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Survival in Tartary

A New Russian Secret Police Story

by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

And Stories by

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PETER CHEYNEY
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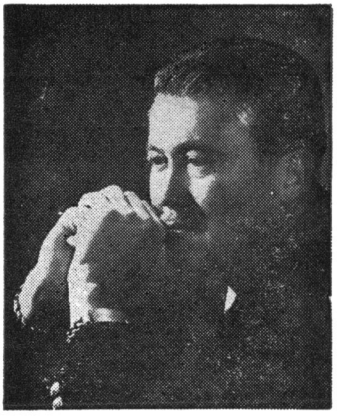
PLUS Others. . .



It may come as a jolt to some of you who have tended to adopt the premise that Charteris is always right, to have me admit that this is not strictly true. The unfortunate fact is that even I occasionally make mistakes.

In one of these disquisitions last year I advocated a wider use of lie detectors, truth serums, and similar scientific techniques, as a means of accelerating the wheels of justice and eliminating the possibilities of error inherent in more primitive trial procedures.

It has now been brought to my attention that West German law expressly stipulates that "a defendant's right to give or withhold information may not be influenced by maltreatment, fatigue, physical harm, drugs, torture, deception, or hypnosis" — thus lumping humane scientific techniques right in with all the Gestapo methods. An article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* went on to explain this deliberate inclusion:

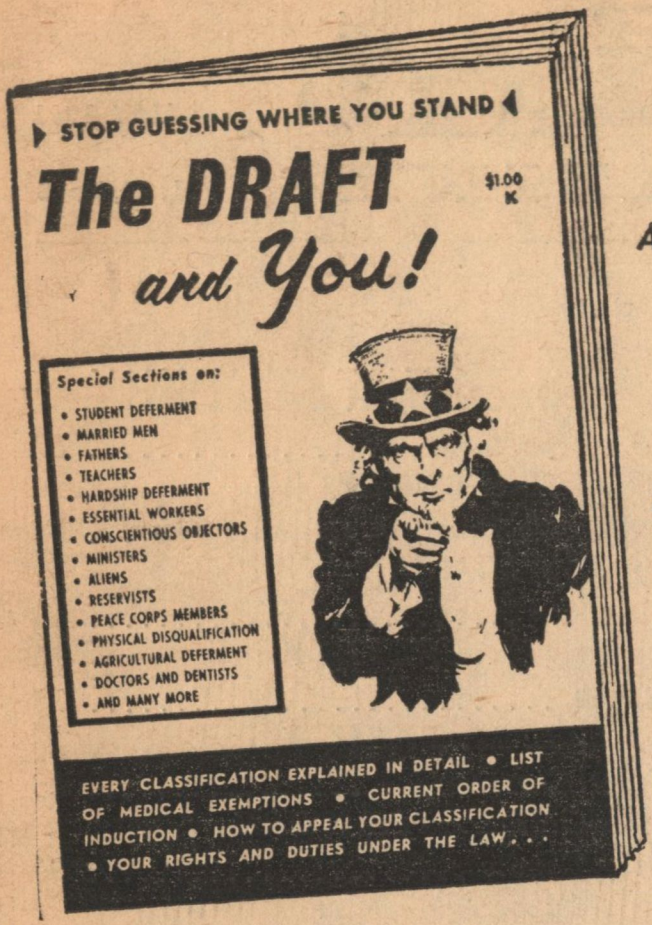
> Granted a few truth-inducing drugs are known to medicine, but they do not necessarily uncover the truth. In fact they tend to discolor it. Most criminalogists are of this opinion, including Dr. L. Heinrichs of the Dortmund police force. He has long been dealing with this problem.
>
> For example, he has long worked with scopolamine. It is used in psychiatry to calm schizophrenics or anyone else overwrought. It is also used on mentally disturbed patients. If dejection, listlessness, and lack of drive do not appear in encephalitis, the doctor will generally try a cure using a combination of drugs the main compound of which is scopolamine or its salts. It causes a sort of twilight sleep. The patient can be spoken to when in this state. He hears questions directed at him and seems to give answers automatically. So far, so good. ***But it need not be the truth he is speaking.*** Reality and fantasy, insanity and wishful thinking mix. Nothing is held back. But how is one to distinguish between reality and fantasy?

The italics are mine, but the dictum is unequivocal. There are, it seems, dangers in accepting the verdict of these serums of which I had been unaware. And it seems logically to follow that the same objections might apply to the acceptance of hypnosis. Besides which, if a hypnotized subject can be made to believe he is sweltering in a freezing room, an unscrupulous hypnotist might force him to make a completely false confession. This leaves us only the polygraph to fall back on, and even the proponents of that machine concede that its efficacy depends largely on the skill of the operator: it is not mechanically infallible like a computer.

So let me stand corrected.

However, this does not shake my wish and my conviction that some method less dicey than the appeal of forensic histrionics to a jury of indeterminate IQ could be found to establish guilt or innocence. A technology which can send a man to the moon should be capable of devising some foolproof test of whether he is telling the truth.

Leslie Charteris



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Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

Hans Stefan Santesson
Editor

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survival in tartary

George Fielding Eliot

On the morning of his forty-first birthday, Guards Lieutenant General of Armored Troops Aleksandr Mikhailovich Mirov awoke with the happy realization that another year had rolled by and the axe hadn't fallen yet. The April sunshine flooding through his bedroom windows seemed of good omen. He jumped out of bed and headed for his shower, putting firmly aside his annual bittersweet birthday indulgence of allowing himself to think about Irena. That could wait awhile. Let's live a little first, Mirov, and enjoy the sun.

Twenty minutes later he swung his scarlet jeep in a long curve up the graveled approach road to the headquarters building of Orelsk Armored Training Center, parked in the No. 1 space and strode briskly through the open gateway and along the walk toward the entrance—a lean, long-legged man whose gait and bearing alone would

The Russian Secret Police is waiting to see who will win — the friends-of-Peking, or those in the Kremlin and in the Russian Army who feel that "this time the danger comes not from the West, but from the East." Major George Fielding Eliot, the noted military analyst and historian, returns with this dramatic story of what happens as the KGB again tangles with Colonel General Mirov, Commander East Kazakhstan Weapons Testing Area.

have labelled him "soldier" anywhere in the world. This morning he wore a smartly-tailored khaki gimnastyerka—the pullover shirt of the Soviet field uniform—and khaki breeches. The twinkle of his mirror-polished boots matched the twinkle of the twin silver stars on his moss-green shoulder boards. His service cap, with its black velvet band of the Armor branch, was set at a slight angle on his blond hair; under its visor, bright blue eyes looked out from a thin, deep-tanned face. The laughter lines at the eye corners were offset by the pale slash of a scar from ear to chin—a souvenir of a German shell fragment of twenty years ago—which drew the right side of the face a trifle out of balance with the left, producing a faintly sinister effect.

The sentries on either side of the stone steps which led up to the doorway snapped to Present Arms with a smart slapping of calloused palms on carbine stocks.

"Greetings, soldiers," said Mirov, hand at visor.

"Birthday greetings, *General-Leitnant,*" chorussed the sentries, grinning broadly.

Their obvious delight in this salutation set the tone for a promising morning, Mirov told himself.

As he reached the top of the steps, a chunky officer wearing the black shoulder-boards of a colonel of artillery came out through the high double doors. At sight of Mirov he halted, faced inward with a loud heel-click and stiffened in a parade-ground salute.

"Good morning, Colonel Baranin," said Mirov, returning the salute.

"Good morning, *General-Polkovnik,*" Baranin answered, with no trace of expression on his face or in his voice.

The sensitive nerve-ends of Mirov's internal alarm system were instantly aquiver. Officers assigned by the Committee of State Security (KGB) to counter-intelligence duty with the Army wore Army uniforms as a matter of routine, but rarely troubled themselves with Army courtesies. Baranin had been on duty at Orelsk for several weeks now; this was the first time he'd ever thrown a salute at the commanding general. Or a word that he could avoid. So why this big salute now, demanded the alarm system—and why does he make the fool mistake of calling you *General-Polkovnik* – Colonel-General – with those two stars looking him in the eye? Invisibly, Mirov shrugged. KGB people didn't make mistakes like that as a rule. But it did no good to ask them questions, either. Mirov kept straight on across

the wide hall and into his office by his private door.

"Good morning and happy birthday, *General - Polkovnik!*" roared a dozen voices. The room was full of officers—his grizzled second in command, Major General Kirillovich, several heads of staff sections, the commanders of the training regiments and Mirov's young aide, Captain Andreyev. All were beaming.

"May I have the pleasure of handing you this message personally, General?" cried Kirillovich. "It arrived just after you had left your *dacha,* so we could not notify you by telephone."

Mirov stared at the scrap of fflimsy blue paper—a standard Army tele-printer form with a Moscow dateline.

The words—a duly authenticated extract from the official Army Gazette—seemed to run together. He forced himself to read them carefully:

"Guards Lieutenant General of Armored Troops Mirov, A. M., to be Colonel General of Armored Troops, with immediate effect. By direction of the Minister of Defense—"

An orderly with a tinkling tray came through the door from Andreyev's office.

"My heartiest congratulations, *General - Polkovnik!*" Mirov heard Kirillovich saying—all the others cried assent—there was a glass in his hand, he felt the bite of the brandy in his throat —someone, Andreyev probably, had remembered his distaste for vodka. He ought to be excited. He *was* excited. But deep within him, the alarm buzzers were sounding again.

He had already been promoted to major general and lieutenant general ahead of many who were his seniors in age and length of service. Now he was being jumped to colonel general—the highest rank that an Armor officer might normally expect to reach—over the heads of half the lieutenant generals of the Armor branch. This one isn't for free, Mirov, his warning system told him. This one will have a price tag on it.

Kirillovich clinked glasses with him.

"Your distinguished career, General, is becoming a legend!" he boomed. "For myself, it warms my heart to see soldierly merit rewarded in this man's Army as well as political bootlicking. Health and long life to our Colonel General! Drink deep, comrades!"

The comrades drank deep, amidst approving clamor.

There were not many headquarters in the Army where such a toast would have been openly proposed and enthusiastically received. Even as he found words of grateful response, Mirov took note that

neither the chief nor the deputy chief of his political affairs section were in the room, which meant they simply hadn't been invited. For Kirillovich to dare to offer the hated but dangerous *zampolits* such a snub was significant of his confidence in what he was pleased to call the Mirov legend. Mirov found himself hoping the confidence wasn't misplaced.

"You'll have a lively day out in the training areas, General," one of the regimental commanders was saying. "The world'll be spreading among the men in no time at all. They'll go wild. I don't have to tell you how well you're loved by Ivan."

"I may not make my usual rounds today, Colonel," said Mirov quickly. "There's a lot of paper work piling up here that I've got to give thought to."

Also I can do without any public demonstration just now, he could have added.

Becoming a legendary figure in the Soviet Army was a distinction attended with very definite occupational hazards.

Afterward, when they had left him to himself, Mirov sat at his desk and did some hard thinking. The Mirov legend – if it could be called that–had an appealing exterior simplicity: the legend of the plain, blunt soldier, lacking the intellectual attainments necessary for the General Staff or even for a course at Frunze Staff College, but valued by his superiors as a troop leader of unusual quality and hence allowed to pursue a career spent entirely with troops, free of the periodic educational-cum-indoctrination requirements of the normal career pattern. Actually the Mirov legend was a work of art, of careful devising and thoughtful development. It was the work of Mirov himself in its details, but it was dependent for its long-continued survival on the clandestine benevolence of Marshal of the Soviet Union Vassili Vassilievich Yanovsky. Yanovsky was something of a legend himself, though not a legend about which vulgar curiosity was openly displayed. Emerging from the Great Fatherland War with a battlefield reputation scarcely inferior to Zhukov's or Konev's, he had contrived to rise to astrometrical eminence at the clouded summit of the Soviet Olympus. He held no formal office, he was not even listed as a member of the all-powerful Central Committee of the Party, as were many other Marshals; but all those Marshals, even the grim Minister of Defense, were said to speak very softly, if at all, in his presence. Whom Yanovsky cherished, he had power to protect. The durability of the Mirov legend was

sufficient proof of that fact.

