, if I may put it that way, something in the blood which precludes blind ac-

ceptance. Understanding does not, after all, necessarily mean agreement—but it can mean living together. Including in Hapana. . . . And **THE INCIDENT AT THE MERRY HIPPO**, this story of a series of murders which need never have happened, should be read with this in mind, remembering Mrs. Huxley's own warning that, "writing about modern Africa is like trying to sketch a galloping horse that is out of sight before you have sharpened your pencil. . . ."

By way of contrast, Perry Mason has once more to do with decorative problems in **THE CASE OF THE DARING DIVORCEE** (Morrow, \$3.50), Erle Stanley Gardner's latest contribution to the Mason saga. Vicarious romance rears its head at one stage, much to the annoyance of both Lt. Tragg and the harassed Mason, as the latter, as always, complicates life for District Attorney Hamilton Burger. Do read this.

Laurence Payne, who made his debut in detective fiction with **THE NOSE ON MY FACE**, published in 1962, returns with **TOO SMALL FOR HIS SHOES** (Macmillan, \$3.95), the story of the murder of a producer who has been making a controversial movie about the Nazis. You may have mixed reactions to Inspector

Birkett—there are times when I suspect that I do *not* have a sense of humor—but the story itself has some good moments.

Bertha Cool, as Donald Lam explains at one point in A. A. Fair's latest novel, **UP FOR GRABS** (Morrow, \$3.50), "is in her sixties. She weighs around a hundred and sixty odd, and she always reminds me of a spool of barbwire. She's hard and she's tough." And, as many people have found out over the years, she is disconcertingly realistic.

It is, I think, a matter of record that Bertha has never been known to have any of those qualities of sympathy—perhaps one could call it empathy—which women operatives, at least in some novels, normally use as a tool. Her weapons are roughness, and a shrewd business sense, which may be one reason the partnership with Donald Lam is so effective. A. A. Fair (Erle Stanley Gardner) has succeeded, in these novels, as in this which deals with an all-too-human insurance executive's problems, in writing a series of novels which it is often relaxing, some time afterwards, to reread. And this can't be said of all novels in this field.

Pyramid Books are making a distinct contribution to the field with their reprinting of classics

in the field such as Phoebe Atwood Taylor's *Asey Mayo* story, *OCTAGON HOUSE*, and Rex Stout's *FER-DE-LANCE* in their Green Door Mystery series (*Pyramid*, 50 cents).

Captain José Marie Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liaison officer between the Brazilian police and Interpol, has been one of the most pleasing things to happen to this field in the '60's. The first Da Silva novel, *THE FUGITIVE*, won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for the Best First Mystery Novel of 1962 (one of the few occasions, in recent years, when I have agreed with these awards . . .). Robert L. Fish's new novel, *THE SHRUNKEN HEAD* (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50), once more reflects the author's long-time knowledge — and understanding — of Brazil. As Da Silva tangles with these men who, based in the upper Amazon, are plotting revolution — with some interesting variations — you meet a cross-section of the peoples of Brazil, the raw material of labor statistics — and of revolutions — who are the strength of that country. Recommended.

Dell Shannon's latest Luis Mendoza novel, *ROOT OF ALL EVIL* (Morrow, \$3.50), opens with Master John Luis Mendoza and Miss Teresa Ann Men-

doza expressing their opinions of the world about them. "Collectively and loudly they howled into the night, and their joint volume was astonishing." The problems of fatherhood are thus added to the normal problems coped with daily by Lt. Mendoza, Los Angeles Police Department (Homicide); a murderer, an elusive rapist-burglar, and the two young newcomers to the Mendoza home, and the need of the Mendoza family for an understanding nurse, all help to complicate Luis' already complicated life. Recommended — as always.

A personal note. More than two million people were homeless in East Bengal last year and more than fifty thousand people had died following the hundred and fifty mile an hour cyclone which swept across Chittagong District. Children had lost their parents. Men and women and children were homeless, their homes in ruins, their future uncertain. This was something which had hit everyone, Muslim and Hindu and Christian alike. In times of disaster, there is no pause, after all, to determine the ethnic background or religious faith of the victim in the path of that disaster. Death is remarkably indifferent to such matters.

A group of us here organized the Chittagong Cyclone Relief Committee, headed by Ibrahim

Chowdry, a friend of mine for more than thirty years, with members in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Chester, Pa., and throughout the Metropolitan Area. Several friends contributed at this time to the Relief Fund

including *SMM* authors W. E. D. Ross, Edward D. Hoch and Stuart Palmer, and Chandler B. Grannis of *Publishers' Weekly*. Our warmest thanks are due these and other friends who responded to our appeal.

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*marked
for
death*

by Wenzell Brown

HAVANA. 1969.

Havana, nearly two years after the assassination of Fidel Castro. A city outwardly gay, filled with music and joyous laughter. But inwardly torn with strife. Here in Cuba's capital the remnants of the Communist regime, led by Ben Morales, struggled for power with the criminal elements which had surrounded an earlier dictatorship. The president was a straw man, the head of a patchwork government that could tumble at the slightest provocation. The real power was divided between Morales, who held the titular post of Secretary of Internal Defense, and Octavio Montilla, the Finance Minister, who was backed by the gambling syndicate.

Havana was waiting for a new force to rise, for a leader of courage and integrity who would restore the reins of government to the Cuban people.

This was the city to which Edward Charles Baker had been sent.

He walked down the wide marble Prado in mid-afternoon.

Is it rather difficult to describe Wenzell Brown in a few lines. The author of more than thirty novels, many of them studies of the minds and the mores of teenage criminals whose reasons for striking out against a society which rejects them are not always understood, Wenzell Brown will be remembered by long-time readers of SMM for his superb WITNESS TO MURDER (SDM, July 1958), and of course for his recent INSTRUMENT OF DEATH (SMM, Febr. 1964). He at the same time knows well the locale of the present story, where Death walks side-by-side with Edward Baker. . . .

Dazzling sunlight filtered through the laurel trees and cast dappled shadows over the jostling throng.

His instincts were those of a man trained to unfailing recognition of danger. He could not be mistaken about the footsteps which matched his own too perfectly. He was being followed.

Still something within him rebelled. Danger should spring from darkness, should be a concomitant of shadow and night. Danger should walk warily, avoiding sunlight and crowded streets.

He came to an abrupt halt and watched the attenuated shadow of the man who slipped up behind him.

A curl of fear rose from his loins and spread out until it touched his shoulder blades and the tips of his fingers.

He tensed himself for the bullet, the knife or the strangling cord that would make death a reality but he was unprepared for the name that was spoken softly, almost caressingly.

"Fedor."

Baker knew a little more now. Whatever the threat, it came out of the distant past, representing a danger long submerged. How long had it been since Fedor had been his code name? He counted up the years. Fifteen. No, longer than that. Nearly twenty.

His hand moved slowly to his mouth where a dark brown Cuban cigarette had burned to a stub that would soon scorch his lips. He tossed the butt onto the tiles and crushed it with the pointed toe of his tan shoe.

Still he did not turn but took a slow sideways step away from the man, then another. Now the shadow of the peaked hat lay outlined against the glistening tiles at his feet. He wheeled about, careful to make no hurried move, his arms stiff at his sides, held out a little from his body.

He was shorter than the man who faced him, his eyes level with the other's shoulders. He stared at the scarecrow figure in the sand-colored Palm Beach suit, the white shirt frayed at the collar, the yellow necktie with its tiny meaningless designs of red and brown.

His eyes traveled upward. The features were vaguely familiar, half remembered as one might recall a book read long ago. The face was long and narrow, the nose looked boneless, the lips thin, the teeth uneven. The eyes were a murky brown, deep-set. The forehead seemed as fragile as an egg-shell. The tufts of unkempt gray hair that showed beneath the hat in straggly sideburns had the texture of dried moss.

"Fedor," the tall man re-

peated. "You are Fedor." The words were spoken not as a question but as a fact, one that it would be useless for Baker to deny.

He sighed. "Yes, I am Fedor. And you?"

"Karel."

"Of course. But you have changed."

Karel shook his head, not in denial, but as a sign of impatience, an indication that he had no wish to think or speak of the past. Momentarily the two men surveyed each other over the abyss of the years, without love, without hate, without emotion of any kind but with the certain knowledge that there was no essential change in their complex relationship.

Karel's voice was flat, toneless. "Mara wants you, Fedor."

Baker felt his pulse quicken. "She is here? In Havana?"

Karel gave no answer either with his lips or his eyes, but he stepped close to Baker and touched his arm lightly just below the elbow. He used only two fingers spread like a V.

Baker glanced down at the white, bony hand. He shrugged and, obeying the slight pressure, began to walk away from the Plaza. The two men matched steps, Baker's feet loud on the tiles, Karel's scarcely audible.

Baker reached toward his coat pocket for his crumpled pack of

cigarettes. Fingers circled his wrist, hard, painful. Baker spoke in an angry undertone. "Is it forbidden to smoke?"

Karel dipped into the pocket, brought out cigarettes and matches. He handed them to Baker. Baker lit a cigarette and noted the tiny tremors in his hand. He inhaled deeply of the strong, rank smoke and felt steadier. He walked on, deliberately taking shorter, quicker steps, making it more difficult for Karel to match them.

They turned off the Prado into a narrow side street. The low balconies of the two-storied wooden buildings cast a strip of cool shadow half-way across the paved surface. Baker did not look at the man beside him. His thoughts were filled with Mara and the strange sweet excitement that he believed to have dried up long ago when he had been told that she was dead.

Could this be a trick? Could Karel be leading him into an ambush by the use of a dead woman's name? What did it matter? He would not draw back even if he were permitted. If there was a chance, however slight, that Mara was alive and that he could see her again, no danger, however great, would stop him.

The memory of their last parting came to him with sharp, poignant clarity. The shabby little room in the run-down hotel

in the Cité de Retiro. Mara silhouetted in the doorway, ready to leave, a small black suitcase in her hand. Himself, pulling her back into the room, covering her face, her throat with kisses. The hot flame of passion that had welded them together, made them reckless of time, indifferent to the ruthless schedule on which the organization operated.

He was jolted back to the present by Karel's grip on his arm. Karel jerked his head toward a high curved archway of faded pink stucco that separated two buildings. He swung half way about, pulling Baker with him. Beyond the arch could be seen a parched earth driveway, a fountain with a single feeble spray, a stone wall afire with matted flame vine.

Baker balked, drawing back from the clutching fingers. Somehow the serenity of the courtyard was frightening. It could be a place of quiet death that would leave no ripple. The tall man's expression was blank, the eyes glazed, the lips slack. Baker thought, "I have lived with danger too long. I see it everywhere. No one except those who have sent me can know why I am in Havana. As yet I have done nothing. Made no contact. No suspicious move. This meeting with Karel is sheer coincidence."

His reasoning did not reassure him. Karel was neither friend nor enemy but a puppet like himself, a man whose loyalty was purchased by cash, whose obedience was assured through fear.

Karel seemed to read his thoughts. He said in his disarmingly gentle voice, "She is waiting, Fedor."

Baker caught the taunt in the man's tones. He stepped toward the archway, walking more briskly than before, aware of the susurrant whisper of Karel's footsteps close behind.

They crossed a patio rich with color; the blue, yellow and white of cracked tiles, the flashing hue of flame vine and bougainvillea, the darting patches of pastel that marked the scarcely discernible flight of humming birds. The sun was bright here, burning into Baker's skin. The spray of the fountain that flicked across his cheek was warm as tears.

Karel directed him to a door at the far end of the patio. The sudden transition to darkness blinded him and he tripped over a stair. Karel prodded at his back with stiff fingers. The stairs were high and narrow with a splintered hand-railing. Midway up the flight was a box-like landing. From here Baker could see a panelled door, its white paint blistered and scaling. To

his surprise Karel brushed by him and hurried up the remaining steps. He fumbled with a key and threw the door open, then stood just inside the entrance, his back to the door, waiting for Baker.

The room was an oblong, with high ceiling, unfinished board walls. Its only light came from the slatted doors that led to an outer balcony. In the murky dimness Baker could see that the room was sparsely furnished. Three wicker chairs, a scarred table and a bureau, and in the far corner, a frame bed covered with filmy mosquito netting. The place was silent and at first he thought it was empty. Then he caught the slight stir of movement beneath the net.

Karel spoke softly. "She is there. Go to her." He stepped soundlessly into the hall and closed the door behind him.

Still Baker did not move. He was torn between the impulse to rush to the bed and tear aside the net and an unreasoning dread of what might be revealed. Mara would have changed with the years. Would she have become fat and dowdy? Would the flawless skin have coarsened? The child-like eyes grown hard? Would the two of them who had once been lovers meet as strangers with the memory of old quarrels and old

intimacies standing as a barrier between them.

His body felt weightless, incapable of action. He took a tentative step toward the bed, then another, before he called her name. A sound reached him, a whimpering cry. He rushed forward, throwing himself on his knees, ripping at the net, pulling it free from the thin mattress.

Mara was turned away from him, huddled in an unnatural crouch, her face cupped in her hands, her shoulders pressed against the wall. Her slim legs, bare beneath the flimsy night-dress, stretched out stiffly. She did not look at him and her stillness seemed almost that of death.

She was as he had remembered her, her body slender except for the warm fullness of her breasts. Her skin had the pale glow of a flower's petal; her hair the richness of dark brown honey. He stared at her, wondering how she could have changed so little; then the thought was erased by the strangeness of her posture, her failure to uncover her face.

His hand touched her wrist. He felt the coolness of her skin beneath his fingers before she wrenched herself free. Her shoulders hunched and she rolled upon her side, burying one cheek in the pillow. Her face showed in profile; it still

possessed the fragile perfection of that of a child.

"Mara, what is wrong?"

In answer she buried her head deeper in the pillow and a shudder passed through her body. Her voice came out thin, strangled with the sobs she was trying to repress. "It was a mistake. I should not have sent for you. I tried to call Karel back but it was too late."

"How did you know I was here?"

"Karel spotted you coming off the plane. He was waiting for — for someone else."

He rose and sat down on the edge of the bed, careful not to move too rapidly, sensing the fear, the withdrawal within her, not understanding its cause.

"Mara, look at me."

"No. I can't."

"Mara." He repeated her name more loudly, almost harshly. There was no response except the more rapid rise and fall of her breasts, the quivering of her shoulders.

He slid an arm about her waist, trying to draw her to him gently. For a moment she swayed toward him. Then with a swift, writhing motion she twisted freed and pressed her forehead against the wall so that he could see only the back of her head.

Something stirred within him, anger at the unknown, a tug of fear. He clutched her

bare shoulder, forcing her back slowly upon the bed. She resisted the pressure at first, clinging to the slats at the bed's side. Then her body arched and she released her grip, rolling back into his arms. Her eyes blazed at him in defiance as the fingers that covered her cheek lowered inch by inch.

He felt sick horror wash over him, nausea strike at the pit of his stomach. He fought to keep his expression blank, not to let the revulsion show in his eyes.

As her hands descended, the great scar in the shape of a cross became visible. The lines started at the temple, crossed the cheek in deep inflamed furrows, stretched downward to the tip of her jaw. The ugly red welts puckered the corner of her mouth into a simpering grimace, pulled the eyelid downward with the suggestion of an obscene leer.