If Mirov really had been the plain, blunt (and dumb) soldier he sought to appear, he might have gone on believing that the Marshal's gratitude for that wartime affair during the bitter winter campaign of 1944 in East Prussia was still warmly alive after twenty years. The tank brigade in which the then Major Mirov commanded a battalion had been rolling forward in the usual Soviet set-piece attack when it ran into a beautifully arranged German artillery ambush. Soviet tactical doctrine demanded that under such conditions everybody kept going right ahead regardless. Young Major Mirov, then as always the soldier's soldier, saw no sense in stupidly throwing away the lives of his men. He changed direction, leading his battalion to the left where a little valley offered some protection, and began to regroup, being joined by fragments of other battalions. At this point the brigade political officer arrived in a jeep, accompanied by several self-propelled anti-tank guns manned by special MVD troops, and demanded that Mirov resume the original direction of advance —or else. In the ensuing confusion, the political officer had the misfortune to be run over by Mirov's command tank, and the MVD people were wiped out before they could fire a shot—wiped out by German shellfire, according to the subsequent testimony of every surviving officer and man of Mirov's force. Thereafter Mirov led his command up the valley and hurled it on the flank of a German infantry division, which was confidently storming forward to exploit the gap in the Soviet battlelines presumed to have been opened by the smashing of the tank brigade by the German guns. The division, caught off balance, was torn to pieces—and since, if it had been allowed to proceed undisturbed, it would have torn to pieces the rising military reputation of Army General Yanovsky, then commanding the Sixth Byelorussian Front, that gentleman took a dim view of complaints which presently reached him as to Mirov's conduct regarding the political officer. He sent for Mirov, pinned upon the latter's shirt his own Gold Star Medal and gave him a battlefield promotion to lieutenant colonel in the outraged but helpless presence of the Front's senior *zampolit*—to whose bitter protests and thinly veiled threats the General responded with an earthy evaluation of the comparative military worth, in his opinion, of one tank leader like Mirov as against an entire trainload of *zampolits*.

A week later, Yanovsky re-

ceived his Marshal's baton.

It had been the memory of this incident which had emboldened Mirov to seek help from Yanovsky when he discovered the vast difference between being an officer in the Soviet Army in wartime when the Party bosses needed the Army to save their own necks and places of power, and the conditions of peacetime when the Party bosses began worrying about keeping the Army in a proper state of subordination.

Mirov's problem was simply that he was unalterably a soldier's soldier and not a politicians's soldier. From his father, a Czarist officer of distinction who had gone right on serving the Soviets, he had inherited a straightforward creed: the duty of a Russian officer is to defend the Motherland regardless of what brand of politicians may be running the government, to obey orders, to look after his men—and himself to shun politics as he would the horns of the devil. Four years of bitter wartime experience with the results of political meddling in military matters had burned these maxims indelibly into youg Mirov's martial soul. Seniors like Yanovsky who knew how to value a brilliant, hard-fighting subordinate had taken care that Mirov came to no harm. But with the return of peace, all this was changed. The Army was immediately subjected to a thorough and continuous regime of political indoctrination, in which all must participate—officers most conspicuously and diligently. Seniors grew cautious, advised abject compliance. The Army Political Administration turned out to have a long memory and a considerable dossier on one A. M. Mirov. The Gold Star Medal with its accompanying title of Hero of the Soviet Union helped Mirov scrape along for a time, but he realized that wartime glamor would not protect him indefinitely. Sooner or later he would find himself trapped by the basic contradictions between his own temperament and truckling—plus the obvious ill-will of the *zampolits*.

The basic idea of the Mirov legend had come to him like sunlight breaking through dark clouds—it was really Irena who had shown him the way to relative security, though she hadn't meant to. But the image of the plain blunt soldier, too stupid to understand the complexities of politics and hence no political threat to anyone, but a fine troop leader who could be valuable to the national security in that capacity—that image, to be preserved for any length of time required a military protector and patron who had the power

to preserve it and the desire to do so. It was on this basis that Mirov had sought out Marshal Yanovsky, and found that officer possessed of both the power and the desire to keep the Mirov legend – and Mirov himself – alive and flourishing through the years.

But that Yanovsky's continued protection was motivated by an inexhaustible flow of gratitude for the East Prussian affair, Mirov had long since ceased to believe. On Olympus, gratitude was not all that durable. Yanovsky had a use for Mirov, and Mirov was being carefully preserved against the hour of Yanovsky's need for him. Mirov had begun to weave together threads of fact and imagination into a pattern of what that need might amount to. Now maybe he was to find out whether his pattern came anywhere near the truth.

Certainly Yanovsky realized that this premature promotion to colonel general made Mirov really conspicuous for the first time–the object of jealous comment and speculation throughout the Army. Almost certainly it heralded a change of station, a new assignment: colonel general was far too senior a grade for the Orelsk command. Mirov felt a quick stir of excitement as he reached this conclusion. If he had guessed right–

Take it easy, advised his warning system. You know you've been living in a fool's paradise for sixteen years. You're overdue for trouble.

Oh, well–here he was, anyway, a colonel general at 41. Not a bad birthday present. Maybe Irena would hear of it, and remember another birthday–

"Mail's just in, *General-Polkovnik*," said Andreyev, coming through the door from the staff office. "Nothing official from Moscow of any consequence."

He laid a pile of papers and manila folders on Mirov's desk, several of them adorned with colored tags indicating their relative claims to early attention. On top of the pile was a small square envelope, unopened.

Mirov sat quite still, staring unbelievingly at the superscription. The last time he had seen that handwriting had been exactly sixteen years ago, on the morning of his twenty-fifth birthday.

He dismissed the aide with a gesture, snatched up the little envelope and ripped it open.

Inside was a fold of note paper, with more of that remembered script: "Congratulations, dear Shaska! . . . . . "

So she still remembered his old nickname, which meant "Saber" and had attached itself to him at Leningrad Cadet School where he had been saber-fencing champion. Irena had

never really liked that nickname that she used it now seemed almost an offered caress. He read on:

". . . . .I was wrong to call you a frustrated Viking!

Wherever you are carving your way to, you seem to be getting there!

Do you remember the last letter I wrote you, just sixteen years ago today? I said then that if you wanted to see me again, you would know where to find me, and sent you my Moscow address. ... ...

Isn't it silly of me to be writing you the very same thing now after all that time?

Happy birthday, dear Shaska!

Irena."

That was all, save for a Moscow street address and apartment number, with "Dr. I. I. Verskaya" added in parentheses.

Sixteen years ago she had been Irena Firubova. Maybe she thought he didn't know her married name—or perhaps had never heard of her marriage to the esteemed Academician Verski of the State Agricultural Survey?

He'd heard, all right. And now, it seemed, she had heard something about him. But—

He glanced again at the envelope. It was addressed to Colonel General A. M. Mirov. Yet the letter had been posted in Moscow yesterday—how had she known of his promotion before the Army Gazette was published this morning? Had somebody told her—for somebody's own reasons?

Mirov walked over to the window, staring out into the sunshine. The sun here on the Great Russian Plain wasn't as hot and bright in April as the sun on that Crimean beach had been sixteen years ago—

Doctor Verskaya. Doctor of Electrical Sciences Verskaya. She'd been married just after she'd received her degree, the degree on which she'd set her heart. What was she doing now? Rising in her chosen profession, without doubt. But what did she want with Mirov? And where was her good husband, the Academician, that she permitted herself the amusement of writing to an old flame? Mirov had seen Verski once, at a reception in Khabarovsk where Mirov had then commanded the 41st Mechanized Division. A fat, self-satisfied little man with a pasty-white face and thick glasses. Irena hadn't been with him, for which Mirov had been grateful. He remembered thinking she'd probably be running to fat herself by that time.

But sixteen years ago yesterday, she'd been lying beside him on a beachrobe in the Black Sea sunshine, slim, lovely and delightful.

For what had followed, Mirov possessed total recall. He stood there at the window, living it all through once more as he had done on every birthday since that one . . . .

The girl who lay beside him laughed, and kissed him once more with soft lingering lips. Then she twisted out of the crook of his arm and sat up, the laughter fading from her brown eyes.

"Now, then, my Shashka," she said firmly, "don't think that I'm forgetting you'll be twenty-five years old tomorrow. I want to know what you've done about applying for admission to the Frunze Staff Academy?"

In the two weeks since Colonel Mirov of the Sevastopol garrison had first met Irena Firubova, vacationing from her Moscow University science classes, they had come a long way together—all the way to plans for the future. But as to the shape of that future, these two were not in agreement. Irena wanted Mirov to qualify for the General Staff, so that he could be stationed in Moscow, where a girl could have her cherished scientific career and her soldier too. Not for Irena Firubova the dreary round of dull garrison towns like Sevastopol, where soldiers had to live who stuck to plain soldiering. Irena was fired with the new spirit of Soviet youth. Irena was ambitious. Irena was going places. If Mirov wanted Irena, he could have her—she had made that plain. But she had also made it plain that he must be going places too. All for love and the world well lost was an idea for which Mirov could find no acceptance in Irena's practical mind.

But he still didn't quite know how to tell her in plain words exactly why he was not, repeat not, going to apply for admission to Frunze. He had already faced that issue and made his decision. Right now he was clinging grimly to the command of a tank regiment here at Sevastopol, three years after V-E day, waiting for the orders "Frunze or else" that were sure to catch up with him before long. He wanted to stay on in the Army; he would be miserable out of uniform. But the accepted career pattern made a course at Frunze almost essential for promotion beyond colonel. And he knew himself too well to have any hope of surviving the ideological booby-traps of the staff academy. That way lay the slippery slope to oblivion.

Nor could he hope to make Irena even begin to understand the reason why he had to say "No" to Frunze—and, if necessary, to her.

Instead he reached for her to

offer argument on a different level. She pushed him away. The tiny gold specks in the brown eyes took on a hard glitter, which experience had taught him was a bad sign.

"Answer my question, you great barbarian!" she snapped.

"Be careful, darling," grinned Mirov."Don't rouse the barbarian blood in me. Did I ever tell you that the Mirov family can claim descent from Rurik the Northman, founder of the Russian Empire?"

"That explains it!" flashed Irena. "Just look at you, Aleksandr Mikhailovich! Yellow hair, blue eyes, a martial strut that would do credit to Rurik himself—and no brains for anything but fighting! You're even proud of a nickname that comes from wasting your time at saber-fencing when you were a cadet, instead of applying yourself to your books! You're just a frustrated Viking, that's what you are—born a thousand years too late to copy Rurik and start carving your way to a throne!"

Her words exploded in his mind like a flash-bomb.

Why, she must actually think I'm too dumb to pass the Frunze entrance examination, he realized. Tumbling over the heels of that idea came another—if my brilliant Irena, after being with me the greater part of every day for two weeks, really believes I've no brains for anything but fighting, maybe other people can be induced to see me in the same light. Maybe I can set up an image of Mirov the frustrated Viking—too dumb for Frunze and star duty, but a damned fine troop commander—that might do me some good with one or two star-studded old gentlemen I knew in the war who have a lot more respect for good troop-leading than they have for paper shuffling. Like for instance Marshal Yanovsky, who's due here tomorrow morning to inspect the garrison. But will Irena go along with that? How can I even start to explain it to her?