She spoke in a voice that was flat, dull; the voice of the dead. "Now you know why Karel should not have brought you here. Now you know, so leave."

He could not answer. There was nothing to say and he distrusted any movement on his own part lest it betray the horror and the sickness within him. He let his hands drop away from her and automatically rose to his feet, towering above her.

"Who did it?" he asked

hoarsely. "Tell me who."

Instead of answering, she twisted back to the pillow, concealing her face once more, lying stiff and straight.

He needed no answer. He let his mind drift back through the arches of memory, the arches of dread and futile rage. Back to the time when once before he had seen the cross hewn on a victim's cheek.

He spoke a name, in a whisper at first, then louder, his voice raised with anger and hate. "Roberts. Rocky Roberts. Tell me, Mara, was it the Rock?"

There was only silence in the room. But the name seemed to echo all around him, bouncing back from the walls, rising up from the floor boards, pounding down from the ceiling. He did not know how long he remained still, looking down at Mara's motionless figure but seeing the face of the Rock. When some semblance of reason came back to him he realized that his fingers were numb from the prolonged pressure of his balled fists and that his nails had sunk deep into his palms. His forehead was beaded with sweat and the muscles of his face were rigid.

He leaned over the woman on the bed and his lips brushed the back of her neck. She stirred and moaned softly.

He said, "Mara, Mara, noth-

ing matters." But even as he spoke he knew that he lied, that the quality of darkness that had grown within him had been driven back and something more subtle, more dangerous, threatened to take its place.

In a way he was glad that she resisted his caress and writhed away from his touch. He needed time to thrust the horror back within him. He straightened up and turned, walking to the door that led to the balcony. He stood with his back against the jamb, gazing at the fountain and the flame vine beyond. Automatically he drew his pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He thrust one of the brown cylinders into his mouth then, calling upon the discipline of years, he forced his hands into steadiness before he struck the match and raised the flame toward his lips.

He was glad when darkness shrouded the room. For Mara it brought sleep. For himself a suspension of feeling, a withdrawal into the gray monotone of lethargy. He sat for a long time in the chair he had drawn to the side of the bed, his body listless, his mind numbed with the struggle to repress emotions of which he had thought he had purged himself forever. Anger. Pity. Hopelessness. Despair.

There had been a time when he was a boy when life had

seemed filled with adventure and vaunting ambitions. Then in a single night, when he was seventeen, he had destroyed his world.

His mother had just died and he and his father had quarreled. In a spirit of revolt he had joined with two older youths in what had started out as a spree. A few drinks. The "borrowing" of a car. A wild ride in which they had given out of gas. Then before he realized what was happening, he was involved in the hold-up of a filling station.

Society had labeled him an enemy and sent him to prison. He had accepted the role with an inverted pride, allying himself with the toughest of the prison leaders, Rocky Roberts and Charlie Buck. Through them he had drifted into organized crime.

After his release he had let the sluggish gray waters of the underworld carry him where they would. Here there was no need for loyalty; only blind unquestioning obedience. Baker had turned himself into an automaton, executing orders with indifference, yet with meticulous care and precision.

Briefly, eighteen years ago, Mara had broken through his self-imposed restraints, aroused him to passion, love and the painful necessity of making decisions on his own. When he had

been told of her death, he had believed that the rebellious flame had been quenched and that he was free once and for all from the tyranny of his emotions. But now that he was beside her again he found that he was still vulnerable.

The knowledge made him restless and alerted him to danger. He remained motionless but with his senses he explored the unfamiliar room. A sultry breeze souged through the patio, set the parched vines tapping against the outer walls. Slowly his eyes swung to the open door of the balcony. Nothing was visible except a wedge of gray sky, lightly sprinkled with stars. He turned his gaze back to the slender figure on the bed. Mara breathed gently in sleep. He looked at her with something akin to hatred. She had made him feel the whip-lash of reality again, had reawakened the aching pain in nerve centers which had long remained quiescent.

He must leave quickly. His presence here meant danger not only to himself but to her. Perhaps he could return in a few days when his mission was accomplished. But now he must go.

He went to Mara, leaned forward and kissed her shoulder, then moved toward the door.

By instinct he retraced the

route which he and Karel had traversed that afternoon. When he reached the Prado, he climbed the three marble steps to the raised walk. He approached the point where Karel had intercepted him and stopped in indecision, with the sense of having rounded a circle and having come to the end of a meaningless voyage. He glanced in the direction of the lights of the Plaza on which his hotel was located, then toward the darkness of the waterfront where he could hear the rhythmic purling of the waves lapping against concrete bulwarks.

Mara's face took shape in his mind, then was replaced by the dark, saturnine features of Rocky Roberts. Hate churned within him, plucked at the muscles in his arms, turning his nerves into coiled springs. He turned his back toward the Plaza and strode toward the Mole, fighting the impulse to exhaust himself in headlong flight.

The awareness that he was being followed came to him slowly. The furtive sounds behind him penetrated his subconscious minutes before he was willing to turn his thoughts to them. He plunged on, careless of light and shadow, rejecting caution in the tumultuous conflict of emotions that engulfed him. Gradually, however, the instinct of self-preservation in-

bred in him through years of danger, reasserted itself.

He thrust his rage to one side and concentrated on the immediate problem of pin-pricking the sounds which had alerted him. He found himself almost welcoming the cat-and-mouse game that he was playing. The sense of threat and menace was familiar, less painful than pity or futile anger.

He tried to think back, to recall when his ears had first picked up the warning signals. Perhaps the man who was trailing him had lain in wait for him in the courtyard. Had he heard a snap of twigs, the scrape of a shoe on a gritty tile when he had looked back and up at the balcony of Mara's unlit room? If he had, it might mean that it was Karel who dogged him. He was forced to reject the idea. The tall man was too skillful to betray his presence so quickly.

The light breeze that whipped in from the sea brought with it a wispy haze of fog but even so the Prado was far from abandoned. Young couples strolled arm in arm along the marble walk, their soft voices exploding into sharp bursts of laughter. Many of the benches were occupied. A pair of lovers were locked in tight embrace, with the branches of a laurel casting speckled shadows about them. A

youth strummed a guitar in the pool of light cast by a streetlamp and sang a doleful Spanish melody. A radio squealed on a balcony. The whine and whir of traffic was punctuated by the bleat of a horn, a voice raised in anger, the cry of a street vendor.

Baker sorted out the sounds, eliminating them all from his consciousness except the soft, insistent footsteps that slowed almost imperceptibly as Baker slowed, that quickened with his own more rapid step. He studied the street. The Prado was a raised promenade running through the center of the broad avenue. On either side the sidewalks were plunged into darkness by the overhanging balconies. The follower was on the sidewalk to his left, perhaps ten yards behind. That meant there was no pressing danger unless the man intended to use a gun.

Baker could elude his pursuer with ease. A sudden spurt into a dark street. Pressing into a shadowed doorway. Returning to the Plaza and losing himself in the crowd. Escape and self-effacement were matters in which he had become an expert. But tonight a stubborn pride had risen within him that forbade him to run or hide. He would like to swing around toward the unknown figure on the sidewalk, force a confrontation.

But even while he played with the idea on the surface of his mind, he knew that it was foolish. An explosive act of violence might loosen his taut nerves but it could also jeopardize the success of his mission and destroy his usefulness to the organization. And when he was no longer useful— He let the thought trickle away, not caring to dwell upon it.

The watcher in the shadows could even be from the organization, making certain that he followed his instructions implicitly. This would not be the first time that he had been kept under observation. But for once he had disobeyed orders. He had been told to see no one, to talk to no one, until he had made contact with the organization's representative in Havana. Had he placed Mara in danger by his disobedience? Had he made himself expendable?

Ahead of him, a figure detached itself from a bench and took a few stumbling steps in his direction, then faltered and stood spraddle-legged, blocking his path. Baker sensed a trap. His muscles tensed, and he was glad for the comforting bulge of the Beretta in his shoulder holster. He moved crab-wise, forcing the man to turn until the street light struck full across his seamed features. The face was that of a derelict, sunken, with

parchment-like skin ridged with heavy veins. The nose was big, pockmarked; the eyes rheumy; the lips thin, almost purple. Baker took note of his clothing. Dirty white duck trousers; a cheap blue shirt, buttoned at the neck and wrists; huaraches over bare feet.

The man jerked forward, his arms raised in a gesture of supplication, his lips twitching as he whined out his beggar's cant. Baker saw the staring eyes, the tell-tale whiteness about the nostrils, and let his breath out. A junkie. He'd seen too many of them in too many cities throughout the world to be mistaken.

Baker knew he did not need to fear this man but there was still the watcher at his back. He was thinking fast and a plan was taking shape by which he could draw his pursuer away by directing his attention elsewhere.

He lured the shabby figure to the edge of the circle of light, angling his own body so that the derelict was between him and the man in the shadows. As the old man swayed toward him, he assumed an expression of annoyance and reeled back as though to avoid the talon-like fingers. The beggar had gone into his spiel, speaking in slurred broken Spanish. Baker did not need to listen; he had heard the

tale countless times in a score of languages.

His eyes went beyond the lurching figure, probing the darkness beneath the balconies. Narrow doorways scooped out arches of deeper black at regular intervals. The man whom he sought lounged in one of these archways. He might have remained invisible if it were not for the tiny circle of red light that was the glowing tip of a cigarette.

His attention swung back to the beggar. He held the man steady, using him as a shield. The beggar did not seem to notice; his whining voice went rambling on.

Baker spoke loudly, harshly, so that his words would carry to the unknown man in the archway. He forced an exaggerated American accent into his voice, "Cut pawin' me, willya? Go on. Beat it. Leave me alone, I tellya."

The old man switched to English. "Old Pablo is sick. No dinero to eat. No place to sleep."

"Okay. If I give you a buck, will you scam? Is it a deal?"

The beggar drew himself straight and a trace of dignity came to his face. "A dollar is not much for a man who is sick and hungry, but—" He hunched his shoulders in a shrug.

A grin tugged at the corner of Baker's lips. The man was letter perfect, almost as though

he had been rehearsed for the act. With simulated anger, Baker growled, "All right. I'll make it two. Two bucks and you shove off."

While he spoke, Baker's free hand dipped into his trousers pocket where he kept his loose singles. His fingers worked on the bills, folding them into a tight wad. He drew them out and with an exaggerated gesture of caution pressed them into the beggar's outstretched palm. The old man blinked up at him, sensing something that he could not understand. Then his eyes lowered to the creased bills. He gave a jerky little bow and backed away, almost falling in his eagerness to escape.

Baker watched him as he scuttled along the Prado and down the marble stairs, angling across the street, moving unwittingly toward the watcher in the doorway, toward the dark, narrow street beyond.

He should not be watching Pablo. He should be sauntering away from the scene with the carefree manner of a man who has just relieved himself of a burdensome responsibility by passing it on to another.

He swung about to face the fuzzy blur of lights that hung above the Plaza a dozen blocks away. But out of the corner of his eye he kept the arched doorway under observation. The

man who had been trailing him was still there and Baker could sense his uncertainty.

He wondered if he had underestimated his adversary's cunning and had hammed up the act too much. The man had not stirred and only a few seconds remained in which he must make his decision to continue to follow Baker or to pick up the spoor of his new quarry. Already Pablo's shambling footsteps were growing faint half a block away. A squat, heavy figure stepped out of the doorway into the gray light of the sidewalk. His cigarette looped into the gutter and the breeze whipped it away with a miniature cascade of sparks. Without a glance at Baker, he walked briskly away in the direction which the old beggar had taken.

Baker felt suddenly relaxed, at ease, as though the success of his simple ruse were a guaranty of his own safety.

He was at the end of the block when he heard the scream, shrill, high-pitched, broken off almost as soon as it was started. The cry blended with the night noises, formed a part of the symphony of the turbulent city. It might have passed him by if his ears had not been attuned to danger. He stood stock still for an instant, then spun about, staring back toward the narrow mouth of the dark street

into which the beggar had lunged.

Somewhere to his right a figure crouched beneath the shadowed balconies then, wraith-like, darted across the Prado. Baker heard nothing but he caught the blur of movement as the man raced across the cleared space formed by the intersecting streets. He swore under his breath. He had acted like a fool. There had not been a single watcher but two. The arched cigarette had been a prearranged signal indicating which of the pair should follow his presumed contact, which should stick with him.

According to the book he should cut out, forget about the harmless old man whom he had so thoughtlessly placed in jeopardy. The organization had taught him that life was cheap, that only the success of a plan mattered. Baker had steeled himself to the code until he thought it had taken possession of him. Last night he would not have hesitated. He would have returned quickly to his hotel and remained within the safety of his locked room. So why should he be concerned now about the old derelict? He knew the answer before his mind had finished formulating the question. Mara's face was still with him, like perfection, the other hide-

ously scarred by the blade of Rocky Roberts' knife.

Even as the picture flashed across his mind, he was moving. He did so without conscious volition but with a heightened awareness of the scene about him. The cry had passed unnoticed on the Prado. The amorous couples did not glance up from their tight embraces, the loungers on the benches did not stir, the thrumming guitar did not miss a beat. Yet for all that an unnatural silence seemed to underlie the tumult of the city and for Baker only one sound remained, the soft insistent tattoo of running footsteps that lay just at the threshold of hearing.

No light shone in the narrow street that jutted at an angle from the Prado. The stucco buildings with their tiered balconies rose on either side, converting the street into a tunnel of darkness canopied by the lowering sky. Baker hugged the wall beside him, treading on the balls of his feet, the Beretta nestled in his hand. He stared into the tunnel but it seemed void of life, empty, abandoned.

Then there was a whisper, harshly sibilant in the quiet night, a grunt of anger. Baker drew back, trying to place the sounds that ricocheted against blank walls. A match rasped and a flow of pale light danced out

from a sunken doorway, then was sucked in again by a cupped hand. Baker twisted away from the wall, toward the middle of the street.

The match was burning low but its flame lit up the three figures in the doorway. The beggar lay sprawled on the stairs, one arm cushioning his head, the other hanging limply over a stone step. A man knelt on one knee at the beggar's feet, his fingers exploring the cuffs of the stained trousers.

The remaining man hunkered at the old derelict's head. He was holding the match and the light limned his thin, narrow shoulders, his straight back. He whispered in hoarse Spanish. "Fool, you have killed him for nothing. I know the old man. He is what he seems. A junkie. Nothing more."

"Shut up and give me more light."

A second match sputtered. The kneeling man yanked at Pablo's shoes. The wide rim of his hat concealed the upper part of his face but Baker could see the swarthy skin, the heavy rounded jaw, the pursed lips.

The thin man growled impatiently. "I tell you it's a mistake, Tico. The old man was on the bum."

Tico looked up and for a moment the flame made his eyes glow. He spread the two

crumpled bills in his palm. "There's more to it than that. Do you give two dollars to a stranger?"

He broke off sharply and his breath hissed as he caught sight of Baker's figure looming in the darkness. The match flickered and it was as though a black cloth had been dropped across the doorway. Baker threw himself to one side, covering the entrance with his Beretta. He waited tense, motionless, bracing himself against the wall in case of attack. There was only silence. For a wild moment he thought of spraying the doorway with bullets. But that was madness. The shots would bring the street to life. Besides if the old man were still alive, he might be killed. Moreover, these men, whoever they might be, were only pawns in the game. It was more important to find the real enemy.

He spoke softly. "Who are you? What do you want?"

The only answer was a faint, rustling sound, the crackle, of grit under a shoe. Then the entrance of the door seemed to bulge, to sway outward. A figure broke away from the shadows and ran pell-mell down the deserted street, the sound of his feet echoing hollowly along the dark canyon. A second figure ran after the first, with long loping strides. At the corner

the tall, thin man overtook his shorter companion. Momentarily they seemed to fuse into one being before passing out of sight.

Baker edged into the recessed doorway and to the foot of the sunken stairs. He snapped on his lighter and studied the gray face. The old man lay still, his rheumy eyes staring sightlessly at the night sky. A knife wound had ripped open the shirt. Blood had soaked into the blue cloth and formed a pool on the dusty stone step. Baker felt for a pulse. There was none. He stood up and flicked off his lighter. In its dying glow, he saw the two crumpled bills which Tico had dropped a few inches from the outspread hand.

From a balcony above a light switched on, illuminating the opposite wall. Wood creaked under heavy footfalls and a woman's voice called out, asking what was wrong. Another light came on, touching the fretwork of the wrought-iron gate at the head of the stairs. The murmur of voices grew louder.

Baker retreated, automatically seeking out the dark patches along the narrow street. A flashlight probed the night, its beam falling across his neck and shoulders. A man shouted for him to stop. Baker did not look back but, keeping his head low, walked on steadily, unhurriedly

toward the intersection that lay ahead.

When he rounded the corner, the headlights of an approaching car washed over him. He veered away, seeking another passageway that was dark and narrow. The city was strange to him but he felt no fear or uncertainty. Night came to every city and brought with it darkness and shadows to form myriad hiding places. As he threaded along the winding back alleys, he felt strangely comforted. He had returned to his natural habitat.

He did not know how long he walked through the back streets. He continued his flight long after the immediate danger was past because darkness and the sense of pursuit and escape were narcotics that lulled the mind.

Gradually his circuitous route brought him to the heart of the city. He stood before the steps of the Capitolio where the Paseo de Martí widened above the Parque Central. Across the street the open-air cafes were jammed. The raucous blare of a half-dozen bands formed a wild cacophony of sound in which the only unity was the throb of the castanets and the dull thunder of the drums. Beneath the porticos behind the cafes the throng writhed and twisted as though caught up in a gigantic snake dance.

He crossed the street and worked his way in among the crowd. At another time he would have shied away from the pressing bodies, the shrill voices and the strident banter but tonight he let himself be carried along willy-nilly.

An entrance to one of the sidewalk cafes showed up ahead. He slipped past the potted palms that stood as sentinels and looked about for an empty table. He found one at the foot of a raised wooden dais on which a Marimba band beat out a ragged, syncopated rhythm. He let the sound wash over him and leaned back in the rattan chair.

It should be easy to keep memory at bay here. Easier than in a prison cell, a lonely hotel room or a dreary bar. He ordered beer from a hovering waiter. The brew was weak but cold and mildly bitter. He gulped half of it before pushing the glass aside. Tonight none of the tricks by which he could obliterate thought seemed to work. Images kept forming in his mind's eye. Mara. The old beggar's broken body. Rocky Robert's gloating face.

The noisy cafe seemed to fade away and, with it, the intervening years that separated him from his brief love affair with Mara. He was a young man

again, bitter, sullen and withdrawn but still capable of revolt against the shadowy world which was closing in about him. The penitentiary lay only a few years behind but he had served his apprenticeship with the organization under Rocky Roberts in New York and had been sent to Paris.

What was the organization? There had been a time when his curiosity had been aroused to try to trace the intricate pattern of organized crime. But the huge international crime cartels defied all definition. They were amorphous, constantly shifting personnel. The Mafia, the gambling, dope and vice syndicates, crooked unions, and legitimate business enterprises linked hands in tentative accord to bring about a coup, then went their separate ways or were enjoined in bitter internecine warfare.

Only the middle men, the mercenaries, possessed some degree of permanence. Their loyalty could be bought for cash for the length of an operation. Orders passed through them to their hirelings. There was no contact between the upper and lower echelons of crime, no visible link, no knowledge of the other's identity.

An agent like Baker was never told more than it was necessary for him to know to perform his

specific task. If a payment was to be made there was no reason to inform him why or to whom the money was to go. If instructions were to be delivered it was better that they should not be understood. If a package was to be turned over to a third party, the less the messenger knew of its contents the safer he would be. Such contacts were brief, carried on under cover of darkness and, if the conspirators should ever meet again, it was part of the game that they should show no sign of recognition.

When Baker had been assigned to work with Mara, he had remained incurious, untouched by her fragility, her withdrawal, the frightened, elusive quality that was present in every movement. He had not even tried to learn her real name. He was Fedor. She was Mara. Each was a pawn in a complicated game of wits, the objectives of which were shrouded in secrecy.

She had been nothing to him at first. A cardboard figure. A partner in a macabre dance. He had recognized the wan beauty in her finely molded features, but he had had no desire to touch her.

The shift in their relationship had come quickly, almost without warning. It had occurred in

Nice after the completion of an assignment.

That had been eighteen years ago but even now, sitting here in the sidewalk cafe in Havana, the sweet bitterness filled him and his hands clenched upon the arms of the rattan chair. And then, as on that night so many years ago, he was suddenly alert to danger.

He did not know what sent his eyes skittering across the tables toward the palm trees that bordered the entrance to the cafe. The man who stood there held himself strangely erect, his broad-brimmed Panama hat clasped stiffly over his heart. The gray hair rose in tangled tufts above the high forehead. The too pale eyes shifted to Baker and bloodless lips split in the parody of a grin.

"Karel," Baker whispered the name. He braced his feet against the tile as though to stand. Then caution took over and he slumped back in the chair, his face partly averted, watching the approaching figure out of the corner of his eye.

Karel came toward him, lurching through the narrow lanes between the tables, faltering, grasping the back of a chair for support, teetering forward again. Claw-like fingers scraped across a woman's shoulder. She screamed and her escort rose, shouting angrily. Ka-

rel backed away, stumbling against Baker's table. His hand trailed across the top, guiding him to the chair beside Baker. He fell into it with a thump. His head rolled loosely against the hunched support of his shoulders and his breath wheezed through his scarcely open lips.

Baker's eyes passed over him quickly, then he studied the entrances, the surrounding tables, seeking out the too watchful gaze, the too careless gesture, the sudden movement that might forebode impending death. But if there were enemies here, they were lost in the strident gaiety of the throng.

Karel's hand spread on the table. The fingertips were scraped away, the nails caked with blood. A waiter approached and the fingers clenched beneath the hand in concealment.

Baker spoke to the waiter. "Two beers. Cerveza Florida para dos."

When the waiter had gone, he asked softly, "Why?"

"Because I brought you to Mara. They thought that I had betrayed them, that I had sold out to the other side."

"Who?"

"The Rock's boys. Tico Alvarez. Johnnie Berg."

"And Mara?"

"She escaped. I saw them

come into the patio and went to delay them."

"Where will I find her?"

"At the Cathedral of San Martino tomorrow at four."

The waiter came with bottles, glasses. He poured the beer, his face impassive. Not until he had turned away did Baker pose the next question. "Is it true? Do you work for the Rock? Does Mara?"

"No." The word was a hollow whisper that swung Baker about. Karel had propped himself against the chair at an awkward angle, but now the rigid hand had slipped downward into his lap, revealing the white shirt with its spreading stain of blood.

Karel's lips parted in the sibilance of a single word, "Sometimes —"

He bent forward, his shoulder striking the edge of the flimsy table knocking it over. He rolled with it, his arms flailing weakly, then fell in a curled heap on the tiles. Glass shattered around him. A woman shrieked. The horn of the Marimba band rose in a discordant wail.

Slowly faces turned toward the fallen man, the broken table. Questions passed back and forth, shrill, uncertain. The man was drunk. No, he was injured. Perhaps dead. The crowd pressed nearer, engulfing Baker. He slid his way among them until he was outside the ring of

watchful faces, then he swung away, searching for shadows again, walking with deceptive speed. Heading nowhere. Only moving away as he had once before tonight. As he had so often when death crept too close and its bright blade became visible.

Sunlight glistened on the scrubbed tiles of the bare hotel room. The wrought-iron grillwork of the miniature balcony spread its delicate tracery across the burnished surface. Baker edged away from the balcony, back into the shadowed interior. In the bright glare of the sun he had felt naked, defenseless. He stood where he was, trying to still the too rapid beat of his heart, the prickling sensation that curled along the back of his hand.

The threat against him he realized was two-fold. Somewhere in the crowded, noisy Plaza one or more watchers were keeping the balcony under surveillance. He had been warned by the sudden, scarcely perceptible break in the rhythmic life below. But even without that warning, he should have expected to be spied upon. He must have been trailed from the moment of his arrival at the airport and whatever suspicions his presence may have aroused could scarcely have been diminished by the events of the previous night.

The greater danger, however, sprang from his own being. A change was taking place within him, one which, unless rigidly suppressed, could betray him. His rendezvous with the organization's representative was not until tomorrow night. Nearly thirty-six hours away. In the past, the passage of time had been a matter of indifference to him. He would have whiled away the hours in the dim seclusion of his room. Or he would have wandered aimlessly through the city, giving scant notice to his surroundings.

As long as he made no overt move he should be reasonably safe. The organization had sent him here for a purpose and they would not destroy him before it was accomplished unless they believed he intended to double-cross them. If some unknown force was in operation whose objectives were inimical to those of the organization, his danger was greater, but, even so, it was too early for their agents to strike. It was more likely that they would bide their time in the hope that he would lead them to his contact.

Mara. Would he see her later in the day? Had the message which Karel had brought been delivered in good faith or was it bait for a trap set to destroy him? He considered the latter possibility and knew that it

would not alter his plan. His decision to keep the appointment with Mara was irrevocable.

Right now he must close his mind to everything but self-preservation, revert to the animal cunning that was his best guide in periods of danger. The vague wordless plans for himself and Mara that had plagued him during the night must be discarded until he knew the task that the organization had set for him and how deeply enmeshed she might be in the intrigue.

Without knowledge of his mission, his plans would appear imponderable. Yet if he traced back the course of events that had brought him to Havana, he might find a clue. He had been in Paris when an envelope had been delivered to his room. It contained an air ticket to New York, a second ticket from New York to Miami, an American passport issued in his real name, a notification of a hotel reservation in Miami. That was all. He had made the flights on schedule, incurious, enfolded in his gray dreams. In the Miami hotel he had been met by a man whose code name was Barney. A big bluff man with a mottled red face, close-cropped gray hair and shaggy eyebrows. Barney had given him the crisp American bank notes that were now in the money belt around his waist and instructions for the

next leg of the journey. As usual the instructions were rudimentary. The spot where he would be picked up by his contact in Havana. The passwords by which each would recognize the other.

Barney had lingered on. He had said, "Listen, Baker, this is a big deal. So don't mess things up."

"Why should I?"

"I dunno. Mebbe I should keep my big mouth shut. But I don't trust them bums in Havana. Ever since Lucky pulled out, they been too big for their pants. They're cooking on too many burners. They could pull a switcheroo on you."

"Like what?"

Barney had given an over-elaborate shrug and reached lazily for his wallet. He had taken a passport sized photo from its cellophane packet and tossed it on the table.

He had said, "Get this straight. This is the boy you're after." He had struggled to his feet and opened the door before he had spoken again. Then he had given a mirthless laugh. "Don't let them studs over there hand you any wooden nickels."

When Barney had left, Baker had picked up the picture, looked at it idly and pushed it into his wallet. He dug it out now and held it to the light. There was nothing remarkable about the man who stared back

at him. The face was nearly round with a high, domed forehead. Thick-lensed pince-nez glasses made the eyes appear bulbous. The lower lip curled outward and there was something comic about the small bristling mustache.

He replaced the photo and stood for a moment in indecision. His eyes strayed back to the latticed doors of the balcony. Was the watcher still outside? There was only one way to make sure. Retrace his steps. Walk out boldly onto the balcony, like a man who had nothing to fear or conceal.

The danger was insignificant as compared to that which he encountered nightly in his work. Indeed the very innocence of the act might disarm anyone suspecting him of treachery. Even so, he felt an inner cringing, the need to steel himself before he could take the half dozen steps which exposed him to the sun's bright glare.

As before, he felt a slight shift in the tempo of the Plaza's teeming life. A vender's cry had been stilled too quickly. A footstep had been broken in mid-motion. Not intuition but senses honed to a fine edge had registered the arrested sounds. He studied the Plaza, seeking visual confirmation of the auditory warning but found none.

He lit one of the coarse brown

Cuban cigarettes he had bought the day before. When the smoke spiralled through his nearly closed lips, he looked up once more and across the dazzling Plaza. His gaze took in the endless line of porticos, the compact gray buildings, the shuttered balconies, the pinched streets slanting into nowhere. A swift upsurging of spirits demanded that he explore the city.

As soon as he was on the street he realized that he was hungry. The open air cafes were inviting but wisdom dictated that he should select a restaurant where he could sit with a wall at his back. He entered a brown cubby-hole of a place where whirling ceiling fans only served to stir up stale air laden with the odors of burnt coffee, garlic and spilled beer. He chose a corner table from which he could watch the entrance. He scrutinized a fly-specked menu written with an indelible pencil and, while he did so, made a mental bet whether his trailer would follow him inside or be content to wait on the sidewalk. Before he had made his judgment, he saw the man enter. A swarthy, compact man in a flowered shirt, slacks the color of milk chocolate held up by a snake-skin belt, pointed tan and white shoes. His face was sharp-featured, the black hair too long, forming

ringlets around the collar. The sideburns, the pencil-line mustache, the furtive manner all helped to form the picture of a pimp, a purveyor of lewd postcards, or a guide to Havana's less savory night spots.

Baker picked up a crumpled newspaper from a nearby chair and, using it as a screen, let his eyes pass over the man once more. He must not underestimate his adversary. There was a wiry strength here, an intangible quality of cruelty and fanaticism, betrayed by the thin line of the lips and the eyes that were as bright and beady as those of a Pekinese. This was a man who would rush to the kill for the sheer joy of it.

Now that he knew the nature of his enemy Baker settled himself on the wire-backed chair. For the first time since he had heard Karel's footsteps on the Prado, he was at ease. The food came; a slab of papaya served with a half lime, a tortilla, dripping with grease and studded with tinned petit pois, coffee that was rich, black and very sweet. He ate hungrily, the presence of his adversary lending a fillip to his appetite.

Not until he was on his coffee did he straighten out the creased newspaper. His first hurried perusal of the headlines netted him nothing. Then his eye caught the story for which he

was searching, wedged in between obituaries and announcements of weddings and betrothals: Jan Karel Gidl, a Czech National, traveling on an international passport, had been found last night, dead of knife wounds, in the Cafe Zamborita. There were a few more lines which intimated that Gidl was a disreputable character whose action in being murdered was somehow reprehensible. The tag sentence told that the police were searching, for questioning, a man who had been sitting with Gidl a few minutes before his collapse.