Irena was getting to her feet.

"Wait, baby," he began desperately—but Irena didn't wait to hear any more. She ran off the beach toward her hotel, her dark hair flying out behind her like a defiant banner. In the morning came her letter saying that she was taking the early plane back to Moscow and giving an address where, if Mirov wanted to see her again, he could find her. When he came to Moscow to prepare for the Frunze examination, that is.

He had that letter in his pocket when he went in to see Marshal Yanovsky, to be received more cordially than he had dared to hope. The Army he found he could have, after all. But not Irena. . . . . .

And now what, Colonel Mirov asked himself. Now, after sixteen years, she's writing me again to tell me where to find her, without any conditions attached this time. Why? Just for fun and games, while her fat husband is off in some place like Khabarovsk? Or—

The hell with wondering why.

He jammed his thumb on the buzzer; Andreyev appeared at the door.

"I've decided to take three days' leave to celebrate my birthday," Mirov told him. "Please so inform General Kirillovich with my compliments, and order me a place on the noon courier plane to Moscow."

"I'll see to it, General. A fine idea, if you'll permit me to say so," Andreyev said. "You've earned a holiday, and you almost never take one."

You just couldn't guess what a fine idea it is, my lad, thought Mirov gaily. He pushed away the papers and began pacing the floor with eager strides, as though every step brought him closer to Moscow.

Aleksandr Mikhailovich, his alarm system was saying sternly, you're shoving under the rug the question you need to have answered—how did Irena find out about your promotion before it was published? Who that was in a position to know about it told her, and why?

Get lost, false alarm, said Mirov from the heart.

Wishful thinking isn't like you Aleksandr Mikhailovich, the alarm system retorted.

Just the same, I'm going to see Irena, come hell or high water—

The door opened.

"Moscow calling on the special line, *General-Polkovnik*," announced Andreyev.

Damn the special line. Nobody was going to interrupt his leave.

"Colonel General Mirov speaking," he barked into the telephone. Some eager General Staff egghead was about to get a flea in his ear.

"One moment, Comrade General, if you please." There was a click, then a deep rumbling voice :

"Good morning, Mirov. Yanovsky here."

"Good morning, Comrade Marshal," said Mirov, hastily smoothing out his manner of speech.

"An aircraft is due to land on your field in fifteen minutes," the Marshal informed him. "You 'll be there, ready to board it. It will bring you to the military airport in Moscow, where a car will be waiting to take you to my office."

"Understood, Comrade Marshal."

"Understand one thing more," rumbled the Marshal. "You are to inform no one where you are going, or that you have spoken with me. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Comrade Marshal. Except that my second-in-command should know when I—"

"That will be attended to," cut in Yanovsky. "Just do exactly as I've ordered, and keep your mouth shut in the meantime."

The phone clicked sharply by way of punctuation. . . . . .

The Marshal's personal adjutant—as sleekly groomed as any of his ilk to be found in the Pentagon or Whitehall—halted before an unmarked door at the end of the long corridor, knocked twice and swung the door open without waiting for permission. He stood aside for Mirov to pass him, his manner contriving to suggest his disapproval of a general officer who would venture to report to a Marshal of the Soviet Union wearing a *gimnastyerka.*

Mirov strode across the threshold, advanced six paces on the thick-piled carpet, brought his heels together and saluted the granitic Presence behind the broad walnut desk.

"Reporting as ordered, Comrade Marshal."

Behind him he heard the click of the closing door.

"Sit down," rumbled the Presence, nodding toward a chair at the end of the desk.

Mirov obeyed. Marshal Yanovsky swung round to face him —a bulky man with a dozen rows of medal ribbons across the left breast of his blue-green service jacket. The square hard chin—the spade-like hands gripping the chair arms—the deep-socketed steely eyes—all were eloquent of power. Age had touched the Marshal but lightly. Only the sprinkle of grey in the busy black hair and eyebrows, the deepening lines in the red-granite face marked the passage of sixty-odd years. There was no paunch below the ribbon-rows, no faltering in the heavy voice.

"You're improperly dressed, *General-Polkovnik,*" the Marshal announced.

"I didn't have time to change Mirov began.

"Not that," interrupted the Marshal. "You need another star on your shoulder boards."

"It's a need I have to thank you for, Comrade Marshal."

"I'm glad you realize it," the Marshal rumbled. "You've a lot more than that to thank me for. Which is what we're going to talk about. Play-time's over, Mirov. Pay-off time's arrived."

Mirov sat still and waited, excitement stirring deep within.

"You haven't supposed," the Marshal went on, "that I've

been nursing you along all these years just because I like your pretty blue eyes, have you? When you came to see me in Sevastopol sixteen years ago, with your silly yarn about how you weren't smart enough for staff college but couldn't you go on serving with troops anyway, I opened my mouth to ask you what sort of idiot you took me for. Then it suddenly occurred to me that the day might come when the army would need just such an officer as I knew you to have the makings of, and need him badly."

Mirov's excitement rose—so his pattern wasn't too far off the mark!

"At that time," the Marshal was continuing, "I was only a military district commander: but I had some notion of where I might be headed. There'd been some very cautious mention among a few senior officers that Stalin's days were getting shorter, that Beria and his secret police were all set to take over, and that the Army's duty must be to see that this didn't happen. We had no favorite candidates for high office, nor any silly notion of a military seizure of power: we were just determined not to have a police yoke fastened to our necks. When the time came, Marshal Zhukov took the lead. I was at first one of his enthusiastic supporters. But Zhukov had no political balance. He made himself publicly conspicuous—a threat rather than a support to the Party leaders. So when they no longer needed him, they got rid of him. Fortunately for myself—and for you, Mirov—I had drawn away from him in time, and made other connections. The politicians still needed a direct and reliable link with the Army—but an invisible link. I became that link. Today I am trusted as a loyal Russian soldier by the Army professionals—except, of course, the new breed of technicians—and I'm trusted by the present Party leadership as a silent soldier who knows on which side his bread is buttered and whose advice has proven worth listening to on more than one occasion. You'll be wondering why I'm telling you all this. It's because the time's come when I need you, just as I foresaw long ago. Against that need, I've kept you alive and kicking for sixteen years. It hasn't been easy for me to do that, I'd like you to understand."

"I suppose not, Comrade Marshal," Mirov acknowledged.

"You know damned well not," the Marshal barked. "The Army Political Administration has a lot of connections with people in the upper levels of the Party hierarchy, and the APA has developed an acute distaste for

you and your methods. For one thing, they've never forgotten that you knocked off that stupid *zampolit* in East Prussia—which to them is unforgivable besides setting a dangerous precedent. Then you've gone on year after year, training soldiers in your soldierly fashion, but finding excuses to cut down on prescribed political indoctrination, giving your men time off to do with as they please, allowing your noncommissioned officers a degree of authority unheard of elsewhere in the Army. All of which adds up, in the APA's books, to the deliberate development of a dangerous cult of personality centered on yourself. By that sin fell Zhukov."

"And I'm no Zhukov," granted Mirov, seeing that the Marshal expected him to say something. "But I've been fortunate in having the guidance of a great soldier who has managed to survive and go on serving his country because, unlike Marshal Zhukov, he put the country and the Army ahead of his own personal ambitions."

"At any rate I've had sense enough to keep any ambitions I may be cherishing out of sight," the Marshal answered. "Just as I've kept you more or less out of sight in Siberia and Central Asia for a good many years. The pressures for conformity tend to diminish the farther one gets from Moscow."

Mirov turned that one over in his mind. Orelsk had been his first assignment to a command in European Russia since he'd been under Yanovsky's protecting wing. All the rest of the time he'd been on duty east of the Urals.

The Marshal, following Mirov's train of thought, nodded.

"I brought you to Orelsk a year ago because I realized I might need you in a hurry. It was a risk, since it brought you under closer scrutiny from the APA's center of authority. I'm told they have a dossier on you that fills a couple of filing cases, and, they're getting bitter because they can't do anything about it but go on building up their files. You'll doubtless be delighted to learn that one very senior *zampolit* wrote of you not too long ago: 'This general officer has elevated to the level of an exact science a capability of producing ironclad excuses, supported by official texts, for doing exactly as he likes.' "

Mirov grinned.

"The regulations have been rewritten and revised so often that you can prove anything from 'em with a little study," he observed.

"You find that amusing, eh?" growled the Marshal. "Now I'll tell you something that won't amuse you. About a week ago

I realized that the KGB is beginning to take an interest in your affairs."

Mirov's stomach knotted. There was indeed nothing amusing about the Committee of State Security. He recalled Baranin's queer attitude. The Marshal was still talking—

"Of course the APA has both direct and clandestine connections with the KGB. I've no doubt that some high-level *zampolit,* tired of filing reports about you which produce no results, has taken it on himself to suggest to the KGB that they ought to have a look at your dangerous cult of personality. I'll find out who he was in due time, whereafter he'll find out how he likes being stationed somewhere north of the Arctic Circle for the next few years. But I can't deal with the KGB in any such summary fashion—and I can't take the smallest risk of any difficulties where you're concerned, just when I need you. So I've got to move you out of the mainstream of KGB interest and attention a little sooner than I'd planned."

"At your orders, Comrade Marshal," said Mirov steadily.

"Naturally," agreed the Marshal. "What else? Mirov, I want you to understand that the Motherland is in mortal danger. More so, even, than when the Hitlerite armies were gathering on our western borders. This time—"

He paused, his steel-gray eyes probing into Mirov's.

"This time," said Mirov with calm certainty, "the danger comes not from the west, but from the east."

"Excellent!" rumbled the Marshal. "You haven't spent fifteen years in Asia for nothing—another reason why I kept you there. I've made the military character of the danger clear to my political masters, and suggested certain remedial measures—toward which I've been given reluctant authority to initiate the necessary preparations. Now maybe you begin to understand why I have need of an officer of your special gifts."

Mirov's inner excitement was coming back. The pattern still fitted!

"I might understand a little more clearly, Comrade Marshal," he suggested, "if I knew which of my special gifts, as you're good enough to call them, you find particularly suited to your needs."

The red-granite segmentations of the Marshal's face underwent the slight rearrangement which, with the Marshal, did duty for an approving smile.

"Fairly put," he said. "I'll give you a fair answer. You love soldiers. They know it, and they love you for it. Suvarov had that

gift. So did Skobelev and Nikolai Nikolaievich—yes, and your own father. It can be a dangerous gift these days—cult of personality and all that rot—but the man who has it can lead Russian soldiers to storm the gates of hell."

"Then," commented Mirov, "you're not thinking of an all-out preventive war in the east. You're thinking in terms of a limited-objective operation, within dimensions which permit personal leadership to be fully effective."

"You think fast, Mirov," the Marshal approved. "And you're right again. But there's one further limitation—invisibility."

Again his eyes challenged Mirov for an answer.

"There's only one place on earth where military operations of any size have taken place and remained pretty much invisible to the rest of the world—and could do so again," Mirov said. "That's in the heart of Asia, where Russia and China meet. My father was killed there in a secret war against the Japanese back in the mid-1920's."

"I was standing within ten yards of him when he was hit," the Marshal observed quietly. "A fragment of the shell that killed him gave me a thigh wound that troubles me yet in damp weather."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mirov. "I had no idea—"

"There was no need to inform you, until now," interrupted the Marshal. "Just the same, the fact that you are your father's son is one reason you're sitting where you are at this moment. He was a Russian soldier first and everything else a long way afterward. As I think you are, as I hope I am. He died defending the Motherland against the threat from the east. The threat's still with us, and it's attaining dimensions which even your father's gifted foresight couldn't have anticipated. Come over here."