So this was the end for Karel. Baker thought of the tall, lean man without pity or compassion but with complete empathy. In his mind he was Karel, alone, dying. Not caring much except that he would never see Mara again. An empty shell of a man, crashing with sickening impact to the pavement, knowing that he would never rise.

His thoughts flitted back to Nice and Mara. The two of them had returned to Paris together, sharing a compartment but scarcely speaking throughout the long journey. They had parted wordlessly in the station, going separate ways, neither turning to look at the other, for somewhere near there would certainly be an observer from the organization. They had al-

ready violated the rules by overstaying their time in Nice. An excuse could be found for that. Or perhaps none was needed. Lust. The sexual act. These were not taboo. Without doubt the organization would take for granted that the propinquity into which they had been thrown could reach but one conclusion. But any act of tenderness was suspect and friendship between agents was forbidden.

His dalliance with Mara had been unfair to her. As for himself, he expected a rebuke, perhaps some punitive act of violence. It did not come. For several days nothing had happened at all. He had waited in his room, in the cafes and bistros where he could be located. During this period he had made no attempt to find Mara. He had tried to blank her out of his mind and, strangely enough, that had not been too difficult. There had been a quality both ephemeral and ethereal about their brief interlude that removed it from reality, so that the details eluded his memory like those of a distant dream.

The days of suspended activity had ended abruptly. Beyond the code name of Gustave he never knew the fat man's name and had encountered him only once before finding him in his room. He had returned through

late afternoon rain to his shabby quarters. Even before he had unlocked the door, he had sensed an alien presence inside. He reached for the Beretta in his shoulder holster and his fingers gripped the metal stock. He eased the door open, using two spread fingers of his free hand, remaining in the hallway until he could see the entire interior.

The fat man had been squatting on the bed, the cloth of his trousers binding the bulging flesh of his thighs. A cap with a broken visor tilted over the moon face that was puckered in an idiot's grin. A caricature of a man, Baker had thought, then he cautioned himself against prejudice. The organization did not pick fools, not even as errand boys.

His hand had slid away from the butt of the automatic and he had sidled into the room.

The fat man had leered and wiped the back of his hand over his loose wet mouth. He said, "What's eatin' you? I just come to pay you off. The boss says you done a swell job."

Baker studied the man, wondering if there was a double meaning in his words.

Gustave growled, "For Criz-zake, don't get in an uproar. I just brought you your dough."

Laboriously he unfastened the buttoned-down pocket of his

khaki jacket, extracted a brown manila envelope and flipped it to Baker.

Baker suppressed the instinct to catch it. This could be the off-guard instant which Gustave might choose to strike. The envelope hit the floor with a flop and the bills spilled out. Baker nudged it to one side with his toe and watched Gustave lumber to his feet.

"Your sure got the jitters, chum," the fat man told him. "Anyway I got good news for you. The boss says it's okay for you to hustle over to Mara's place."

"Where?"

"Like you don't know."

"Just give me the address and grab yourself a walk."

Gustave glared at him, then his mouth cracked open in a crooked grin. "I ought to take you apart, chum, but maybe I don't need to. Wait until you meet Karel. You two will get along fine."

"The address."

"Cité de Retiro, Hotel Duray. Karel will be waiting."

Baker didn't stoop to pick up the envelope until the clump of Gustave's boots had ceased to echo on the stairs, then he scooped the bills onto the bed without counting them.

He had waited an hour before setting out for the Cité de Retiro. By an act of will he made

his footsteps lag but, in his heart, he was running every step of the way. He had renewed his liaison with Mara that evening and it was on that same night that he had first encountered Karel.

The Hotel Duray was midway along a dreary cul-de-sac, blocked off at one end by a gutted warehouse. Next door to the hotel was a greengrocer's. The doorway was dark but, as Baker passed, he saw a man waiting there. The man stood too straight for a lounge and showed himself too openly for a spy. The pale eyes followed Baker as he turned into the narrow entry. Baker swivelled about. Karel scarcely stirred and the white face with its high cheekbones remained impassive. Baker had felt a finger of superstitious fear crawl along his spine. He had seen men like this standing behind bars, their burning rage masked by a false patience that could break without warning into maniacal fury.

At some time past midnight when he had left Mara, Karel had still been in the doorway, his stance unchanged. Baker walked past warily, keeping the width of the alley between them, wondering whether Karel would follow him or creep up the stairs to Mara's door. But Karel did neither. Baker walked to the next street, then doubled back.

Karel had not moved and did not even glance in his direction.

In the weeks that followed, Karel had been so much a part of the scene that Baker almost forgot about him, or at least ceased thinking of him in terms of a human being. Whether or not Karel had been assigned to spy upon them, Baker was certain that the man was in love with Mara, serving her with blind, unquestioning devotion. Occasionally Karel had been in the room when Baker arrived or he had showed up at the door in the course of an errand for Mara. His eyes barely flicked toward Baker and he always withdrew quickly. There was a mawkishness in his servility that revolted Baker, an enduring calm that could be the prelude to an act of insensate violence.

Once or twice he had spoken to Mara of his misgivings. Her first response had been pitying laughter. "I do believe that you're jealous of him."

"How could I be? He is nothing but a straw man."

Mara had turned serious. "No, he is more than that. He is a guardian. A protector."

Baker's lips had pursed, partly in disbelief, partly in annoyance. He had given no credence to the purity of Karel's motives, nor in his harmlessness. Did a man watch outside the door of his beloved, night after

night, observing her lover enter and leave, and still feel no pangs of jealousy, experience no fantasies of revenge? Some night might he not find Mara lying strangled on her bed, or feel the thrust of Karel's knife in his back?

Mara had cried, "Karel would never harm me. Nor you either. He only wishes to help me secure the things I want. That's friendship. But I don't imagine you can understand, Fedor. You're not capable of friendship."

Baker had turned aside, hurt by the whip of her anger, yet recognizing the partial truth of her words.

She had come to him and stroked his cheek with her fingertips, saying, "I'm sorry, Fedor. You can't help being what you are anymore than I can help loving you."

He had swung her into his arms and covered her lips with kisses but he could not shake off the awareness of the phantom figure outside, watching and listening. The edge of his pleasure was dulled and Karel's presence seemed to give a tawdriness to the whole affair.

Perhaps if the romantic interlude had endured longer his fears concerning Karel would have been proven to be correct. But the idyl had ended as abruptly as it had begun. One

evening he had come to the hotel to find Mara packed, ready to leave. He had not questioned her or tried to stop her, but he could not let her go without the final act of love. Afterward he had remained in the dark room, listening to her footsteps descend the stairs. When he could no longer hear her, he crossed to the window and pushed aside the chintz curtain. A battered taxi with high running boards had been parked on the opposite side of the alley. Mara had appeared and picked her way gingerly across the cobbles. A hand from the black interior of the cab had released the door and Mara climbed inside, leaving the door agape. A moment later a thin figure detached itself from the shadows of the closed greengrocer's shop. Karel had approached the cab unhurriedly and taken his place beside Mara.

The taxi wheezed and rattled, disappearing as it passed the mouth of the alley. Only then did Baker notice the man who had been left behind. Striated light from a lower window had fallen across the man's face, but Baker had had the feeling that he would have recognized him even in pitch blackness. Rocky Roberts. He had not known the Rock was in Paris but he had had no doubt of his identity.

The Rock was peering up-

ward. Baker stepped away from the window but not before he glimpsed the leering grimace on the Rock's face, the mocking salute of his raised arm.

That was the last time he had seen Mara until yesterday. For months he had waited in Paris, confident of her return, chary of making inquiries lest his continued interest should draw unfavorable attention to her. Then quietly, cautiously, he had tried to trace her and had come up with what he had considered incontrovertible evidence of her death.

He had been duped. He knew that now from the story Mara had told him. She and Karel had been sent to Havana on a mission. When it was over she had tried to desert the organization by going into hiding. But Rocky Roberts had found her and sliced the deep cross on her face as a warning to all others who might seek to free themselves of the bonds the organization imposed upon its members.

Baker's fists clenched and he dropped the paper to the floor, once more becoming aware of his surroundings. He glanced across the restaurant to the man in the flowered sport shirt. The beady eyes met his briefly, then moved on toward the open arch of the door. Baker too looked through the archway. He could see a patch of sky, incredibly

blue; the faded wall of the church, its stucco the color of dried rose petals, caught in the gleam of the sunlight. Somewhere bells sounded, each note as clear as the tap of a fingernail on a crystal glass. The scent of mangos and pineapples floated in from a laden barrow. Each impression came to him sharply as though a gray gauze which had encased his senses had suddenly fallen away and left him free.

For hours he had zigzagged through the heart of the city and somewhere in his wanderings he had eluded his follower. But now the time for his appointment with Mara was growing close.

From this point on he must ask no questions, leave no trail. The Cathedral de San Martino lay across the bay in an area known as Casa Blanca. The maps which he had studied last night had shown him the routes of the ferries, the wharves from which they sailed. Once he reached the waterfront they should not be hard to find.

He angled downward through the maze of streets until he stood in the glaring sun of Luz Square. A chugging, outsized motor boat with peeling white paint plodded its way toward a gray wharf that pointed a stubby finger into the bay.

He waited beneath a canopy made of dried coconut fronds until the ferry had berthed and debouched its passengers. Then he walked swiftly to the jetty and, jumping aboard, took a seat in the semi-circular bench at the stern.

The motor drummed into re-awakened life and the ferry glided out into the bay. Baker watched the receding skyline. The slanting rays of the sun gilded the metallic towers with reflected light.

He turned. A man slumped on the bench a few feet away. There was no mistaking the flowered shirt, the ferret face of the man who had followed him earlier. A chill passed over Baker. He had been far less clever than he had thought.

Mockery rimmed the smaller man's eyes and a fawning smile twisted his lips. Baker glanced away but his eyes were drawn back by the sound of a click, scarcely audible above the racing motor. The huddled man was leaning forward, an open switchblade in his hand. Carefully he scraped the glittering edge across a fingernail. His eyes slewed toward Baker and his lips trembled like those of an over-anxious child.

Instinctively Baker felt for the comforting pressure of the Beretta against his armpit. Then a swift wave of panic broke over

him. The gun was not there. He was a victim of habit. Danger was a thing of the night. He had left the revolver on the stand beside his bed.

The panic lasted for only a moment but his adversary was quick to sense his fear. When Baker looked again the knife had disappeared. The small brown hands lay empty and harmless across the man's lap.

In victory the man reverted to his sycophant role. His fingers made fluttering motions toward his mouth. He raised his voice to be heard above the engine and the slap of water on the hull.

"A cigarette, Señor," he said wheedlingly. "You have a cigarette for Berto?"

The ferry nuzzled alongside the ramshackle wharf on the far side of the bay and a laughing, jostling horde descended upon it.

No one moved aside as Baker stepped from the boat. He was forced to elbow his way through the crowd who seemed unaware of his existence. The throng closed in behind him as water ripples through one's fingers, yet never fast enough so that Berto was not able to pass with him.

When they were on the rutted main street, Berto gripped Baker's arm, his slim fingers surprisingly strong. He pointed to-

ward pumice-colored towers astride a hilltop half a mile away. "La Catedral de San Martino," he said, then added as though speaking of a woman, "Very lovely. Very beautiful."

Baker thrust a bill toward him. "All right. I'm a big boy. I don't need any guide."

Berto shied away from the bill as though its touch might be poisonous. He drew himself up with a pretence of hauteur but he made no effort to disguise the insolence in his tones. "I am a man of Casa Blanca. Would I take money from a friend to show him the beauties of my barrio?"

Baker stood still, his expression blank, watching the other's face. Berto stared back at him for awhile, his eyes taunting, malignant; then his gaze dropped but he did not move away.

Berto must be eliminated. And this must be done before contact with Mara was established. There was not much time left. Mara might be in the Cathedral already and, in that case, she could be in danger. Even so, he must wait. To tackle Berto in the open street was madness. A crowd would gather and Berto's friends would be among them. The police might be called and there would be innumerable delays.

Perhaps he had been wrong in

trying to intimidate the man. Berto, frightened, would only spy upon him from a distance. Baker could never be sure that he had eluded him. It might be better to make Berto believe that he had surrendered, to make no further protests and hope to catch the man off guard.

Berto looked up again and this time it was Baker's gaze that wavered. With a shrug he turned and started to trudge along the main street. The houses were all alike. A succession of two-story, wooden buildings, the ground floors given over to a row of colmados, shops, bars and poolrooms all noisy with shouts of laughter, the click of balls or the blare of radios and television. In a few blocks the street widened into a square, made gay with stands painted in blue, red, green and yellow. In one corner a portable merry-go-round ground out jangling music.

A fair must be in progress. Baker lingered at a booth examining the piles of bananas, plantains, yuccas and limes, then strolled on to another. And all the time, Berto moved behind him, ahead of him, at his side, talking without cease to the women who tended the stalls, the men who squatted on their haunches at the curb, telling them all that he was taking his

friend, the rich Americano, to see the wonders of the Cathedral of San Martino.

Berto was leaving a clear trail, making sure that their passage would be remembered, their destination known. Baker looked up at the slab-like towers of the church, then down at his watch. Twenty minutes until the appointed time.

With deliberation he turned away from the stalls, back toward the waterfront. From the ferry he had caught sight of a long row of abandoned warehouses with rotting wharves interspersed among them. Berto plucked at his sleeve but he ignored him.

A dirt street led to a cobbled roadbed on which the warehouses fronted. The place had long been in disuse and grass and weeds sprouted high among the uneven stones. He did not look back but he could hear Berto's footsteps lagging, so that the distance between them gradually lengthened.

He was beside the wharves now, watching the scum-covered water that lapped among the rotting piles, stirring the debris caught in the loose crevices. His eyes took in the scene but his mind scarcely registered what he saw. He was too intent on the slithering sounds of Berto's feet. A wariness had come into the tread. Berto was wait-

ing for the correct spot for the sharp encounter in the bright sun. When he had made his choice, Berto would close in fast, planning to strike without warning, then flee.

The street spread ahead of him like that of a ghost town. Across the bay he could sense the teeming life of the city but here there was no movement and the sultry silence was broken only by the distant notes of the merry-go-round that were dimmed to a metallic tinkling.

His nerves grew taut as he realized that the footsteps were gathering speed, drawing closer. Then, as he steeled himself for the attack, they came to a full stop. Up ahead, in the shadow of an arched gate, a ragged figure braced itself against a wall and lurched toward them. Arms flailed to keep a precarious balance. Then the figure reeled back against the rusted gate. The man's legs spread out in front of him as he sat down in a heap on the packed earth. He wagged his head from side to side and tried to focus bleary eyes, first on Baker, then on Berto.

Baker approached the sprawled figure cautiously, sidestepping to avoid the outflung legs. The gate was part-way open, a broken padlock clinging to its hasp. Beyond was a yard littered with old packing

cases, beer tins, the rusted skeleton of a truck. He squeezed through, twisting as he did so to look at Berto. The brown face was drawn into a tight mask out of which the eyes shone with feverish intensity.

"He is afraid," Baker thought and felt strangely shaken by the knowledge. A frightened enemy is unpredictable and therefore doubly dangerous.

He lengthened his stride as he crossed the yard to the straggly loading dock that stretched into the water midway between two gray, crouching warehouses. Rotting wood sagged beneath his tread. He picked his way to the far side of the dock where a strip of concrete reinforced the boards. He moved along easily, sure-footed and almost silent. Behind him a board splintered beneath Berto's feet. There was a louder rending noise and a grunted curse. Then Berto, too, found the reinforced area.

At the end of the dock Baker stopped, his back toward the approaching man. Across the bay, the sun glinted on the monolithic towers of chrome and glass that marked the new city. The sun sent slanting rays across the dock too, illuminating it like a stage. But there was no audience. The warehouses effectively blocked off the scene from both sides. And it was unlikely

that any of the ships in the bay would sail close enough to notice the lonely figures on the dock.

Baker stood motionless, knowing that his very immobility would twist at the other's nerves. Berto crept closer, then stopped a dozen feet away. Baker swung toward him with seeming laziness. Berto crouched, the long thin blade of the knife winking in his hand. There could be no doubt that the man who held it was experienced in its use. The blade hung low, dangling loosely between slim fingers so that it could be flicked in any direction with deadly precision.

Berto was grinning, his teeth showing white against his bronzed skin. All that he needed was some trifling suggestion of panic, the sharp intake of a breath, the twitching of a muscle, and he would leap forward to attack.

Baker faced him calmly and spoke a single word. "Why?"

Berto's head tilted to one side and his eyes hooded over with sly malice. "Perhaps I do not like Americuchos. They are all hijos de putas."

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody. Just me. Come to kill you."

"You're lying."

Berto did not answer but a tiny nervous spasm tugged at

the corner of his mouth and his eyes darted to one side. His body coiled tight and he lunged forward, the knife low, its honed edge pointing upward, ready to rip Baker from groin to navel. Baker arched away from the sweeping blow. The point plucked at the cloth of his shirt as he swung to one side, moving on the balls of his feet. His fist lashed out, catching Berto on the cheekbone, sending him tottering back to the dock's edge. Berto's arms spread outward to catch his balance and his feet performed a crazy, drunken jig. An iron-topped bollard caught him between the shoulder blades, knocking the breath out of him but saving him from falling. He cowered against the bollard, gasping for breath, but with the knife still clutched in his hand.

He spat out an obscenity in Spanish and started a shuffling side-step that carried him away from the bollard. He moved in a crude half-circle, so that Baker would be between himself and the water.

Baker took the offensive, edging in closer, sensing Berto's growing uncertainty. Berto held the knife in front of him, the blade weaving back and forth like the head of a snake. The burnished steel was a magnet drawing Baker's eyes. The trick was old. When Baker's gaze

dropped, Berto would attack. Instead he must watch the Cuban's dark eyes, knowing that they would flick toward him, giving him a split second of warning before the next rush.

The warning flicker came. As Berto propelled himself forward, Baker took a feinting backward step, then closed in fast. The knife thrust upward, raking at the flesh beneath his ribs. But Baker's hand had caught the slim, brown wrist, forcing the knife hand upward and away. The dipping blade slashed across his knuckles, drawing blood, but he did not let go. His prodding fingers bent the wrist back with a vicious twist. Berto gave a shrill scream of pain and, as Baker thrust him away, went sprawling on his back. The knife clattered to the boards and skittered into the water.

Baker went to the fallen man and stood over him. In Berto's brown eyes there was nothing left but fear and pain. He whimpered and clutched at his wrist. Baker prodded him with the toe of his shoe.

"Who sent you after me?"

"No one. I swear to God."

Baker's foot arched back prepared to slam into Berto's side. The man screamed and rolled away but Baker stayed with him.

Once more the foot drew back. "Tell me the truth and

you can go."

"They'll kill me if I do."

"Lie to me again and I'll kill you myself."

Baker waited. Berto wet his lips and his throat worked but it was as though he could not force himself to speak. Then the name came in a whisper that cut the sun-drenched silence.

"Morales. Ben Morales."

Baker stepped aside. He said, "All right. Get out."

Berto scabbled to his feet and began to run. In his headlong flight he was careless of the rotting boards. One splintered beneath his weight. He fell, then picked himself up. He was still running, bent nearly double, when he disappeared through the high wire gate. For a moment his heels rattled on the cobblestones. Then the muffling silence returned to the abandoned dock and the looming warehouses.

Baker's gaze swung upward to the rolling hill and the Cathedral de San Martino. Lowering clouds were forming, driving out the background of blue sky. He glanced at his watch. He would be late. But only by a few minutes. His skirmish with Berto had taken far less time than he had thought. Mara would still be waiting. A picture of her flashed in his mind, disconcertingly vivid. He shut it out and made his way back to the road-

way, seeking a path that led up the steep hillside.

Finally he arrived at the foot of the wide, shallow steps of the Cathedral. He climbed to the top before stopping to study the surrounding land for some sign that he was still followed. Beneath him spread the almost abandoned town. Many of the roofs of the houses close at hand had collapsed; the doors and windows were gaping holes; the yards tangles of vines.

The stillness was unbroken except for the tap of crutches as an old man hobbled across the ribbon of sunlight at the base of the stairs. A wave of premonition washed over Baker. It seemed impossible that Mara should be waiting in the funereal gloom of the edifice that towered above him.

The thirty-foot entrance portal, embossed with a huge iron cross, was closed but a small wooden door opened into a rectangle of blackness. Baker stepped over the high sill and, before his eyes could adjust to the diminished light, the scents of burning tallow, incense and the too sweet odor of lilies reached him. A splash of color came from the corner where an arched window of purple and gold filtered light into a grotto laden with flowers.

He scanned the shadowed darkness of the nave for Mara.

There were a dozen or more small chapels in any one of which she might be concealed. He moved slowly along the outer aisles searching for her.

Behind him he heard the grit of shoes on the pebbled floor. He swung about. A lone worshipper stopped in the doorway, a woman, middle-aged, stocky, dressed in rusty black. Her face was red, with small eyes and thickened lips which gave her a porcine look. She released a black veil over her face and placed black mantilla over her streaked gray hair. She walked heavily to the image of the Virgin and sank down on her knees. Her lips moved to a soft sibilance and over her coarse features crept a silent dignity.

Baker turned away, feeling like an intruder.

His idle progress took him back to the grotto beside the portal and the flower stand there. A barefoot attendant, with trousers doubled up above his calves, gave him a sidelong glance and continued potting the miniature cacti spread on the window sill.

He turned to find the eyes of the black-clad woman upon him. Her hand raised slowly to her throat, the fingers shaping a double V. It was a signal out of the past, one that he and Mara had devised in Nice. The message flashed a remembered

warning: "Follow me but not too closely. There may be danger."

He brushed by the woman and stood spraddle-legged at the entrance of the nave. He heard her lumbering footsteps retreating but remained with his back turned, while he clicked off the seconds in his mind. When three minutes had elapsed, he left the Cathedral. The stout woman was plodding down the hillside along a rough path that ran in the opposite direction from the one along which he had come.

Where the pathway curved the woman gave a backward glance, then waddled on. Baker wended his way along the hillside path. The storm clouds that had been gathering were darker now. He stopped from time to time to look about and listen but neither saw nor heard anything suspicious. The trail did not lead far. A narrow earthen road formed a semicircle about the base of the hill. A black car was drawn up at the side, half hidden by the spreading boughs of an acacia. Baker stopped, wary of a trap. The woman rounded the car. A rear door opened and she got inside.

Baker descended the slope more slowly than ever, examining the car as he approached. A black Jaguar. Three or four years old. Coated with dust. The

windows reflected the waning light so that he could see only the blur of a figure behind the wheel. A glimpse of lime-green fabric, of honey-colored hair. Mara! Suddenly he abandoned caution and was rushing forward, conscious, even as he did so, of the unwonted recklessness of his action.

He wrenched the door open. The woman's arms lay loose across the wheel. She turned an inquiring glance toward him. He felt the suck of his breath, the hollowness in his stomach. A miracle had happened and time had collapsed. This was the Mara he had known in Nice, in Paris. The slender girl with features that were fragile, yet possessed of a finely chiseled strength. The great ugly scar was gone, the cheeks unblemished, the lips soft and firm.

"Mara!" he cried hoarsely. Then in bewilderment, "But you're not Mara. You can't be."

Laughter tinkled across the years. "Of course not. I'm Irina Gidl."

Mara's daughter. The miracle was no more than an uncanny resemblance. And now that the first shock had worn away, he could see that the likeness was not as close as it had seemed. Irina's tawny eyes were the same as Mara's had been. But otherwise her coloration was deeper, the cheekbones higher, more pro-

nounced. Mara's fragility was lacking in the girl for her slim, wiry body suggested an energy that was supple and controlled. He counted up the years of his separation from Mara. Could this be his daughter? She turned her face full towards him. Some expression in the eyes, the moulding of cheek and jaw supplied the answer to the unspoken question. He felt a stab of jealousy for Karel whose name the girl bore. He shook off the numbness that enveloped him and brought his thoughts back to the present and the moment's urgency.

"Where is Mara?"

"We've come to take you to her. Does it matter where?"

He shook his head and twisted about in the seat. In the back the red-faced woman sat in mammoth solemnity, drowsy eyes resting on her clasped hands. Beside her was a young man, scarcely more than a boy. The bronzed face with its regular features was almost too handsome. The eyes were brown, liquid and sultry, with curled lashes. The jet black hair was smooth as that of a seal. A pretty boy, Baker thought, then stifled his impulse toward contempt and studied the youth more carefully. A good forehead. Hidden strength in the rounded jaw, in the compact body. The youth returned his

stare, his expression, sullen at first, lighted in a quick smile. He spoke in precise English, only slightly accented. "I did not want Irina to come. I would have thrown you to the wolves."

"What wolves?"

"Quién sabe? There are many packs."

"And which pack do you run with?"

The liquid eyes turned to agate and the muscles of the rounded jaw tensed. "Not all men are animals. Some fight for what they believe and believe in the cause for which they fight."

"Certainly. The fanatic is a self-righteous man."

"And the man driven by ideals, is he a fanatic too?"

"Perhaps. I am too old to speak in riddles." He turned from the youth and straightened in his seat. The car was speeding along an asphalt road within sight of the bay. Irina drove with competence, her long fingers gripping the burnished wheel lightly. He longed to speak to her, to hear her voice again, but he could think of no words to say.

The storm that had been brewing broke with a flurry of rain that beat out a brittle tattoo on the hard top of the car. A crossroad loomed up ahead. Angled across it was a battered slate-gray Cadillac. Two men clambered from it and rushed

into the roadway, waving their arms to flag down the Jaguar. The gray slanting rain was like a Japanese curtain between them but, even so, Baker recognized one of the men. The smaller of the pair was Berto; the other was tall, bearded and dressed in khaki fatigues.

The Jaguar slowed slightly and Baker saw the girl's slim leg move toward the brake.

"Danger. A trap," he said sharply. "Keep moving."

Before the warning words were completed, the Jaguar had accelerated, driving directly, purposefully at the two men. They leaped aside barely in time. The Jaguar swerved outward, its far wheels spinning in the wet sand of the verge before they gripped the asphalt surface again. Berto fell clumsily, rolling half way beneath the parked car. But the bearded man twisted in mid-air with the liteness of a jungle cat. He crouched against the Cadillac's hood and there was the glint of steel in his hand.

Automatically, Baker flattened himself against the back of the seat. There was an angry spang as a bullet starred the glass beside him then ricocheted away. He swiveled about. The big man was hoisting Berto to his feet, prodding him into the front seat of the car. Almost instantly the Cadillac lurched for-

ward in frenzied motion.

Baker checked the speedometer. The red needle wavered just above the eighty mark. The Jaguar should be able to outdistance the older car but, looking over his shoulder, he saw that this was not true. There must be a souped-up engine beneath the battered hood because the Cadillac was eating up the distance between them foot by foot. His attention shifted to the girl, wondering if she could be trusted to meet the emergency. Her eyes were intent on the curved roadway but her face was relaxed and there was a hint of a smile about her lips. The only signs of tension were the tautness of her arms and the whiteness of her knuckles where her hands clutched the wheel.

"She'll do," he thought and, despite the danger of the moment, felt a glow of pride.

Behind them the Cadillac spun out of control. It swerved across the ridge of sand to the water's edge. Baker caught a glimpse of the khaki-clad man fighting the wheel. As the car hit the wet rutted beach it bucked and cut into the water at a sharp angle. A mass of white spume fanned upward over the hood and windshield. The car seemed to rise with the spray, then floundered deeper into the water and settled on its side.

The girl's foot lifted from the accelerator and she twisted her head to look back. The boy leaned forward, cupping her shoulder with his hand.

"Ave Maria. Don't stop."

"They may be trapped. We might save them."

"For what purpose? So that they can kill us?"

"It seems too cruel to leave them there."

"Don't be a fool. There's nothing else to do."

Irina looked toward Baker. He nodded in agreement. Resolutely she returned her attention to the road. The car picked up speed and, as they rounded a curve, the wreck was lost to sight.

The silence within the car was unbroken. Baker darted an occasional glance at the red-faced woman beside the boy. Her hands remained clasped and she seemed to be nodding.

She did not move again until the Jaguar swung into a driveway and braked to a stop. Then her head came up and she made the sign of the cross. She mumbled in Spanish, "It is over. We are home once more."

The house was of pink stucco, perched half way up a mountain side and surrounded by a wide sloping lawn set with *lignum vitae* and acacia trees. The

tropical storm had abated as quickly as it had risen. Already the late afternoon sun had pushed aside the clouds and was shining with crystalline clarity on the pearly leaves and moist grass.

Baker got out. On the opposite side of the car the boy was speaking to the girl, his tones guarded. He spoke in Spanish, apparently in the belief that Baker could not understand.

"I do not like it. We should not have brought him here. He is not to be trusted."

The girl answered even more softly. "No one can be trusted these days. But he is here. So let us make the best of it."

"But why?"

"Mara desired it. Isn't that reason enough?"

The boy repeated doggedly, "I don't trust him. How do you know it was not he who killed your father?"

"Would Mara want him here if that were so?"

"She is not infallible."

Their voices fell off as Baker approached. The boy was frowning then, as his eyes met Irina's, a smile brightened his face. He touched her hand lightly and turned to Baker. He said formally, "I have forgotten my duties as a host. I will tell Antonia to mix drinks." He walked toward the front door through which the stout woman

had disappeared, leaving Baker and the girl together.

She took a step toward him and hesitated. "You understand what Jorge said?"

"Yes."

"It is not true. You are not an assassin."

"I had no part in Karel's death."

She studied him with cool, appraising eyes. "I believe you," she said at length. "Will you help us?"

"That is something I can't promise. I am still in the dark."

"Mara will explain." Her lips puckered in a half smile. "That is if Jorge will give her a chance."

"He is a fanatic."

"Perhaps. But with good reason. Cuba has been bathed in blood for a long time."

"And Jorge would put an end to this?"

"Don't mock him. He has more sense than you think."

Baker bent his head in a gesture that was half apology.

She reached for his arm. "Come. Mara is waiting."