He rose ponderously from his chair and strode to a paneled wall near his desk. At a touch, the panels slid aside; behind them was a steel shutter, which the Marshal unlocked and rolled up, revealing a large map of Soviet Central Asia and the adjoining Chinese province of Sinkiang—or East Turkestan, as Soviet nomenclature preferred to call it. The map was covered by a transparent overlay, liberally bespread with lines, symbols and arrows in red and blue crayon.

"The old romancers used to call this region the fabled land of Tartary," the Marshal stated. "Today, on both sides of the frontier, what's going on would have put the most fanciful of romancers to shame. Here and

here and here—" his blunt finger moved from one red-crayoned symbol to another—"are the test installations, the research facilities, the experimental laboratories of our missile and space programs. Here and here, also, are industrial centers of great importance to our defense production. We chose these locations originally to be as far out of reach of American sea-launched weapons as possible. But now—" his finger shifted suddenly to a group of blue symbols on the Chinese side of the border—"we have a new threat to face, a threat which may be launched from a site within easy range of our vital installations. This place is the terminus of the railway the Chinese have built into Sinkiang, 1300 miles of line from Lanchow along the old Silk Route. In fact it is something more than just a rail terminus. It is the site at which our dear comrades in Peking are working night and day to develop nuclear weapons and launching facilities – with which to blackmail us and terrorize all their Asian neighbors."

"So that's it," said Mirov. His imagined pattern hadn't included that item, but it fitted the rest of the pattern perfectly. You're being told much too much to be turned loose again, Mirov, his warning system was informing him. Whatever's coming, you're already committed to it. Or else. But "or else" be damned. His inner excitement was getting out of hand.

"Stop champing at the bit and listen carefully," the Marshal bade him. "You can't go at this business with a 'draw swords and hurrrraaa!' like a Cossack captain charging at the head of his sotnia. I'd better make it clear to you that the orders under which I am acting place definite limits on even my own freedom of action. What's involved here is nothing less than whether our country shall continue to be ruled by those who put the interests of Mother Russia first, or by others with a set of purposes which have nothing to do with the interests of Mother Russia. Or her survival. Wait—don't interrupt. I want you to realize, and never forget, that there are plenty of highly-placed comrades right here in Moscow who are so blinded by ambition or bemused by outworn slogans that they'd make common cause with the Chinese leaders if they dared: or if our own present leaders were to make just one bad mistake."

"There's always the Army," suggested Mirov.

"The Army high command is no longer what it was a few years ago. It's divided, too—between soldiers and scientific slide-rule wizards who think

only in terms of their giant weapons," the Marshal rasped. "I have every reason to believe that if and when the Peking comrades attain even a minimal nuclear weapons capability of their own, a series of blackmailing pressures will get under way which are likely to end in a Kremlin take-over. Then it may be too late for the loyal soldiers to intervene effectively as they have done in the past. So we have to act before Peking is nuclear-capable—and we have to be very certain not to show our hand until we are ready to strike. You, Shashka Mirov, are the man who is going to do the striking — if you live long enough."

"How long is enough?" Mirov inquired.

"We'll come to that later," the Marshal told him. "Right now I want you to understand that I am acting under the sole authority of—shall we say a certain August Personage—who has in this matter taken none of his associates into his confidence. I hardly need to point out to you the very grave personal risk he has assumed in doing so: when you have reflected on that, you will be able to weigh for yourself the gravity of the mission with which I've decided to entrust you."

"Then that's why you can't have the KGB nosing into my affairs!" exclaimed Mirov.

"Exactly. But we'll come to the KGB a little later, too. Let's think a little more about the vital importance of invisibility—not just for Shashka Mirov right now, but for this whole enterprise from start to finish. The August Personage of whom I spoke was insistent on that point. When I'd made clear to him what he's up against if this nuclear enterprise of our Peking comrades isn't scotched, he was in quite a sweat. He was willing to listen to my suggestions as to how it might best be dealt with, but he would not hear of any forcible counter-measures being taken against them UNLESS the entire operation remained invisible — relatively speaking—to three separate sets of observers."

He ticked them off on his thick fingers.

"First, the non-Socialist world, which must not under any circumstances be afforded the exhilirating spectacle of one great Socialist power attacking the other. Quite aside from the worldwide ideological consequences, my revered superior is convinced that the inner Kremlin reactions to such a cataclysm might well suffice to destroy him and his immediate supporters. Second, the Chinese people, whom their government must not be permitted to divert from

their current miseries and deprivations by a call to arms against an identifiable foreign aggressor. Third, the Soviet people, who must not have the very foundations of their Socialist creed shattered by open war between the two great people's democracies."

Mirov was thinking coldly and clearly again.

"Then a nuclear attack on the Chinese installations is out," he said. "Only we could launch such an attack—nobody would believe that the Americans would drop H-bombs on a God-forsaken outpost in Sinkiang. Also the enemy would remain in possession of the ground and would be able in due course to produce evidence of what had happened."

"Thereby starting a ruckus which would likely end in the triumph of the friends-of-Peking faction here in Moscow anyway," nodded the Marshal. "You've no idea how delicate the balance—but never mind that now. You've put your finger on the main military point, Mirov. Possession of the ground is the thing we must keep in mind. Even in the hidden borderlands of Tartary, you can't keep nuclear fireballs—and their consequences—invisible. What you can keep invisible there—at least from distant observers—is what happens on the ground, as long as you control the ground afterward and are able to go on stirring up convenient dustclouds."

Mirov was eying the map.

"Sinkiang's a big place," he remarked. "Half a million square miles or so. That's a lot of ground to control—and stay invisible."

"Lower your sights, soldier," the Marshal suggested, turning back to the map. "Let's think first about this deep depression north of the Tien-Shan mountains—Dzungaria is the old name for it. Good grazing land. Some forests. Good tank country, too, at least most of it. And right here's the rail terminus. Not far from our border, and a long way from the central sources of Chinese power.

He paused, glancing at Mirov.

"It isn't like 'em to take unnecessary risks," mused Mirov. "Why didn't they locate their weapons development operation farther from the frontier?"

"You might as well ask me why they were so blandly confident we'd ever let them bring such an enterprise to completion under any circumstances, anywhere in all China," the Marshal told him. "They think about nuclear weapons the way we used to when we first got 'em. The absolute weapon. The be-all-and-end-all. We weren't alone in that. The Americans went through the same phase of

panic-reasoning when they first found out what nuclear explosives could do. Everything old was dead. No more use for infantry and artillery, warships, or anything else except the Bomb. All the bright young physicists told us bow-and-arrow soldiers to go play with our toys while they took charge of serious problems. We've still got some of that kind of thinking entrenched in high places, as I've mentioned, though experience in thinking through the problems involved in the actual possession of a nuclear capability has produced some sobering reactions among sensible men. But our dear comrades in Peking have had no such sobering experience. It just hasn't occurred to them yet that there is any answer to a nuclear capability at any level of applied violence except another nuclear capability."

"I'll be damned," said Mirov. "You mean that the leaders of a government—civilian and military—have to have nuclear weapons actually at their disposal to force them to think out just how such weapons can really be used to advantage. And then they begin to see that there are flies in the uranium ointment."

"That's right," the Marshall agreed. "The Chinese haven't been compelled to do their nuclear home work. They think they've got us in a cleft stick: either we let them go ahead until they've got the Bomb and can threaten us and all their neighbors with it, or else we use our Bomb to knock theirs out and then we're the betrayers of the Revolution and their friends take over in the Kremlin and can use our nuclear power for their own crazy ends. So when the uranium mines here at the railhead began to develop a more bountiful yield than those elsewhere, they just let development take root close to the source of supply as a matter of convenience. The last thing they're expecting is conventional attack."

"What kind of time-limit are we working with?" Mirov inquired.

"I'm personally sure," said the Marshal, "that they can't demonstrate a nuclear weapons capability before this time next year at the very earliest. We've slowed 'em down by cutting their oil supply, especially refined products like av-gas. Maintaining a big industrial and research operation in a place like Sinkiang needs a lot of moving back and forth—people as well as material. If something were to happen to their key operation this Fall, when the rainy season in Sinkiang is over, we should have a comfortable margin of safety."

Mirov laid his finger on the complex of symbols around the railhead.

"How many troops here " he asked.

"Ten or fifteen thousand, mostly infantry. A few tanks. Two or three squadrons of fighter planes, very short of gas and only about 50% operational due to shortages of spare parts. About as many 2-engine transport aircraft. There are a lot of other troops scattered around Sinkiang, of course: the local Turki tribes are getting restive because the Chinese keep impressing labor locally—the labor 'volunteers' they've brought from China die off too fast. The Turki have always hated the Chinese, as you probably know."

"When I was stationed at Alma Ata, there were a lot of Turki refugees coming across the border to get away from what they called the infidel Chinese imperialists," Mirov remarked. "They told some pretty rough tales of what was going on where they came from."

"It's been getting worse ever since," the Marshal observed. "So the Chinese have to use more troops all the time, ever more widely dispersed on local security duties: therefore the less able to react to outside attack."

His eyes were questioning Mirov again. Mirov took the plunge.

"I'd say a surprise air-borne drop in division strength, with a fast armored link-up by road and a quick fan-out should give us that railhead and all its trimmings, mostly intact. Including the two airfields. You said we must control the ground afterward. For how long afterward."

"Indefinitely," snapped the Marshal. "We're not just planning a demolition raid."

"Then grabbing the railhead area's not enough," Mirov went on. "We'd have to exploit surprise—pounce on the two or three other local centers north of the mountains, along with their airfields—mop up the local security detachments, maybe arming the Turki as auxiliaries —meanwhile bomb out the railway bridges to the eastward. All this done, we have full military possession of the ground in that part of Sinkiang. Is there any local oil supply available?"

"They've a few wells in operation—you'll have to be sure and grab those before they can set them afire," the Marshal told him. "They have a small refinery, too: by our reports, just about enough output to keep the aircraft they already have in the area operational, which is probably why they don't have more planes there. We'll see you get equipment and technicians to build up the output so you'll

be sure of maintaining local air superiority."

"That being the case," pronounced Mirov, "we can hold, as you say, indefinitely, especially if we can keep the Turki working with us. Any Chinese comeback, considering distance, their oil shortage at home, and the dilapidated state of their air force, should take a long time getting under way. But there's still a catch to this bright idea."

The Marshal's busy eyebrows lifted slightly.

"To make sure of a quick, neat job I—we'd need maybe forty thousand combat troops," Mirov explained. "Say an airborne infantry division, two armored divisions, and enough air for tactical support, recon, and troop-lift. To say nothing of the support elements that'll have to come along later if we're going to make a long stay. So the catch is, how do we keep a Soviet invading army of that size invisible for very long?"

"Who said anything about a Soviet invading army?" demanded the Marshal. "The unfortunate internal disturbances that will presently occur in Sinkiang will of course be the work of the East Turkestan Peoples' Liberation Army, locally recruited by tribal notables with resounding Moslem names and titles. The entire resources of the Soviet communications system will be hard at work making these facts clear to home and foreign audiences, long before our Peking comrades have recovered from the shock and have begun to realize what hit them."

Laughter welled up in Mirov's throat and would not be denied.

"Turki tribesmen with tanks and planes?" he choked out between guffaws.

"A handful of refugees, returning from exile in Siberia to help their countrymen, may turn out to have made off with some discarded Soviet equipment," suggested the Marshal. "The Soviet government will naturally pursue a most rigid investigation and take steps to keep the frontier tightly closed against any further such violations. Doubtless we shall even apologize to Peking and offer reparations."

Mirov was still shaking with merriment.