She led him through the front rooms of the house to a long, low veranda that gave a view, through the foliage, of the glittering Caribbean far below. He stood at the screen, thinking that the scene might be Nice. A light footstep sounded on the parquet floor and he guessed

that when he turned Mara would be there.

He was correct, but Irina stood just behind her. Temporarily a sense of confusion seized him, as though in some strange way, the two had exchanged personalities. Irina seemed the more familiar of the figures, the embodiment of the woman whom he had once loved, whose memory had been buried in a dark dream. Irina was living, vibrant; but in the pitiless glare of the sun, Mara seemed fragile, faded, not quite real.

Mara brushed his cheek with a light kiss and, without speaking, went to the canvas swing at the end of the veranda. She had kept the left side of her face averted and now she sat down carefully, waiting for the others to join her. Irina took a seat beside her mother, her fingers gently caressing the back of Mara's hand. Baker drew a chair to the rustic table, facing them. Before he could speak Jorge appeared in the doorway followed by Antonia who carried a tray of cocktails.

Baker accepted a frosted glass containing a pale green-tinted daiquiri. He met Jorge's challenging gaze. The boy said, "We will drink to a free Cuba. Is that not so?"

Baker sipped the biting cold drink and watched the boy, unsmilingly.

"Jorge asked, "What are you doing in Havana? You are not a tourist."

"No. Not that."

"Who are you working for? Is it Morales? Or, are you one of Montilla's goons?"

"Believe me, until today I was unfamiliar with either name."

Jorge lunged forward, swaying toward Baker, his fists clenched, his body trembling with rage. "You lie. I believe it was you who killed Karel."

Baker remained motionless. Mara spoke for the first time, her voice low-pitched with quiet command. "He is speaking the truth, Jorge. Tell him your name."

The boy drew himself straight and there was pride in his voice. "I am Jorge Bonsaro. Eugenio Bonsaro is my uncle."

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

The boy's lips curled and he turned toward Mara. "The man is a hireling. You admitted as much. We risked too much to bring him here."

"We need his help."

"We are better off without him. He led us into a trap today. Two of Morales' men were waiting for us near the Cathedral."

Mara's gaze shifted to Baker. He said, "It is true. I was followed to the meeting place."

Mara slowly lowered her glass

to the table. "Karel must have found you last night. Otherwise you would not be here."

"Yes. I was with him when he died."

"And you did nothing to help?"

"What was there to do?"

"Nothing, I imagine." She was silent for a minute then added, "We're still puppets, aren't we, Fedor? Why did you keep the appointment? Why did you come here?"

"Need you ask? I had hoped to find you at the Cathedral. And now —" His eyes moved almost imperceptibly to Irina.

"Why were you sent to Cuba?"

"Mara, you know better than to ask such a question. We worked together once. You know that each operation is separate. A man follows his orders blindly because there is nothing else to do. In this business there is neither right nor wrong. Only instructions to be obeyed."

"I have not forgotten but this time there is a great deal at stake." It was her turn to glance at the girl beside her.

Jorge's angry voice sliced across the taut silence. "This is fine talk — there is neither right nor wrong. How can you place confidence in such a man? For all we know he may be a spy, ready to sell us out at the drop of a hat — or a dollar bill. Irina

is in danger. I'm taking her away, to Tía María's."

Baker said quietly, "Soon. But first tell me about Eugenio Bonsaro."

"My uncle is a man of principles. Ideals. He places his country before himself. But what does that mean to you? Patriotism is something to sneer and laugh at."

Mara spoke sharply. "Jorge, there is no need for insults or oratory."

"All right. Then what must I tell him? For years Cubans have been at each other's throats. Why? Because my country is caught between two evil forces. On the one side there is Morales, a Communist stooge, who is trying to hold together the Castro machine and once again to make Cuba a satellite of the Russians. On the other hand, there is Octavio Montilla, a criminal, a thug. He rose to power with Lucky Luciano and wormed his way into the Castro government. He would turn the island into a vast criminal domain, policed by the dregs of the underworld, in which no decent person would be safe. How can one choose between such men?"

Baker shrugged. "There is no reason for me to make the choice."

"No. But we who are Cubans have been forced to do so. The country is filled with turmoil,

with self-hate. Many supported Castro in the belief that he was an honorable man only to be betrayed, sold out to the Russians. Now men are turning back to the underworld as the only power able to oust the Frankenstein they have helped to create."

Baker flicked at the rim of his glass with a fingernail. He said wearily, "You were telling me about Eugenio Bonsaro."

"He is the only hope for a regenerated Cuba. For many years he has spoken with the voice of reason. He has refused to side with either Montilla or Morales. He is the one man whose integrity has remained unquestioned. And now, at long last, this has been recognized by all except the avid supporters of Morales and the goon squads who back Montilla. He can bring an end to bloodshed and civil war."

Baker looked up at the boy's flushed face and flashing eyes. "Perhaps. But I doubt that men of reason can prevail over men of action."

"It is easy enough to jeer. But that is because you do not understand. My uncle's following has been built up slowly through the years. The people would acclaim him today if they dared to do so."

Baker asked wryly, "If Montilla and Morales are such evil

men, how does it happen that they have not destroyed this paragon of virtue?"

"Because, like you, they were contemptuous of the idealist; they considered him a harmless dreamer. And when they awakened to his strength it was too late. If either side touched him, the people would throw their support to the opposition."

"Then he is safe."

"No. I believe both sides are plotting his death. But it must be done cleverly, so that his assassin will appear to be other than he is, so that a wave of hate can be directed against false enemies."

Baker stood up abruptly. He said, "I have heard enough. Do you have a picture of Bonsaro?"

Jorge paused uncertainly and Mara said, "There is one in the front room. Bring it to me."

"What does he want with it? This may be a trick."

Mara's voice was firm and clear. "Do as I ask, Jorge, Get the picture."

The boy scowled but he turned and passed through the open doorway. In a moment he was back with a framed photograph. He extended it to Mara. She accepted it and held it out to Baker.

He tilted it toward the waning light and studied the portrait. The round face with the thinning hair, the domed fore-

head, the pince-nez glasses and bushy mustache was only too familiar. This was an older picture than he had seen before but there could be no mistake.

He laid the framed photo on the table close to Mara. His hand reached for the inner pocket of his jacket and he brought out his wallet. He removed the picture that Barney had given him in Miami and flipped it down beside the other.

Jorge bent over the pictures, the flat of both hands on the table top. When he looked up his face was livid with rage. "You lied. You said you knew nothing of my uncle."

"I said that his name meant nothing to me. That was the truth."

Jorge leaped at him, his fingers catching in the folds of Baker's shirt, twisting the linen into a tight ball. "Who are you? Why are you here? Tell me."

Baker's arms hung limply by his sides and he made no attempt to free himself from the boy's grip.

"Why did you have my uncle's picture?"

"Mara knows. That is enough."

A figure came between them. Not Mara. But Irina. Her fingers clasped Jorge's arm and she moved close against him.

"Jorge, you were going to take me to Tía María. Come. We must

leave now."

He said, "No. I won't go until I've exacted a promise that no harm will come to my uncle."

Baker's eyes flickered from Jorge to Irina and back. "They are right for each other," he thought. "They should always be together."

But when he spoke he directed his words to Mara. She alone would understand. If this forthcoming interview should prove that he had been sent to Havana for reasons inimical to Eugenio Bonsaro, he would write a letter detailing every step in the plot to destroy him. He believed that such a documented exposure of the organization's activities would be a powerful weapon in Bonsaro's hands.

Jorge's face radiated sudden eagerness. "Tío Eugenio has many friends on the newspapers. They will carry the letter on the front page. I know the Cuban people. Within hours they will rally around my uncle. They need just such an incident as this to cast off their fetters."

Baker added, "You will not open the letter prematurely. You must wait until the proper time."

"How will I know when the time has come?"

"You will receive a message that will release you. When it arrives you will understand.

Suspicion clouded Jorge's eyes again and he would have asked more questions. But Irina led him away. When they were gone, Baker turned to Mara.

The tropical night was closing in quickly and a delicate haze like a gray veil threw a tracery of shadows across her mutilated face. He gathered her in his arms and pressed his lips against the white arch of her throat.

El Puerco Gordo was strictly a dive. Its tinsel brightness as thin and brittle as pancake makeup. A big barn of a place with rattan tables and wire-backed chairs. Decorations of fibre matting and palm fronds strung with grotesque heads carved from coconuts. Candles stuck in the necks of Chianti bottles filled the room with wavering shadows.

At the rear, on a raised platform, an overweight, and over-aged stripper went through her routine of bumps and grinds to the accompaniment of a tinkling off-key piano.

Hibiscus blossoms bobbed precariously over her capacious breasts. One floated downward. Wolf whistles, guffaws and shouted ribald jokes followed the stripper as she retreated in mock confusion to the stage door.

Baker waited patiently, standing at the bar, occasionally sipping his flat tepid beer. The appointment had been set for an hour ago but he was not disturbed. Throughout the years he must have spent hundreds of hours waiting in such places in Algiers, Port Said, Paris or Berlin.

He ordered another beer and turned his back to the bar, resting his weight on his elbows. His gaze roved the room with studied casualness. Somewhere among the motley array of men and women, he was sure that a watcher from the organization was posted.

Three troubadours dressed in gaucho hats, ruffed white shirts and black pants, slashed up the sides to show crimson insets, stumbled onto the raised stage. They strummed guitars and belted bawdy jokes.

Baker's attention shifted from the musicians to the girl who had edged along the bar until she was nearly touching him. Her narrow face had peaked cheekbones; the skin was pallid with a dusky underflush; the eyes black and searching. She inched closer, looking up at him, laughing. Her laugh was suggestive, intimate but he sensed that it was rimmed with fear.

She was not the first girl to approach him this evening but

the others had been bolder, brassier. This girl was young, scarcely more than sixteen. Her sleazy green dress snuggled her small tight breasts and her legs were bare. The blobs of rouge on her cheeks, the high-heeled patent leather shoes and the golden bangles that tinkled at her wrist seemed out of place as though she were a child masquerading as an adult.

She said, "I know a place where we can be alone."

This was the opening gambit of the password which had been supplied to him by Barney in Miami.

"How can you be sure?"

"Because no one is there."

"We will go soon."

His arm coiled about her waist. She moved against him, her body cleaving to his, but a tremor ran through her.

His whisper was harsh, almost angry. "We are being watched. Play the game."

He ordered two beers and watched while she drank, running his fingers along her arm, fondling her, pretending an excitement that was the expected prelude to their departure. But there was a cold knot in his stomach. When he had first seen her he had wondered why they had used a girl so young and inexperienced. At the same time he had had a puzzled sense of familiarity as though he had

seen her before. Now he realized why. The girl bore a subtle, but unmistakable likeness to Mara as he had first known her. It was hard to pin the resemblance down. The coloration was different and so were the features when examined singly. Perhaps it was in the bone structure of the face which, like Mara's, was fine and delicate or perhaps it was in the movements that were shy and frightened yet possessed of a lithe animal grace.

The girl had not been selected by chance. But what was the significance of the choice? Was this a warning? A threat that any deviation from his instructions would endanger Mara? Or was she merely a pawn in some sadistic cat-and-mouse game?

She looked at him and her lower lip trembled. He felt an unreasoning tenderness, a desire to reassure her. He said softly, "Simply do as you were told and there will be no trouble. What is your name?"

"Carmen. You must come with me."

"Yes. But not openly. It is better that you should go first. Use the side door. I will follow in a minute."

He watched her as she threaded her way among the tables. Once a man reached for her but she fended him off. She hesitated in the doorway and he thought that she would look

back but she walked into the darkness without turning.

He waited the allotted time then set out after her, moving unhurriedly, his manner slightly furtive, like that of a man who wishes to keep a liaison unobserved. When he stepped outside he saw that the door opened onto an entryway, unlit except for pale streamers of light from the cabaret's grimy windows. The girl was standing at the mouth of the entry, her figure silhouetted by the fuzzy glimmer of the neons.

As he picked his way through the litter, he listened for some sound behind him. He heard it at last and turned briefly. The single glimpse of the man whose gross body blocked out the doorway was enough for recognition. He was the shorter of the two men whom he had seen crouching beside the lifeless form of the old beggar lying in the recessed doorway, the one whom Karel had identified as Tico Alvarez.

When he reached the girl, he pulled her around roughly and looked into her face. She tried to keep her eyes bold, her manner defiant, but she could not maintain the pose for long. Her gaze dropped and she hung her head.

He asked, "Which way?"

"I am to go ahead and you will follow. If anyone picks up

the trail, you are to drop out and come to El Puerco Gordo tomorrow night at the same time. I am only repeating what I was told to say. Do you understand?"

He nodded.

He lingered about the entrance until the girl was midway along the next block. There was no further sign of the thickset man. Baker shrugged inwardly. If Alvarez was from the organization he would have orders not to interfere tonight.

He hurried to close the gap between himself and the girl but still kept half a block behind. Sometimes she disappeared in deep shadows but he could hear the steady tap-tap of her high heels. Sometimes a light spilled through a window or doorway and fell across her fragile figure. Each time this happened his thoughts would flicker to Mara; then he would resolutely force the image to one side. He must not confuse Carmen with Mara and transfer any sympathy to her. Carmen was simply a teenage prostitute, one of thousands employed by the vice syndicate with which the organization was allied. No matter what might happen tonight, there was nothing he could do for her.

Ahead of them rose a pagoda-shaped tower and the fronts of the buildings were illuminated with Chinese characters formed by glowing neon tubes. The

edge of Chinatown. The girl slowed her pace and looked nervously over her shoulder. That would mean that the end of the chase was near. She slid into a narrow unlit street that jutted off at an angle from the one they traversed. By the time he reached the opening she was swallowed up in the darkness but he could trace her progress by the click of her heels.

The heels were silent and he knew that she was waiting for him. He moved in warily, hugging the walls of the buildings, uncomfortably aware that the lights at his back made him a tempting target if, by chance, she was leading him into an ambush. She was in a strip of blackness beneath a low-hanging balcony. He heard her sibilant whisper before he saw her.

"Are you sure that we were not followed?"

"Yes. I am positive."

"We are almost there."

He looked beyond her to a squat, ugly, two-story building. The lower part was a shop, closed and barred for the night. Slits of light glinted through the shutters of the upper floor. She led him to the side of the building where a wooden doorway closed off the opening of a high Roman arch. The door was ajar and they pushed through into a barren courtyard.

She fastened the door with a

clumsy wooden latch and turned to him.

"You must stay here."

He shrugged and rested his shoulder against the arch, watching impassively as she made her way across the courtyard and climbed curved stone steps that led to a massive door. She rang a bell and, at the same moment, a dog began to bark fiercely from somewhere inside the house.

There was a period of waiting, then a peephole in the upper panel of the door opened, showing a circle of yellow light. The door swung back, jolting against a chain. Baker could hear the strident, questioning voice of a woman and the murmur of the girl's answers.

The door nearly closed and the chain clanked free. Then it opened wide enough for the girl to slide through. A woman appeared at the head of the stairs. Her features were blotted out by the light behind her but there was something ominous about the hulking figure that looked as though it were hewn from rough stone.

She called hoarsely to Baker, "Venga aquí. Come."

He plodded up the stairs, aware of her scrutiny, but not returning her look until he was close to her. Her features were buried in layers of fat and the bright red circles of rouge on

her cheeks would have given her a clownish look were it not for the cruelty of the shark-like mouth, the greed in the bulbous eyes. Her tight-fitting lavender dress with its broad neck-band of gold brocade was spotted and soiled.

She held a police dog on a short leash. The animal bared its fangs at Baker's approach. She struck it hard on the top of the head with the flat of her hand. The dog whimpered and cowered at her feet. She grunted and moved aside, signalling Baker to enter. He stepped into a long, windowless room. Along the walls were ranged faded pink sofas, potted palms, cane chairs. A strip of pink linoleum stretched from the entrance to a balcony. The air was stuffy and hot.

She placed a meaty hand on his arm. His muscles tightened with distaste. He looked down at the hand with its fat-encircled wrist, its glittering rings and grimy nails, then up at her face. Her eyes were implacable. She had sensed his revulsion and from now on would be an enemy.

She said, "The last room on your left. They are waiting."

He preceded her along the strip of worn linoleum. The door was open a crack. The only sound from within was the tinkle of ice in a glass.

She thrust the door inward. Rocky Roberts was sprawled in a rattan lounge chair, legs crossed, a glass in his hand. Beside him was a second man, tall and lank, with colorless hair and a craggy prison-worn face. Baker had to look a second time before he recognized Charlie Buck.

Rocky jack-knifed to his feet and came forward, his arm extended. "Eddie boy, it sure is a treat to have you with us. Long time no see."

Baker let his arm be pumped, his back slapped. Rocky's speech was slightly slurred and there was a hint of a stagger in his walk. Probably it was an act intended to confuse Baker. But with the Rock you never could be sure.

The long dark saturnine face had not changed much. The cruel lines about the eyes and mouth had deepened and the hair was tufted with gray. But the youthful recklessness was still present and so was the swaggering pride and the hint of sardonic humor. Even with the hate churning within him as he remembered the years in which the Rock had held the whip over him and the mutilation of Mara, Baker could not deny the tug of the man's personality.

Rocky's mood was expansive. "This calls for a drink. A big

one. How long's it been, Eddie? Don't answer. I don't like to think of all those years."

His arm went about Baker's shoulder and he swung toward the fat woman. "For Crizzake, what's wrong with you, Matilda? Shake the lead out and mix a drink for the boy. Can't you see he's dying of thirst? What'll it be, Eddie? A rum and coke? That ought to hit the spot."

Matilda dropped ice cubes into a greasy glass, poured rum over them and filled the glass with Coca-Cola.

Charlie Buck had not said a word. Neither had the girl who was huddled on a cot in the corner of the room, her bare legs drawn up under her.

Rocky rambled on, falsely hearty, the mockery almost hidden in his voice.

Buck shifted his weight and shuffled his feet. "Let's get down to brass tacks. We came here on business, you know."

"I'm surprised at you, Charlie. You and me and Eddie here, we're old friends. Buddies. We been through the mill together. And you're treatin' the boy like he was a stranger."

Buck's eyes flickered toward Baker and his mouth twisted into a grimace. He said, "Sure, we're all friends. Ain't we, kid?"

Rocky's grin widened. "You know what's eatin' on Charlie. Believe it or not he's got a yen

for Matilda. He must be a psycho or something. I been telling him he ought to see a skull doc. Now me, I like 'em cute and young, like the dish in the corner. How about you, Eddie?"

Baker glanced at Carmen. Her shoulders were pressed against the wall and her head hung down so that he could see just the top of her shining hair. He tried to make his voice non-committal. "Not bad."

"Not bad the man says. You got to hand it to this boy, Charlie. He's a real expert."

Baker suppressed the hot surge of rage that threatened to overwhelm him. It would be proof of his own unreliability. His anger ebbed and was replaced by a spreading fear. Not for himself. But for Mara. Irina. No matter how the Rock taunted him, he must show no emotion until the details of his mission had fallen into place.

Charlie Buck appeared to be restive. He said, "Cut the comedy, Rocky. We ain't got all night."

"Why not? Matilda's sent all the girls away except Carmen. We got the joint to ourselves."

"Get on with it, man. I'm bored."

Rocky's eyes gleamed. "Maybe so. But Eddie here ain't bored. Are you, kid?"

Baker remained stolid. Rocky was trying to make him flip. It

was an old game, tried out on every newcomer in a prison yard. Kid stuff. But Rocky was the eternal adolescent. He said in a flat voice, "No. I'm interested."

"I thought you'd be. But Charlie's right in a way. Fooling around with a dame is okay but never lose your head over one. That's my slogan. Some dames are dynamite. They'd sell you down the river for next to nothing. Take Mara, for instance. You remember Mara, don't you, Eddie?"

"I remember her."

Rocky cracked his knuckles. "That's right. The boys told me you dropped in on Mara. She's not looking so hot these days. But then, you can't expect a broad to keep her looks forever. Especially one who don't know enough to put a zipper on her lip."

Baker's gauge was rising and tiny beads of sweat sprouted at his hairline.

"Mara's got a kid now. A real flossy piece of goods. But I guess I don't have to tell you about that." He nudged Baker in the ribs with his elbow and his voice lowered conspiratorially. "You know something funny? This chick I sent to meet you at El Puerco Gordo, she sort of reminds me of Irina. Don't know what it is about her unless its the look of innocence they

both got. Like butter wouldn't melt in their mouths."

He looked over Baker's shoulder at the crouched girl. "Come on over here, Carmen, where Eddie can get a good squint at you."

The girl arose reluctantly and sidled toward them. She was frightened and Baker could see the appeal in her eyes. But there was nothing he could do for her. Rocky stepped close and forced her chin up with a vicious jab of his cupped palm. She gave a sharp cry of pain and tried to back away but his fingers sank deep into the flesh of her arm.

"Carmen's new to the game. She's so green she don't know the score yet. Maybe this is the night to teach her. What do you think, Eddie?"

To disagree would only increase the girl's danger. Baker said, "Sure. Why not?" But even as he spoke he knew he had hesitated a moment too long.

Rocky was speaking to the girl now. "You know who I am, don't you?"

"Yes. Rocky Roberts."

His hand left her arm and slashed at her face. Her head jerked to one side and blood flooded her cheek. "You got the answers wrong, sweetheart. You don't know me from Adam. You never seen me in your life."

He back-handed her. "Who am I, Carmen?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

"You're learning fast, baby. Just keep it that way. As long as you don't know from nothing, you'll be all right. But it's a lesson you got to learn good."

He shoved the girl toward the bed where the big woman stood. He laughed. "She's all yours, Matilda. You know what to do."

Matilda grunted and for the first time Baker saw the savage little dog whip in her hand. She said, "Don't worry. When I get through with her, she won't give you no trouble."

Baker watched as the big woman forced the girl down on the cot. To protest would be futile. To try to interfere might bring about the girl's death as well as his own. He could not even turn away. He must watch without visible emotion as he had witnessed scenes of brutality in the prison yard.

He took two slow steps to the table and poured himself a fresh drink. He sat down on a cane-seated chair, careful that his hands should rest on the table top, that they should not knot into fists or be shaken with tremors.

His gaze shifted to the two men beside him. Rocky appeared as relaxed as himself. Only the shining brightness of his eyes betrayed his inner ex-

citement. He caught Baker's look, grinned and nodded. It was his way of telling Baker that the girl was unimportant. The show was being put on for Baker's benefit. This was what could happen to Mara or Irina. Or perhaps something far worse. Baker's glance traveled on to Charlie Buck. The tow-headed man was leaning forward, his mouth open, breathing hard. A vein throbbed across the width of his forehead.

Rocky's lazy drawl broke the unreality of the scene. "Okay. That's enough, Matilda. We don't want to kill the frail. Now get her out of here." Rocky said. "And you scram too. Me and Eddie and Charlie got things to talk about. So beat feet and I mean fast."

Matilda hauled the girl to her feet, half-pushing, half-dragging her to the door.

Baker avoided looking at them but he could not shut out of his hearing the girl's cries. When the woman had taken her away, Rocky went to the door, slammed it shut and bolted it.

He came back and hooked an ankle around a straight-backed chair. He slid down on it, his arms around the back, his chin resting on them. He grinned at Baker.

He said, "I don't mind telling you, Eddie, when I heard the mob was sending you in on this

caper, I put up a beef. Not that I got anything against you personally. But I always reckoned that you had a soft spot; that underneath that veneer of yours, you were a weak sister. But maybe that's because I knew you when you were still wet behind the ears."

"That was a long time ago."

"Yeah. Too long. Anyway I can see I was mistaken. You're cool, Eddie. Real icy. The kind of boy we need. So let's do like Charlie says and get down to brass tacks. We got this caper all laid out, right down to a tee. And I don't need to tell you what happens if you mess it up."

"I won't."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk, boy. So listen careful. This is it."

Last night they'd given him a gun. Not a miniature revolver like the Beretta that nestled in his shoulder holster, but a heavy-barreled Luger. They'd given him bullets too. He had smiled inwardly when he weighted the Luger in his hand for he had known instantly by its balance that it was not loaded. The empty weapon was a dead giveaway that Rocky still distrusted him and feared him too. What had the Rock thought he might do? Turn the gun on him and Charlie Buck? Try to

kill them on the spot? Actually the idea had flashed through his mind, but he'd discarded it immediately. He would never have escaped from the bordello. Even if Charlie hadn't picked him off, there was the fierce police dog on the prowl outside. The clumsy locks on the door and gate which would have impeded his flight. And if he was to fulfill his pledge to Mara and Jorge he must remain alive. For a while at least.

Now it was mid-morning and he sat on the edge of his bed tossing one of the bullets in his palm. A Luger was not a gun that he would ever have chosen for himself. It was deadly at close range but unreliable, badly balanced and prone to jam. He broke the gun open thoughtfully and filled the chambers.

When he was finished, he carried it to the round marble-topped table in the center of the room and laid it down beside the sheaf of papers, the hotel pen, the clogged inkwell that were already there. He paced the room for a few minutes then sat down and slowly, laboriously began to write.

It was a long time since he had written a letter to anybody. His hand felt stiff and awkward. The words refused to come at first but after a while they flowed more easily.

He covered a sheet of paper, then a second and a third. He leaned back and rubbed the circulation into his cramped fingers then he picked up the pen again and, with a little flourish, attached his full name, Edward Charles Baker, to the last sheet.

He was folding the papers into an envelope when he heard the light tapping on his door. He froze into position momentarily, then dropped the envelope into his pocket and picked up the Luger.

He crossed warily to the door and stepped to one side, listening. The tapping sounded again, a little louder, more insistent. He depressed the lock, using the door as a shield, keeping the Luger ready. Instantly the door swung back until it struck against his shoe. He saw a waiter's white mess jacket first, then caught sight of the handsome, youthful face above it. Jorge Bonsaro. Damn the boy for a fool! What nonsense was he up to?

He drew the boy inside and then went to the hall. As far as he could see the corridors were deserted. He sighed, returned to the room and kicked the door shut after him.

He stood facing Jorge, not bothering to conceal his anger. "Why did you come here? I told you it might jeopardize the plan."

"For the letter."

"It was to be put in the mail."

"I know. But here in Havana the mails are not always reliable. Besides—" He broke off and had the good grace to flush. Baker knew what the boy had intended to say: that he could not be trusted to keep his word.

"Were you seen?"

The boy's eyes lighted with pride at his own cleverness and his speech lapsed into Spanish. "Most assuredly not. I came through the service entrance into the kitchen. I have friends who work there. They fitted me out with this." He touched the white mess jacket. "I ascended on the service elevator which I operated myself. There was no one in the corridor."

Baker felt a weariness creep over him. He was far from convinced that the youth's approach had been unobserved. Yet he had intended no harm. To Jorge politics was a game; espionage an adventure. He had no concept of the dark, deadly world in which Baker had spent most of his life.

Yet mixed with Baker's anger was a strange affection, made even stronger by its impersonal nature. He did not believe in the boy's cause. Eugenio Bonsaro might be all that Jorge conceived him to be. But a visionary can turn into a tyrant, im-

posing his will upon others by force. Power in the hands of the innocent may bring greater tragedy to a country than the restrained corruption of cynical men.

If his actions should help Cuba return to a democratic pattern of life, that was coincidental. The sacrifice he was prepared to make was not for a country, not for this boy, not even to avenge Mara or purge himself of his long festering hate for Rocky Roberts. His object was to assure the safety of the daughter whom he scarcely knew and whose innermost thoughts he could not guess.

He returned to the problem of the letter in his pocket. To the boy who had come for it. He must get Jorge out of the room as soon as possible. He wanted no fervent patriotic speeches. No expressions of gratitude. Only that Jorge should leave.

He thrust the letter into the boy's hand and turned abruptly, walking to the balcony. He remained with his back to the room, looking out over the Plaza with unseeing eyes. He could sense the boy's uncertainty, hear the slight shuffling of his feet. Then there was the sound of a door closing and Baker knew that he was alone.

Never before had he been so completely alone.

The Plaza seemed a huge

stage set. The tiled square, the faded pink stucco of a church tower, the arched porticos all formed a backdrop that could collapse at the touch of a hand.

Only the heat was real, palpable, drenching his clothing with sweat, sending crooked waves of golden light shimmering across his vision. This was the day, bright and clear, that he had chosen in which to wrench himself from the past and assert himself as a person capable of decision.

There were not many hours left. He could not wait for the courage that would be given him by the night with its darkness, its shadows, its countless hiding places. His mind slipped back to the plan that Rocky Roberts had outlined last night. How simple it had sounded at the time. Eugenio Bonsaro was scheduled to give a lecture at the University tonight. There would be a crowd, fearful and timid, yet filled with the hope that he could speak the words that would unite the dissident factors in Cuba's stormy political scene.

The hope would seem a feeble one. Yet both Montilla and Morales were apprehensive. A single sentence might spark a spontaneous demonstration that would transfer power into Bonsaro's hands. Each group had turned to the organization to

make certain that such an eventuality did not occur. And the organization was more than willing to act. A stable government in Cuba would mean the end of gun-running, wholesale gambling and the traffic in narcotics in which Havana was still the distributing center for the Western hemisphere.

Baker had interrupted at this point. If Morales had knowledge of the plan, why had Berto been sent to kill him?

Rocky's laughter had cackled. "You really got your wires crossed, Eddie boy. You had orders to make no contact and the first thing you do is get palsy with Karel. And Karel's been acting as a double agent for us and Bonsaro. Because of Irina, we reckoned he'd sell us out for a song. We attended to Karel but Morales wasn't satisfied. He got the crazy idea you might pull a switcheroo and hit him instead of Bonsaro. But we got things straightened out. You don't need to worry about Morales any longer. We're all in this together."

Baker had nodded and given his attention to the details of the plan as Rocky enumerated them.

Before the lecture Bonsaro would be dining in the private rooms above La Casa Rosita Blanca. The dinner would be small, intimate and the restau-

rant had been chosen because its proprietor was a staunch adherent of Bonsaro. But the Rock knew all the devious ways to strip a man of his loyalties. The proprietor had not been proof against the threat of death for himself and mutilation for his family. He had given his consent that one of the organization's men should be planted among his waiters. An inconspicuous man like Baker, who would draw no attention to himself until he was just behind Bonsaro, his gun cocked, the trigger ready to release the bullet that could not miss its mark.