"You didn't imagine I was going to send you marching into Chinese territory in the outward character of a Soviet colonel general, did you?" he heard the Marshal ask. "Of course you'll still be Shashka Mirov to your troops, but the rest of the world will hear of you as—shall we say—Iskander Pasha, a legendary warrior raised up by Allah to liberate his countrymen from the yoke of the foreign Chinese

imperialists. You'll have to have a three-horsetail standard carried before you to mark your rank and dignity."

Mirov, rocking back and forth on the edge of the Marshal's desk, held his mirth-heaving ribs with both hands.

"A Pasha of three tails—instead of a frustrated Viking!" he gasped.

"What's that?" snapped the Marshal.

"Nothing that matters—a boyhood memory," gulped Mirov, wiping his eyes. If Irena could only know—maybe that wouldn't be such a good idea, his warning system cut in.

"You haven't asked me what happens afterward," the Marshal noted.

Mirov, still under the spell of his fierce exultation, answered without taking thought:

"Comrade Marshal, once you've turned me loose in Sinkiang with forty thousand men I've trained myself and a built-in oil supply, I'll take care of what happens afterwards!" Horrified at having blurted out exactly what he was thinking, he made haste to add: "As long, that is, as you keep me supplied with ammunition and spare parts."

"I'm glad you realize you won't be entirely free of strings," the Marshal growled. "Just the same you'll be pretty much on your own. That's why you're indispensable, Mirov. The capability for independent decisions in such a situation has been pretty well bred out of most Soviet general officers in these post-war years. I have preserved and fostered it in you against this day."

"This happy day!" cried Mirov.

The Marshal permitted himself another of his odd smiles.

"I knew you'd find the proposal irresistible," he said. "So would I if I were a younger man. Do you realize, Shashka Mirov, that I'd give my right arm to change places with you."

Their eyes met in a flash of soldierly understanding.

"One other matter, Comrade Marshal," said Mirov on the spur of a sudden thought. "As a division and a corps commander, I've of course received the high-level familiarization briefings on tactical nuclear weapons and defensive measures against nuclear attack. But taking over facilities where nuclear weapons are being produced and nuclear research is in progress, or even destroying such facilities without visibly disastrous consequences, needs far more technical know-how than I possess. I'll want a thoroughly reliable nuclear expert on my staff with the necessary assistants, and all the detailed information that's

available about the Chinese plants."

"Use your head, Mirov!" snapped the Marshal. "If a man of the qualities and background you speak of is detailed to your staff and put to studying the intelligence data on the Chinese nuclear set-up, how long will it be before he guesses your real mission?"

"Not long," admitted Mirov, mentally kicking himself. "But then how—"

"You'll get your expert nuclear staff about five minutes before you're ready to jump off," the Marshal cut in. "What they guess after that can't do any harm. One trouble is that I don't have any personal knowledge of these gentry as I do of fighting soldiers—I can't evaluate 'em as individuals by the standards I've learned to rely on."

"That I can understand, Comrade Marshal," said Mirov. "But it doesn't make me any easier in my mind about having to take on as a key staff officer, at the last moment, a man I don't know and haven't had any chance to size up, and whose ideas I have to accept because I have no scales of professional judgment in which to weigh 'em. Five months from now I'll know every other senior officer in my outfit inside and out, and a hell of a lot about most of the juniors and the enlisted men. And they'll know me. But this new chum—"

"It has to be that way, Mirov," the Marshal interrupted again. "Stop talking and listen while I tell you what you're up against. You've been made the possessor of a secret that is known to only three men in the whole Soviet Union or anywhere else—you, myself and the August Personage under whose authority I am acting. If that secret becomes known to as much as one other person it can easily mean the death of all three who share it now. It must remain inviolate until the time comes to act on it—say five months hence."

"Five months," muttered Mirov. "That's a long time to keep sitting on a time-bomb like this."

"Can't be helped," the Marshal answered. "As I said, we have to wait till the rains are over and the roads in Sinkiang become passable for armor and heavy transport. Anyway you'll need time to get your force organized and honed to a razor's edge of readiness. You'll do that in your training area—here in Kazakhstan where you see the red cross-hatching on the overlay. As you'll note, the eastern border of the area is within striking distance of your objective. I'll accept your estimate of the force you'll require. Your troops will arrive in your area

in battalion-size groups, picked and screened out of divisions from all over the country. They'll be the cream of the Soviet Army. Joint ground-air training will be arranged at the proper time. Officially, your mission is field-testing new and highly secret weapons, which justifies sending you selected personnel—and also the extraordinary security measures that'll be necessary. No one in your command, not even your chief of staff, is to be informed what your real mission is until you get my orders to move out. By then you should have the whole outfit eating out of your hand, if you're the man I take you for."

"You couldn't have given me a job more to my taste, Comrade Marshal," said Mirov earnestly. "And—I'm proud of your confidence in me."

"Deserve it by staying alive and making no mistakes for five months, then," the Marshal bade him. "Let me impress on you once more—you're the indispensable man in this business. There's no one else I'd dare trust, not just to train this—ah—Army of Liberation but to hold it together after it's across the frontier. You're making the opening gambit in a game that is going to change the course of history."

"And teach our political masters that the safety of Russia depends on the Russian army, now as always—not the missile wizards!" Mirov cried.

"That's our private share of the secret, Mirov—yours and mine," the Marshal affirmed. "But never forget—the whole game depends on the success of the first gambit. So take care of yourself. Rumors will get about. There'll be suspicions and whisperings. Peking is well served here, as I've told you. And even August Personages have been known to allow happy anticipations of coming triumph to lead them into saying just a word too much. If suspicion centers on what you're doing in Kazakhstan, if rumors and whispers are pieced together by the wrong people into anything like even a shadowy pattern, you can expect the most desperate attempts to find out more. Even to put you yourself out of the way, if any notion of your indispensability and the reasons for it is so much as faintly imagined."

"If anything goes wrong it'll be through no indiscretion of mine," promised Mirov. "But I must beg you, Comrade Marshal, to allow me full personal responsibility for internal security in my training area. No *zampolits*. And of course no KGB counter-intelligence snoopers."

"No *zampolits* I can manage," the Marshal agreed. "The KGB is something else again. I've already explored that problem rather cautiously at the highest level, though I refrained from mentioning the KGB's current interest in you—which I'm sure is just APA spitework. I'd better tell you some basic facts about the KGB which you may not know. The Russian secret police, under any of the various names they've been known by from time to time, have always played both ends against the middle. When they see their political masters at odds—as they do at present—they invariably run errands for both sides until they're sure who's going to win. Then they turn to and help the winners clobber the losers. Of course the agents who've been doing dirty work for the losing side are thrown to the wolves. Right now they have a grudge against the present Party leadership because it has been cutting back on their authority and privileges. All we'd need to do would be to invoke top-level authority to exclude the KGB from your area, and they'd start digging like mad to find out why, with the APA complaint against you as their starting point. So you'll have special responsibility for local security, as you suggest, and no APA people: but you'll have to accept a KGB presence in your command, with the usual private wire to KGB headquarters in Moscow. I can see to it that the man in charge has strict orders not to make any arrests or take any other drastic action without consulting you. You'll see to it that he doesn't find out anything he shouldn't know about, using your special security responsibility to that end. He'd better be somebody you know already—who's the KGB man at Orelsk now?"

"A Colonel Baranin," Mirov answered. "He's been there only a few weeks." He told the Marshal of Baranin's odd behavior that morning.

"He may have been sent there to probe into the APA complaints," the Marshal conjectured. "Better keep him with you where you can watch him than here where he might start digging in the wrong places. I'll see to it. If he gets too nosy, let me know. I hope your rather unprecedented promotion may suggest to these busy gentlemen that you're well regarded in high places. They'll be aware that promotions to colonel general aren't made without approval by the Central Committee of the Party."

So that was why—

"You think of everything, Comrade Marshal," said Mirov with genuine admiration.

"Of course," agreed the Mar-

shal. "How long d'you think I'd stay where I am if I didn't? For example—"

He took down the overlay from the map, crumpled it, closed and locked the map case, walked across the room to the tiled hearth, lit a match and watched the overlay burn.

"I made that overlay with my own hands, and I'm burning it with my own hands as soon as it has served its purpose," he remarked. "Neglecting small precautions of that sort is what brings secret operations to ruin." He glanced sharply at Mirov. "I hope you aren't leaving any personal loose ends behind you that can be woven into a rope for your neck, Shashka Mirov?"

Now you've got to tell him about that letter from Irena, Mirov's warning system urged. So if she's been seeing the wrong people, she can be shipped off to some ice-bound outpost where she can't do any harm.

See her yourself first, Mirov, begged his heart. Give the girl a chance.

"No loose ends, Comrade Marshal," Mirov heard himself saying.

"Good!" the Marshal rumbled. "I'll have some lunch sent in now; we can dispose of a few more details while we eat. After lunch I'll have you driven straight to the airport. Your aide at Orelsk has already been ordered to pack your personal belongings and fly with them to your new headquarters. You'll be sleeping there tonight. And from this moment on, Mirov, you'll communicate outside the limits of your command only with me, by channels I'll prescribe. Understood?"

"Understood, Comrade Marshal."

It was too late to tell him about Irena now.

It was going to be a sizzling day, even for the Kazakhstan steppe in mid-June. Colonel General Mirov, Commander of the East Kazakhstan Weapons Testing Area, paced the floor of his office in shorts and open-necked shirt, wishing the gentlemen from the Ministry of Missile Production in Moscow had picked some other day to respond to his well-grounded complaints about the erratic behavior of the P-99 anti-tank missile. He glanced impatiently at his watch — half-hour yet before their plane was due to touch down. He'd probably have to waste the whole morning answering their long-winded questions and demonstrating the validity of his criticisms of the P-99's guidance system out on the missile range. It had to be

done—he couldn't let his men go into action against Chinese armor with a faulty anti-tank weapon—but he grudged every minute lost from his daily task of overseeing the troop-training that was in progress all over the five hundred square miles of steppe-land, desert and rocky hill-country which made up his closely-guarded domain.

His forty thousand tankers, airborne doughboys, gunners and airmen were shaking down into a tough, tightly-knit team—a mechanized army that was beginning to wear a high crest of solderly pride in itself and its commander. The Marshal had kept his word. He'd sent Mirov a splendid selection of officers and sergeants—many of whom had served under Mirov before—plus the cream of the year's annual draft of young conscripts. In their training, Mirov had a completely free hand—for the first time, he didn't have to invent excuses for treating his men simply as soldiers; and to that sort of treatment they responded with enthusiasm.

Not a man of that forty thousand, from the divisional generals to the humblest Ivan Ivanovich, had the least idea where Mirov was going to lead them, but he sensed that an instinct was stirring among them, an instinct that told them he was going to lead them *somewhere*. He could read it in their faces as he drove past in his scarlet jeep: he could hear it in their shouts of greeting. It was almost as though they called out to him, Lead on, Shashka Mirov, and we will follow you! All that was as it should be.

Whether all was as it should be elsewhere—say in Moscow—Mirov could not be sure. Nothing had gone wrong that Marshal Yanovsky had heard of, or Mirov would have heard of it too. Colonel Baranin of the KGB was behaving himself with great circumspection. He stuck close to his quarters, did no prowling, had nobody dragged in to be grilled. Obviously he was not being prodded by his superiors to take any special interest in Mirov's doings.

So far so good, but there could be trouble on the way just the same. Mirov had been in Kazakhstan two months now. Two months was just about long enough for rumors and whispers to begin to be pieced together. By this time twitching noses in Moscow or Peiping could be sniffing the air for a whiff of what might be cooking in the East Kazakhstan Weapons Testing Area. If any such inquiring nose got a good identifiable whiff, the next thing that would be cooking could very well be a burnt sacrifice on the altar of political expediency named

Aleksandr Mikhailovich Mirov, already on record as the proprietor of a dangerous cult of personality. Over that final lunch, the Marshal couldn't have been franker about these interim perils, or about the likelihood that he might not be able to protect Mirov if his political bosses became alarmed and ran for cover. That hadn't bothered Mirov then and it wasn't bothering him now. He hadn't disciplined his mind against yielding to worry for sixteen years to start giving way to it just when he needed to concentrate every ounce of thought and energy on the job in hand: the most challenging and exciting job a Russian officer could hope for. All the same, his warning system wouldn't let him stop wondering why the Ministry of Missile Production had suddenly decided that a Deputy Minister in person must be rushed out to Central Asia to oversee an inspection job that could be handled perfectly well by technical experts of lesser rank. Word that the esteemed Deputy Minister was heading the inspection group had come in only an hour ago. As the prospective No. 1 victim if anything goes wrong, Mirov's warning system kept telling him, you ought to be definitely allergic to unexplained quickies at the Moscow end. This Deputy Minister might have the wrong political connections, connections who had contrived to have him sent here—maybe to burrow for the roots of Mirov's anxiety about the anti-tank missiles, maybe on a general fishing expedition. Who the devil was the fellow, anyway? His name might ring a bell.

"Andreyev!" Mirov sang out.

The aide – Major Andreyev now—appeared in the doorway.

"Let me see the revised radio clearance on that Moscow plane," Mirov directed.

"Right here, General."

Andreyev laid a clipboard on Mirov's desk.

The name rang a bell, sure enough. There it was, in the decoding clerk's clear handwriting:

"Deputy Minister Verski, Ministry of Missile Production."

Could this be the Verski that Irena had married all those years ago? Impossible. That Verski had been an eminent agricultural genius at the time of his marriage. He'd hardly be turning up in the armaments business now.

Some relative, maybe? Or—

"Get me the cryptographic duty officer, Andreyev,' Mirov ordered.

Andreyev dialed, spoke curtly.

"Senior Lieutenant Osipov on the wire, General," he reported, handing Mirov the instrument.

"General Mirov here, Lieuten-

at," Mirov said, annoyed that it took conscious effort to keep his voice steady. "I want you to check personally the revised radio clearance for the courier plane from Moscow, and report to me immediately any error in decoding or transcription, however slight."

"Understood, General."

Mirov hung up.

"Exactly when is the plane due, Andreyev?" he asked.

"ETA 0915, General. I've just confirmed to air security your authority for it to land."

Andreyev said this with a pleased smile. He still got a kick out of operating under orders which made the Army responsible for local security instead of the KGB counter-intelligence section. So did Mirov—except that right now he was getting a bigger kick out of thinking about something else.

The telephone buzzed. Mirov waved Andreyev's hand aside, picked up the instrument.

"General Mirov."

"Lieutenant Osipov reporting as ordered, General. I regret to say there was a mistake in decoding that Moscow transmission."

"Let's have it."

"It's the name of the Deputy Minister, sir. As transmitted, the correct name is Verskaya, not Verski as decoded. The decoding clerk took it on himself to decide that there must be a mistake somewhere; he claims he'd never heard of such a thing as a female Deputy Minister. So he made it Verski. Very sorry, General. I'll make sure the clerk is sorry too."

"See that you do, and see that I don't hear of any more such nonsense from your section," snapped Mirov.

He hung up on the lieutenant's anguished protestations of reform.

Five minutes to nine. In just twenty minutes, he'd be greeting Irena at the airfield.

For of course this Deputy Minister Verskaya was his Irena. Or rather, Academician Verski's Irena. He knew Irena had already earned her doctorate in electrical sciences when she married Verski. She could certainly have risen fast enough in the scientific world to have become a Deputy Minister by this time, and a Deputy Minister with her educational background would be a logical person to be looking into the aberrations of guidance systems. These last few years Mirov hadn't tried to keep track of what she was doing; it wasn't strange that he'd heard nothing of her advancement.

But there couldn't be any doubt. It was just beyond the limits of coincidence that there'd be another Verskaya female qualified for this job. Also, there

was the sudden decision in Moscow to send her here. That alone was evidence who she was. Somebody had tried getting at him through Irena before he'd even left Orelsk. The KGB, of course. Who else? So they were still trying.

Mirov ordered his stupid heart to stop hammering. Irena wasn't coming here for any heart-business. She was being sent here to try to sell her ex-Viking down a darker river than the long-ships of Rurik the Northman had ever navigated.

So she ought to be given every opportunity to try her pretty wiles.

These reflections had occupied Mirov for perhaps thirty seconds.

Andreyev was taking another paper from the clip-board.

"It appears we're being favored by a visit from a lady Deputy Minister, Andreyev," Mirov remarked with a cheery smile.

"A lady, General?"

"That's right," nodded Mirov. "And since I believe I have the honor of the lady's acquaintance, we won't run the missile demonstration on quite as tight a schedule as I'd laid down. My compliments to Major General Kashirin; his divisional anti-tank battalion will carry on with its regular training schedule this forenoon. The missile demonstration will be tentatively postponed until 1300, subject to my further orders."

"As ordered, General. But may I—"

Mirov waved away the piece of bluish flimsy Andreyev was trying to put in front of him.

"Never mind that for now," he said. "When you've notified General Kashirin of the changed schedule, you might call the steward at the officers' club and tell him I'll want the best breakfast he can put together served in my private dining-room at 0930. Breakfast for two."

"Yes, General. But if you please—" He offered the flimsy again.

"It'll keep, Andreyev. We've got to start for the airfield. Have my jeep brought around—you can follow in the Zil."

"Yes, General."

Andreyev went to do as he'd been told.

When Mirov came out into the sun-glare, his personal chariot—as always, a bright scarlet jeep with glittering brass-work—was waiting, attended by his sergeant driver. Behind it stood the big Zil sedan which Andreyev had thought more suitable for official hospitality. In front of the jeep, a smaller sedan blocked the way. As Mirov appeared, the door of the smaller car opened and Colonel Baranin of the KGB got out.

He snapped his hand to his

cap-visor.

"With respect, Comrade General, may I have a private word with you?" he asked. There was a hint of nervousness in his tone as though he expected a curt refusal.

"I'm headed for the airfield," Mirov told him. "Can your business wait for an hour or so?"

"I'd appreciate an opportunity to speak to you before you arrive at the airfield, Comrade General," said Baranin, his nervousness a little more apparent.

Better listen, urged Mirov's warning-system.

"All right, Colonel, get in the jeep," he said. "You can have your car follow. Sergeant, you ride with Major Andreyev in the Zil. I'll drive the jeep myself."

He slid behind the wheel and gave the red jeep the gun as the KGB car cleared the road.

"Let's have it, Colonel," he snapped.

"What I have to say, Comrade General," Baranin began, speaking slowly as though selecting just the right words as he went along, "concerns this aircraft which is arriving from Moscow."

"What about it?"

"Last evening," Baranin explained, "I received telegraphic orders from my superiors concerning a passenger on that plane. These orders were so completely contradictory of the very detailed instructions I had received concerning my duties in this area when I was first sent here that I immediately asked for confirmation. I was told to call again this morning. This morning I was informed that the person from whom confirmation would have to be obtained is still unavailable." He paused, cleared his throat, glanced unhappily at Mirov.

The jeep was churning gravel along the edge of the contonment area of the aviation engineer battalion.

"Greetings, soldiers!" yelled Mirov to an engineer company which was just falling in under arms.

"Greetings, *General - Polkovnik!*" the hundred-odd sappers yelled back.

Mirov saw the company commander do a double-take as he recognized Baranin. A whistle shrilled, and engineer soldiers began piling into a couple of trucks. Mirov understood that reaction. If the *General-Polkovnik* was having any little problem with the cops, he was going to have some help handy.

"Well, Colonel?" asked Mirov, aware that Baranin hadn't missed the by-play.

Baranin swallowed.

"Under the circumstances, Comrade General," he said, obviously choosing each word with great care, "I feel that my duty requires me to inform you of the

facts I've just stated, and to respectfully suggest extreme caution on your part as regards any —eh—person arriving by this aircraft."

Mirov slowed the jeep a little to goggle at Baranin. This wasn't what he'd expect at all. Indecision in a KGB officer was so rare a phenomenon that it shook him. Which suggested that Baranin might be shook even worse.

"Do I understand, Colonel Baranin," demanded Mirov in a tone of icy suspicion, "that you're trying to tell me you suspect the authenticity of an order you've received from your own chiefs?"

"I'm trying to tell you I wash my hands of this airplane and whoever is aboard it!" yelped Baranin. "And that's all I'm trying to tell you!"

There was an edge of desperation in his voice. In any other circumstances Mirov would have been thoroughly enjoying the spectacle of a KGB officer so plainly in trouble way over his head. But this situation wasn't amusing at all. Irena was right in the middle of it.

Mirov slowed for the turn to the airfield approach road.

"You wouldn't care to identify for me the arriving passenger about whom you received the original message, I suppose?" he suggested.

Stubbornly Baranin shook his head.

"I've said all I can. Maybe too much," he muttered. "May I beg you to drop me here, Comrade General? My car will pick me up."

"Certainly. And my thanks for your trouble." Mirov braked the jeep. Baranin piled out and sprinted toward his own car, which was just ahead of the Zil carrying Andreyev and the sergeant. Fifty yards behind the Zil the two engineer trucks were tearing along the road, bristling with helmeted heads and rifle barrels. Baranin's car took off with a howl of spinning tires. Andreyev hit the gravel and came running toward the jeep, waving that piece of blue flimsy.

"General!" he yelled. "I—"

"Send those crazy sappers back to their duties!" cut in Mirov, pointing.

He slammed the jeep into gear and headed for the airfield.

Low against the sky, a plane flying from the westward was wheeling for a landing approach.

Mirov had perhaps two minutes to do some fast thinking. He knew now why Baranin found himself out of his depth.

The Marshal must have been wrong about the reason why the KGB had started taking a sudden interest in Mirov. It wasn't

just an APA complaint about his cult of personality. They'd had a whiff of something bigger—just possibly, God forbid, something to do with his present mission. They'd started digging, and must have turned up some trace of his old romance with Irena; that wouldn't be hard, it had been the occasion of a lot of chit-chat in the Sevastopol garrison at the time. Now somebody in the KGB was nosing around to find out more about what Mirov was doing in East Kazakhstan. Clearly whoever it was didn't find himself in a position to seek that information through official channels—so this could be a case in which the KGB were playing their time-honored game of carrying water on both shoulders, just as the Marshal had said they would. Therefore whoever was interested in Mirov's doings was carrying water for the "outs"—the friends-of-China faction. What could be handier than making use of Irena? Irena was a civilian scientist, and ambitious. She was ideally situated to pay an official visit to East Kazakhstan. No doubt she had been told a fine cock-and-bull story about mad-dog generals whose insane schemes were threatening the safety of the Soviet people and all the gains made by the unprecedented advances of Soviet science. She probably had no idea that the plausible character who had gotten her all worked up about her Socialist duty, etc., etc., was a KGB agent. She had just been persuaded that she was truly fortunate to have so good a chance to serve the Party by having a nice cozy chat with her old boy friend—the frustrated Viking—and digging out of him, by any methods that suggested themselves as she went along, what he was really up to. Very likely her husband had agreed; he was doubtless ambitious too. Then whoever had sold her this dirty bill of goods had sent instructions to Baranin to look out for her and give her a helping hand if she needed it. Baranin, under instructions to let Mirov strictly alone, had quite naturally asked for confirmation. Whereupon somebody at a higher KGB level had gotten cold feet. Let's not leave any trail, we haven't picked our winner yet. So, no confirmation. Baranin can stew in his own juice if anything goes wrong. But Baranin—with his own case of cold feet—had panicked: and had confirmed, chapter and verse, Mirov's original suspicions about Irena. Nothing, he told himself bitterly, could possibly be plainer.