After the assassination there would be flight. In his mind's eye, Baker could see himself racing down the service stairs across the gleaming kitchen, into the alleyway behind La Casa Rosita Blanca to the narrow zigzag street that lay beyond. He knew the route well. Rocky had taken him over it last night. Shown him the spot where Tico Alvarez would be waiting for him in a car, its engine running, ready to rush him to the airport where a private plane would be in readiness to fly him to Miami.

That was the plan as Rocky had told it to him. At another time Baker might have believed him. But his heightened perception warned him that the Rock lied. It would not serve

the purpose of the organization that the assassin should escape or that he should live long enough to defend himself in court or make a statement to the police. Baker must die. Perhaps he would be gunned down in the alley as he rushed from the restaurant. Or perhaps his murder had been assigned to Tico Alvarez. Without doubt, the organization already had a carefully concocted tale ready for release, complete with false documentation intended to prove that Baker was a hireling of American business interests. His passport, the five thousand dollars in American currency in the money belt around his waist would be additional touches calculated to set off an hysterical wave of hatred against the Yankee imperialists. And the organization, like a clever magician, would direct attention outward in order to clamp a reign of terror on the island republic.

Escape was still possible, Baker thought. With the money in his possession he might flee to one of the coastal towns and hire a fishing vessel to take him to the Florida coast or Haiti. And after that, what would be left for him? He would live as a hunted man knowing inevitably that the organization would track him down. Knowing with even greater certainty that the

Rock would make good his threat against Mara and Irina.

So he must act now. Quickly. Before the bright sunlight faded to dusk. He straightened himself and turned back to the hotel room. He stripped off the money belt, ripped the bills to shreds, took them to the bathroom and flushed them down the drain. The passport followed the bills. When he was finished, he smiled grimly to himself. Where he was going he needed neither money or a passport.

The Luger. He had almost forgotten it. He retraced his steps to the table where he'd left it. He lifted it gingerly. It was too big and clumsy for his needs. The Beretta would serve him better. He tossed the Luger onto the bed and covered it with the pillow.

He was ready to go now but some instinct drew him back to the balcony. In the narrow street below he saw the black top of the Jaguar as it angled to the curb. A moment later Irina stepped onto the sidewalk. The sun caught the soft glow of her hair and sparkled off the keys that dangled from her fingers.

She hesitated briefly, her eyes on the striped canvas marquee of the hotel. Then resolutely she crossed the street toward the entrance. What madness was drawing her into the circle of

danger in which he moved? He thought he knew the answer and felt life quicken within him, a sense of elation.

Mara must have told her the truth. More than anything else he wanted this moment with Irina when they should recognize each other as father and daughter, when he might encompass her in his arms.

But it must not be.

Any further contact would jeopardize her, render futile his hopes for her happiness.

He opened his lips to call her, to warn her to stay away. But if there was a watcher, that would increase her danger.

He must hurry down the stairway. Out the side entrance.

He left, letting the door swing wide behind him. When Irina arrived, she must find nothing but an empty room.

He was waiting with the patience of the practiced hunter, despite the rushing hours that were all that separated him from his appointment with death at La Casa Rosita Blanca.

Dusk was the deadline. If he had not acted by then the task which he had set for himself would be impossible. His failure to appear at the restaurant would be the signal for Rocky to unleash his goon squads, to scour the city in search of him.

The trail of Rocky Roberts

had not been difficult to pick up. A few questions, asked with seeming casualness in Chinatown bars, poolrooms and tawdry cafes were enough to bring forth a stream of information. The Rock was a name in the underworld. Shabby little men who had never come within ten feet of the Rock claimed to know all about him. Who his latest mistress was. The intricacies of his operations. His habits.

Most of what Baker heard was lies. But there was only one matter of real importance: How could he reach the Rock this afternoon? And now he had the knowledge for which he had been seeking. He had the Rock pin-pointed, knew exactly where he was. For a few minutes at least he could afford to take things easy.

He settled back on the red plush chair and crossed his ankles. He let a waiter place a frozen daiquiri on the glass table beside him. This was the lobby of the Hotel Barcelona-Madrid, the mecca of American tourists. The tables around him were filling up for the cocktail hour. He could hear the nasal twang of a woman speaking with the flat accent of the Midwest, the volley of excited Spanish from a Cuban family group. The words slid by him without registering.

His mind was filled with other matters.

Outside was the Prado, the raised marble walk burnished with the afternoon sun, the laurels crisp despite the heat. Not far from here was the spot where Karel had stopped him on his first day in the city. Beyond that was the narrow side street where Pablo, the old beggar, had met death in a recessed doorway.

His eyes flicked above the window to the strip of polished mirror which reflected the indicators of the rank of elevators at his rear. He was interested only in the last elevator in the row. The metal arrow was stationary at number fourteen. That meant that the cage was standing open at the roof. It was the only elevator that went that high.

The roof garden was a gambling casino, not yet open for the night's play. But the Rock was there. Making the weekly collections. Checking the roulette wheel. Perhaps having a drink with the manager or trading jokes with one of the dice girls. As long as the arrow remained still, time was suspended. There was no need for Baker to move.

He sipped from his frosted glass, tasting the sweet bitterness of the drink, feeling the coldness on his tongue. He

smiled as though some passing thought had given him pleasure. Then he glanced again at the reflection of the indicator. The slow circular movement of the arrow traced the car in its descent. He sighed, rose stiffly and walked without haste to the souvenir shop at the far end.

He stood before a counter, fingering a bracelet made of linked shells in the hollows of which were crude paintings of the Morro Castle, but his attention was fixed on the area in front of the elevators. The door of the end cage rolled back with mechanical precision. The first man out was short, stocky, with broad sloping shoulders. Even before he turned, Baker recognized him as Tico Alvarez. The tall man who was directly behind him had been his companion the night old Pablo had been killed. Baker groped for the name by which Karel had spoken of him, Johnnie Berg. That was it. The two men fanned out, one on either side of the elevator, their manner outwardly casual but their alertness only half concealed by their slouching bodies.

Baker lowered his head until the brim of his Panama shadowed his face even though he knew that the precaution was unnecessary. He had studied the way in which the glow of the overhead fluorescents was re-

fracted in the glass of the display window so that vision from outside was distorted.

The Rock had stepped out of the cage and was between the two men. He looked cool and comfortable in a white cord suit that set off his darkly handsome features. From a dozen tables in the lobby women turned to stare at him. He grinned and his teeth flashed as he made a little ducking motion that was almost a bow. Charlie Buck was at his heels, his ravaged face pale and wan in the artificial light.

They stood in a cluster for a few moments. Rocky was talking but there was no way for Baker to catch the words. Rocky linked his arm through Charlie Buck's, laughing as he did so. They started off, moving as a group. Rocky and Charlie walked together. Tico Alvarez ranged ahead of them by a dozen paces; Johnnie Berg lagged behind. Baker let out a sigh of relief as he saw the direction they were taking. Not across the lobby as he had feared, but along the corridor stretching to the right. At the far end of the corridor was a miniature barber pole.

This was the payoff for the hours spent in accumulating information about the Rock. Like many another criminal, Rocky was fascinated by barber shops. The daily shave, the manicure, the blandishments of the barber

were status symbols of the underworld. The Rock made a habit of dropping into a barber shop late each afternoon and his favorite was the one in the Barcelona-Madrid. The word had been passed around that if you were on the ropes and wanted to reach the Rock, the easiest way to do it was to way-lay him in the hotel corridor. If you called at his headquarters the chances were that you would get the bum's rush but here in the Barcelona-Madrid Rocky was likely to be in a mellow mood, enjoying the role of patron, distributing largesse to hangers-on.

As Baker watched the receding backs of the men, he saw a gaunt, gray-haired figure rise from a settee and take a lurching step toward the Rock. Tico Alvarez blocked his path. The squat bodyguard did a frisk job. Quick and neat. A tourist passing by could see it all and never guess what was happening.

Rocky waved the bodyguard aside and took out his wallet with a flourish. A bill passed hands. Big-hearted Rocky, Baker thought cynically. Always good for a touch. Providing you didn't try it more than once or twice a year.

He watched the Rock and his entourage until they disappeared into the barber shop.

Then he became aware of the curious gaze of the girl behind the counter.

He'd been standing here too long with the tawdry bracelet in his hand. He mustn't attract attention by lingering about idly. But still he had another ten minutes to kill. Five at least. And when he started into action there must be no hesitation; no interlude to unnerve him. He took the bracelet to the counter and purchased it, slipping the tinkling shells into his pocket.

He turned away and studied a rack of bright-hued postcards, watching the clock out of the corner of his eye. The minute hand dragged maddeningly but, now that he had made a purchase, the girl was no longer interested in him. Her head was bowed over a paperback novel.

Time to go at last. He started walking along the corridor, his footfalls nearly silent on the thick nap of the carpet. But he had no feeling of movement. It was as though he were rooted to one spot, watching his own figure becoming smaller and smaller. Then suddenly he was before the white door of the barber shop with its pebbled glass panel and its polished brass knob. His hand touched the metal and twisted. The door swung lazily inward.

His eyes swept the long narrow room. Tico Alvarez was

standing at the front of the shop, his back turned, looking out over the Prado. The thin bodyguard was hunched in a chrome and leather chair only a few feet away. Beyond him Rocky was sprawled in a reclining chair, his face covered with lather, a barber sheet with pin stripes of green draped over the upper part of his body. A white jacketed barber hovered over him, a straight edge razor poised above the lathered cheek. On the other side of the chair a manicurist in starched green uniform was holding Rocky's hand and laughing self-consciously. Charlie Buck was barely visible in the next chair, a barber working over him.

As Baker pushed his way in, Johnnie Berg jack-knifed to his feet and put out a restraining hand. Baker saw recognition followed by uncertainty. Berg swiveled toward the Rock and his mouth opened to speak. Before the words came, Baker struck hard across the man's windpipe with the flat of his hand. The bodyguard crashed backward and his head struck the base of the barber chair with a pulpy thud.

Baker jumped over him reaching for the Beretta in his shoulder holster. He knocked the barber to one side and stood over the reclining man.

He spoke softly. "Rocky."

The Rock's head rolled toward him and fear crawled into the bright eyes. Baker had no time for exultation. His finger was tightening on the Beretta's trigger. The gun bucked as he fired. The sound of the shot reverberated like thunder in the narrow tiled room. At the same time the manicurist screamed piercingly and her tray of instruments clattered to the floor.

The Rock's reflexes were quicker than Baker had imagined possible. He jerked upward before the bullet struck. It caught him beneath the shoulder blade and slammed him back in the chair but in the same movement his body arched and twisted and his feet thrust against the iron treadle. He flung himself sideways, but the arm of the chair and the barber sheet hampered his movements. Instead of rolling from the chair he hung over it, one arm dangling loosely, the fingers scraping at the tiles.

Baker fired again. This time the slug buried itself high in the Rock's back. A convulsive shudder passed through him. He toppled to one side and fell to the floor in an awkward heap.

He braced himself with his good arm and tried to writhe away. Baker tilted at an angle across the chair. His third shot opened a red wound in the base of Rocky's skull. The Rock's

arm buckled under him. He collapsed and lay still.

Baker straightened, the gun steady in his hand. The ashen-faced barber was backing away, unwittingly shielding him from attack by Tico Alvarez. The squat man was rushing toward him, the black snout of a Luger raised for action, but he held his fire for fear of striking one of his own men.

Baker snapped off a shot and saw the bullet whip at the body-guard's shirt sleeve. Alvarez dove for cover behind a barber's chair, slipped and fell to his knees. Baker glanced at Charlie Buck. Charlie had made no effort to rise but lay rigid in the chair, his hands clutching the leather armrests.

There was nothing to do now but run. Race into the bright sunlight. Run as fast and as far as he could, until he fell from exhaustion or a bullet brought him down. He flung the revolver away from him and spun about.

He had reached the door leading to the street when a bullet splintered the plate glass in front of him. He plunged on through, into the hot Havana afternoon. He dodged through traffic and leapt to the Prado. The crowd, withdrawing from danger, opened a path for him so that he could run hard and straight.

He ran alone through a tunnel of bright sunlight and the pathway that stretched ahead of him was narrow, without turning. The sounds of panic and confusion spread on every side but he was scarcely aware of them. The clatter of his own footsteps, the pumping of his heart absorbed the clamor of pursuit. The racing feet that followed him in his flight, the hoarse shouts that echoed along the Prado, the spat of a bullet on the tiles were all muted by an inward roar that was part terror and part triumph.

He had killed the Rock. In that the triumph lay. With the Rock dead, Mara and Irina would be safe. The organization would avenge the murder but they would be satisfied to exchange a life for a life. A single bullet-riddled body would be adequate to show that their authority could not be flaunted with impunity. The organization was impersonal, efficient as a machine. The price of betrayal was death. But there would be no fruitless reprisals. Once the penalty had been exacted, the score would be canceled.

His terror lay in the beauty that surrounded him. The warmth of the sunlight on his skin. The knowledge that the gaiety of the city would soon close in around him as though he had never existed. Havana

had reawakened his long dormant joy of living. This was not a city of shadows. It was rich with color, scents, sounds. It possessed the shape of reality but no longer would he be permitted to share a part in it.

He raised his eyes to the distant sea-wall. Beyond, the water was a lambent blue, streaked with the fiery sheen of the sun. The lighthouse of the Morro Castle glowed like amber and the pale escarpments had the delicate texture of tinted chalk.

He would make the sea-wall his goal. He could not hope to pass beyond it. He had reached the intersection where a street cut through the Prado. Three marble steps led downward to the black strip of asphalt. His arms raised automatically as he prepared himself to make the leap that would carry him to the roadway. As his feet left the walk, he felt the impact of the bullet. It caught him in mid-air, spinning him about with painless ferocity, so that instead of clearing the steps, he plummeted downward and lay spread-eagled at their base.

The sunlight was bright here. It shone on a crushed hibiscus blossom, a bit of discarded tinsel paper. His fingers groped toward the blossom and stopped. The glittering marble seemed to

reflect a face. Not Mara's. Not Irina's. But the flowering face of a city.

Cynicism had dominated the gray years of his life. But his pretence of indifference could no longer endure. Havana in its age-old beauty had revived the guttering flame of humanity within him, brought it to brief fruition. Havana could not be destroyed by the assault of men. It would survive. And perhaps, because of what he had done, he could possess some minute part of its vibrant life.

A shadow fell across him and he looked up. Tico Alvarez' squat figure loomed at the top of the steps, the polished black muzzle of his gun pointed downward.

The gun flashed and once more Baker felt a numbing blow that flattened him against the steps. The pain struck in an engulfing wave but it did not last long.

Dark shadows came creeping in, black and solid. Baker's head fell to one side and a smile puckered his lips. He had always been sure that death would come this way, that it was a shadowy void from which there was no waking. But now he knew that he was wrong, for all about him bright variegated light was bursting.

(Continued from Other Side)

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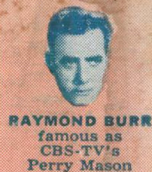
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