Still, the opposition wasn't sure of anything solid yet. They were just fishing for information. What Mirov had to do was to

see to it they didn't get any information through Irena. That would be no problem at all. The scientific mind was as helpless as a child's in an affair of this kind. She'd be very cool and correct—and, of course, strictly impersonal.

A sound two-minute job of fast thinking-through, Mirov.

He jammed on his brakes at the ramp, jumped out, returned the salutes of a half-dozen staff officers. The arriving plane, jets whining, was just taxi-ing up to the deplaning point. It was a trim little job of a type used for transporting Soviet VIPs who were in a hurry. Andreyev was at his elbow, saying something. Mirov shook his head. His attention was absorbed by the white-jacked flight attendant who opened the door of the plane as the ramp crew rolled a short set of steps into position. The flight attendant stood back to clear the exit for his passengers. Andreyev was still talking. Mirov waved him aside and started toward the plane.

Irena Verskaya (née Firubova) stepped daintily over the coaming of the doorway and paused for an instant on the platform atop the steps.

She was wearing a beige silk ensemble which the breeze molded delectably around a figure to which sixteen years hadn't added an ounce that Mirov's remembering eyes could identify. A turban of rough-woven fawn-colored straw perched on her dark curls; on her feet were polished brown walking-shoes. A Leningrad girl, Irena. Leningrad women always thought of themselves as rather more "European" than their Moscow sisters. Clearly a Deputy Minister's salary afforded a lady the means of appearing very European indeed. Not to say Parisian.

Finishing a casual survey of her surroundings, she looked down and saw Mirov standing at the foot of the steps looking up at her. She smiled and floated down the steps, holding out a small gloved hand.

"How nice to see you again, Shashka," she murmured.

"Irena," said Shashka, bending low over the hand.

Two gloomy-looking civilians followed Irena down the steps and were duly presented as Engineer So-and-So and Technician Thus-and-Such. Next came Lieutenant Colonel Lavrentyev, the escort officer from the Marshal's staff. All visitors traveling on clearances from the Marshal's headquarters had to be escorted—and identified—by a staff-officer known to Mirov personally. Lavrentyev's salute conveyed the "all clear".

"We are quite ready to proceed whenever you are, General

Mirov," Irena said brightly. "I presume the necessary preparations have already been made?"

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mirov. "But we can't face that missile range on empty stomachs. Major Andreyev, I'll thank you to see that Colonel Lavrentyev and these esteemed comrades are suitably refreshed. Comrade Deputy Minister—if you please?"

He waved her on ahead of him, and after the barest instant of hesitation, she obeyed his gesture. Straight to the scarlet jeep he guided her, threw open the door, half-lifted her to the seat.

"But—" she began.

The staff officers were all eyes.

Mirov ran round to the other side, swung into the seat beside her and sent the little car spinning down the exit road.

"Where are you taking me?" she wanted to know.

"To the officers' club for breakfast," he answered.

"I had breakfast on the plane," she objected.

"You need something more substantial for the day's work we have lined up," he told her. "Besides, I want to get a good look at you. It's been a long time, Irena."

Strictly impersonal, arent you? his warning-system was muttering.

"Sixteen years is indeed a long time," she agreed with a scientist's precision. She flicked a glance at the three stars on his shoulder-boards. "They've been good years for you, though," she added. "I—I've been following your career with great interest."

"And I yours," he answered quickly. "Your academic honors —" he was sure she must have had some, anyway she was wearing a tiny silver-and-orange rosette of the Order of the Badge of Honor, granted for contributions to science and invention—"and of course your appointment as Deputy Minister. I can't tell you the time I've spent browsing through scientific journals looking for some mention of your name."

Now what on earth was he lying like that for?

"Why, Aleksandr Mikhailovich!" Irena said softly. The little golden spangles in her eyes were all a-dance.

"Here's the club," he announced. "Rather a rough place for ladies, but we don't see many here. We're operating under field conditions."

He handed her down, and across the broad verandah into the lounge, which was just an echoing barn of a room with a few scattered chairs and tables. The club steward, in a sleazy alpaca coat, bowed them through a doorway into a small-

er room, where a table gleaming with silver and white linen was set for two. Two big windows facing eastward, were open to let the breeze in; the breeze bore the hot breath of the desert with it, but whirring fans on either side of the windows at least kept the air in motion and the temperature endurable. Beyond the windows, the sun-washed steppe rolled away toward the distant purple mountains on the frontier of Sinkiang. Mirov could just see the tiny notch that marked the location of the historic Dzungarian Gate —the pass through which the armored hordes of Jenghiz Khan had once roared westward to ravage the cities of the plain, the pass through which the armored hordes of Shashka Mirov would be roaring eastward in three months' time to return the compliment. If this lovely little lady here beside him could be prevented from selling him down the river meanwhile.

"But this is charming!" cried Irena, smiling up at Mirov as she stripped off her gloves.

"Now that you are here, yes," agreed Mirov. "You've changed very little from the girl I knew, Irena."

And that's the truth, he told himself. She must be thirty-seven now. There were new lines of strength, even a hint of ruthlessness in the set of the delicate mouth; it was the face of a woman who had fought her way to the top in the fiercely competitive climate of Soviet technical-official life. But lips and eyes held the promise of other gifts as well—gifts which Mirov had tasted once, which he discovered he was longing to savor again.

Irena laughed gently, slipping out of the jacket of her ensemble. The sunlight gleamed on her bare arms as she laid the wisp of silk across the back of a chair. Aleksandr Mikhailovich, warned Mirov's alarm system, you are being given the business. A hundred roubles will get you a thousand she wouldn't dare wear that dress in her office in the Ministry of Missile Production. She's wearing it for you.

"Will you sit here, Irena?" he suggested, holding a chair for her. There was a touch of perfume about her somewhere which went a little to his head. "I don't use this dining-room often," he went on, sitting down facing her. "Where the steward laid his hands on all this finery I've no idea. But I'm glad he did. I'd hate to think of you going back to Moscow and telling the excellent Academician, your husband, that we live like *muzhiks* here in Kazakhstan. I trust you left him well?"

The steward bustled in with an iced silver bowl piled with

grapes, pomegranates and huge Tashkent strawberries. He poured coffee and went out again. Irena was looking steadily at Mirov.

"The excellent Academician, my husband," she said in a clipped voice, "died in Moscow last summer of heart failure, due to overwork. Since he had rather extensive obituary notices in several prominent scientific journals, isn't it odd that you missed them in the course of your diligent browsing?"

"I'm distressed to hear it," Mirov said, almost choking on a grape. That was another lie. He wasn't distressed at all. Quite the opposite, despite his embarrassment.

Irena munched a strawberry.

"I was distressed too," she told him. "Nikolai was a good man, and I think he loved me after his fashion. But we were not good for each other. We had been living apart for nearly three years when he died."

A question slammed its way through Mirov's guard before he could stop it.

"Why did you come here this morning, Irena?"

She lifted one delicate eyebrow – another remembered habit.

"Because the guidance system of the P-99 anti-tank missile was designed in my section of the Ministry," she answered levelly. "I feel responsible for its behavior under field-test."

"Is that the only reason you came?" Mirov persisted.

This is insane, yelled his built-in alarm. You're tipping your hand.

Color showed on Irena's high-boned cheeks.

"I was just a little curious," she admitted, "to discover why you've never answered the letter I wrote you at Orelsk wishing you a happy birthday."

"I was preparing to answer it in person," Mirov told her, "when I was suddenly transferred to this command, which is under such strict security that no officer or soldier here can engage in private correspondence. I can't imagine how you found out where I was."

"By pure chance," she answered. "I'll confess I made inquiries, after I got over being angry that you hadn't answered my letter. I found you'd left Orelsk, but not where you'd gone. Yesterday the Minister sent for me. He told me he was much upset over the criticisms of the P-99 he'd received from this testing area—I already knew of them, of course—and he added that the commander here, a Colonel General Mirov, was an officer of considerable influence and had the reputation of being extremely exacting. You'd have been proud of me, Shashka. I

never even blinked. I just said that in that case I'd better take charge of the inspection mission in person. The Minister seemed relieved. So here I am. And—and I'm glad to know you did mean to answer my silly letter, Shashka."

She stretched one slender arm across the table—for an instant her fingers rested on the back of Mirov's hand.

Either she's telling the truth or she's the most accomplished liar I've ever met, he informed himself. But if she isn't lying, who put the Minister up to mentioning my name to her so offhandedly?

What he said was not the product of these, but of other, anxieties.

"Then you really did want to see me again, Irena?"

"Yes." The flame of her cheeks brightened, but eyes and voice were steady as she went on. "I suppose I've never really forgotten those days at Sevastopol. When you wrote me afterward to say you were not coming to Moscow, and good bye, it hurt. I ordered myself to forget you. I married. I pursued my career. I discovered an affinity for guidance systems. Then, as I began to rise in the Ministry, I began hearing of you now and then. Army officers come and go in my department, and you're well known in the Army, Shashka. I was proud of what I heard. And I was happy to be told that you are considered a confirmed woman-hater—except for an unfortunate taste for ballerinas when a touring troupe is in your vicinity."

Mirov muttered something about damned exaggerations.

"I think," said Irena gently, "that I've been reading the Army Gazette more faithfully than you've read, let's say, *Tekhnika-Molodezhi*. We get all the military journals for our library, sometimes ahead of regular publication dates."

Mirov jumped. So that was how—

Irena kept right on:

"When I saw your orders to Orelsk—the nearest you'd been to Moscow for years—I almost wrote you right away. But Nikolai had only been dead a week or two then. I didn't want to seem heartless. Even though I did start acquiring something of a reputation for heartlessness on quite another count."

She grinned impishly.

"Do you know what they call me in the Ministry now, Shashka?"

He shook his head.

"The Ice-Cold Miracle Maid of Missilery," she announced, with a little flourish of mocking trumpets in her voice. "How do you like that, my Shashka?"

"I like it just fine," he told

her. "Since I gather you earned the title by your attitude toward your male colleagues."

"I did," she agreed. "From the moment poor Nikolai's passing became known, I had certain problems. I was getting good and damned tired of them. So when I saw the notice of your promotion to Colonel General, I just grabbed a sheet of note paper and wrote to you fast, before any sober second thoughts could overtake my unmaidenly impulse."

Mirov got up and started around the table.

There were loud voices in the lounge. The steward came through the door, looking scared.

"A thousand pardons, Comrade General. Lieutenant General Taranchuk is here and insists on seeing you."

Mirov opened his mouth to say that General Taranchuk could wait awhile. But Taranchuk was the very capable commander of the reinforced air division which was part of Mirov's force. If Taranchuk was insistent, there was good reason.

"I'll be just a moment," he said to Irena.

Taranchuk came striding across the lounge, Andreyev right behind him. The big gray-mustached air general looked hot and bothered as he saluted Mirov.

"Sorry to break in on you, *General-Polkovnik.* But I must have your orders as to what to do about this damned aircraft thats buzzing around overhead."

"What aircraft?" Mirov demanded.

"I tried to tell you, General," cut in Andreyev anxiously. "I've been trying to tell you all morning, but you wouldn't let me. It's an IL-14 from Moscow, with a routine clearance from the Ministry of Defense but no other authentication."

"Except," rumbled Taranchuk, "that when we ordered him out of the control pattern, the pilot told us he also has a passenger with credentials from the KGB. Of which there can be no proof till he lands, and he can't land without your authority, *General-Polkovnik.* I've got two fighters trailing him. Shall I tell 'em to shoot him down and have done with the bastard?"

"Did you check with Colonel Baranin?" Mirov asked.

"Baranin can't be found, and nobody in his section knows when he'll be back or anything at all about any aircraft that ever flew," Taranchuk said. "If this wandering bird was from the KGB, Baranin would be right here to welcome him."

Mirov wasn't so sure about that.

"Let the plane land," he decided. "Meet it yourself, An-

dreyev. Have a squad of Air Police handy. If there's anyone on board with KGB credentials, escort him to my office. If not, arrest the pilot and everybody else in the plane. Whichever it is, notify me at once.

Andreyev saluted, looking a little white around the lips. The KGB were tricky people to play games with.

"Sorry you were disturbed like this, General Taranchuk," Mirov said. "It's my fault for not listening to Andreyev earlier."

"I still say let's shoot him down," growled Taranchuk. "Lousy policeman. We've got every excuse in the world."

He went out, muttering about wasted opportunities.

So there were two planes from Moscow this morning. Irena's plane and this one. Could this one be the plane Baranin had been talking about instead of Irena's? It was possible. It was even likely.

So what now, fast thinker?

Irena was standing just inside the door of the dining room.

"I listened," she informed Mirov. "Are you in trouble, Aleksandr Mikhailovich?"

"I don't know yet," he admitted. She certainly sounded as though she cared whether or not he was in trouble. His warning system suggested rather feebly that she'd try to sound like that anyway if she was trying to draw him out.

"Let's have some hot coffee," he said, stalling for time to think. "This pot's getting cold. Also there's more to eat here than just fruit. Steward!"

"I couldn't eat anything more," protested Irena. But she sat down.

They sipped coffee and Mirov munched a roll, trying to sort out something useful to say next.

"What time did you leave Moscow, Irena?" he asked finally.

"Five a.m. Too early." She smiled a little.

A fast four-hour jet flight. No IL-14 could make that kind of time. In fact it must have left Moscow last evening, and made at least one re-fueling stop on the way. Last evening was when Baranin said he'd had a message about a plane. It was long odds the message referred to the IL-14. Not Irena's jet.

Mirov found himself wishing desperately that he could really take Irena at face value. If he could only be absolutely sure—

Here was the steward again.

"Major Andreyev called, General. He's on his way to your office with a man from the plane."

So there really was a KGB man aboard.

"I hate to ask you to wait here, Irena," Mirov began, "but

I don't know—"

Irena was on her feet.

"I'm coming with you," she announced. Her small jaw was firm-set.

Mirov weighed up the pros and cons of that one for maybe five seconds.

Even money.

"Come on, then," he yielded.

Mirov could feel the tension inside the headquarters building as he and Irena went up the stairs from the outer door. Andreyev met him at the top of the stairs. He looked really scared now.

"They're in your office, General," he said. "They're KGB all right."

"They!" rasped Mirov. "Your message said *a* man from the plane."

"There's one man in charge, and two others with him," Andreyev explained. He glanced nervously at Irena. "Perhaps the lady—"

Mirov hesitated.

He could send for a sergeant's guard from the engineer barracks and have it here in five minutes. But if these were genuine KGB people, that wouldn't really settle anything. It might wind up with loyal soldiers being shot or shipped to a labor-camp.

He must play this one alone.

Irena's fingers, light in the crook of his elbow, reminded him that he wasn't playing it quite alone. That is, *if* she was playing on his side.

"I'll see what they want, Andreyev," Mirov said as casually as he could.

He walked along the corridor, Irena beside him. He opened his office door, holding Irena back with one arm as he went in first.

A thin man wearing a dark hat, dark glasses and a rumpled dark suit sat in a chair beside Mirov's desk. His face was pale, pock-marked and further distinguished by a broken nose. Two other men, much burlier but identically dressed except for the dark glasses, stood like wooden statues against the wall at the far end of the office.

The man at the desk lifted his head as Mirov and Irena entered but didn't bother to rise.

"General Mirov?" he asked.

"That's right."

"Who is this woman?"

"Who are you?" Mirov retorted.

"Send the woman away," demanded Broken-Nose.

"Who are you?" repeated Mirov.

The man flipped a leather folder from his pocket, pushed a card half way out and held it so Mirov could look at it.

"Committee of State Security," he announced. "I have an order here for you to accompany me to Moscow."

Mirov leaned over and looked closely at the card. It appeared to be the genuine KGB article. He pushed forward a chair for Irena, sat down himself in his own chair behind his desk.

"Let me look at this order you speak of," he suggested.

If the order is as genuine as the card, Shashka Mirov, you've had it, his warning system was muttering.

Broken-Nose took a folded paper from an inner pocket and handed it to Mirov. His manner was coolly confident.

Mirov unfolder the paper. It appeared to be an order from the Minister of Defense requiring Colonel General of Armored Troops A. M. Mirov, commanding the East Kazakhstan Weapons Testing Area, to turn over his command temporarily to the officer next in rank and proceed to Moscow by air transportation to be provided by the bearer. An officer with further orders would meet him at the Moscow airport. The order was in routine official form, on what looked like genuine Defense Ministry stationery, with a stamp and authenticating signature ("for the Minister of Defense") that looked genuine too. But as an order that Mirov was in duty bound to obey, it was as phony as a called-in ten-ruble note.

Mirov was in fact specifically forbidden to pay heed to any written order over any signature whatever, unless it was countersigned in green ink across the lower right-hand corner by Marshal Yanovsky. As a further precaution, he was required on the receipt of an order so countersigned to confirm it by means of the red telephone on his desk, which—on a scrambler circuit—was directly connected with a similar instrument on the Marshal's desk in Moscow. That Mirov was not under the direct control of the Minister of Defense was, of course, understood by that official. It followed inescapably that the order so confidently presented by Broken-Nose was forged.

Mirov laid the paper on his desk and grinned at Broken-Nose.

"Sorry," he said. "It's a neat bit of forgery, but the boys who fixed it up didn't know the right answers."

The other's thin lips tightened.

"If you refuse to obey an official order," he retorted, "my instructions are to place you under arrest and bring you to Moscow by force."

The answer to that one was the sergeant's guard that Mirov hadn't sent for. Like a fool. He should have seen all this coming.

Baranin had tipped the hand. The forged order was the clincher. This fellow might be genuine

KGB, but he was playing games that his chiefs weren't ready to back to the limit. So if he got dead playing those games, too bad for him. He had to pull off his caper by himself. Or else.

Broken-Nose started to get up.

Mirov turned in his swivel chair, watchful—

"Don't go with him, Shashka!" cried Irena. "It's a trap! All he wants is to get you aboard that plane alone!"

Broken-Nose snarled; his hand flashed inside his coat, emerged with a gun.

Mirov flipped out the automatic that nestled in the hollow arm of his chair and fired.

Broken-Nose squalled, dropping the gun from his bullet-shattered hand.

The two men at the end of the room started forward, yanking guns from shoulder-holsters. For one precious second the agonized Broken-Nose blocked them from a clear shot at Mirov. Mirov whirled his chair, flung himself round the desk in a crouching rush, intent on getting in front of Irena. But Irena's chair was empty. As Mirov cleared the desk corner he saw her on the floor on her hands and knees. "Lie flat!" he snapped at her, just as the nearer of the two gunmen snapped a shot at him. Before Mirov could squeeze trigger, the gunman's shot was echoed by another, down on the floor by Mirov's feet. The gunman let go of his weapon, clawing at his right arm-pit.

"No shooting!" screamed Broken-Nose. "We want that man alive!"

The other gunman hesitated, facing Mirov's steady pistol-muzzle.

"Drop it!" Mirov barked at him.

"And drop it quick, before I cut you in two!" shouted young Major Andreyev, charging through the door from the inner office with a Kalashnikov submachine gun in his hands. Behind him crowded other officers of the headquarters staff, all with weapons ready.

The gunman dropped his pistol and lifted his hands shoulder-high. His companion was now sitting on the floor, still clutching his armpit.

"Thanks, Andreyev," said Mirov. "Gather up the hardware, some of you. And let's have a surgeon in here on the double."

Irena was scrambling to her feet. Mirov bent to help her, getting between her and the others.

"I'll say 'thank you' later, darling," he muttered. "Let me have that gun quick."

He took Broken-Nose's automatic from her hand and slid it into the pocket of his shorts. She stared at him, eyes very wide.

Her hat had fallen off, her dress was sadly rumpled, she had a smudge on her cheek. She had never looked lovelier.

"Are you all right?" Mirov asked anxiously.

"Of course, she half-whispered. "It's just that I'm not used to shooting people." She made a small gesture toward the sitting gunman.

"Hush," he bade her. "They may not be sure. Your career—you don't want to be mixed up in this."

"But I had to!" she protested. "He tried to shoot you. I had to shoot him before he could try again!"

This is the girl you were sure was coming here to sell you down the river, Mirov. Remember? Shame engulfed him.

But he had work to do.

Here came a plump green-tabbed surgeon carrying his little black case.

"Take a look at that fellow sitting on the floor first, doctor," Mirov ordered.

The wounded man was rocking back and forth, groaning a little.

The doctor squatted beside him, lifted his right arm. The man's flat face twisted in sudden agony.

Mirov glanced quickly around the room. Broken-Nose had collapsed into a chair and sat nursing his hand, trying to stop the bleeding with a wadded handchief.

Two staff officers stood guard over him, pistols drawn. The uninjured gunman was backed up against the wall, also under guard.

Mirov's attention went over to the doctor, who was cutting away his patient's coat and shirt —there was plenty of blood on the shirt. The doctor's fingers probed—he wiped off some of the blood, probed again, nodded and looked up at Mirov.

"The bullet glanced off a rib and went through the muscles of the upper arm Comrade General," he reported. "He's lucky. An inch or so the other way and he could have had a hole through his lung. Come on, you, stand up while I bandage that wound. You aren't a stretcher case."

The gunman got up awkwardly, looking pretty sick. He could have been dead by now, thought Mirov. And that just might have turned out all wrong for Irena. A dead KGB operative was serious business.

"When you're through, doctor, the man there in the chair has a wounded hand," Mirov said "Major Andreyev, when the doctor has applied first aid I want these three prisoners taken down the hall to the Intelligence office and held there under a guard composed of offi-

cers of this headquarters. They are under close arrest on my personal responsibility until I have reported to higher authority."

"Understood, *General-Polkovnik,*" said Andreyev.

Mirov remembered a loose end. He couldn't afford loose ends as the Marshal had once reminded him.

"The plane these men came in, Andreyev. Was anyone else aboard?"

"Pilot and navigator, General. Wearing Air Force uniforms, but not exactly Air Force types, I'd say. They're Asiatics from the look of 'em."

"Telephone General Taranchuk to arrest them and keep the plane under strict guard."

"As ordered, General."

"Very well. Take the prisoners away and clear this room."

"March!" snapped Andreyev.

The procession filed out through the staff-office door. Broken-Nose passed Mirov without a sign or a glance. The door closed.

Irena was standing by a window in the sunlight.

"You rule here with a high hand, Shashka," she remarked.

"Let's keep it that way," said Mirov, and took her in his arms.

Her lips were as soft and lingering as they had been in all his memories for sixteen years.

Presently she pulled back a little, still within the circle of his arms.

"Wait, Shashka. Listen to me. What will happen to you now? Were those men really from the KGB?"

"You shot one of 'em without asking any questions," Mirov reminded her.

"I know—but—"

"I know too," he interrupted, "and I'll never forget."

His arms were tightening around her again when he realized that the door in the corner of the office, which gave directly on the corridor and the outside stairway, was an inch ajar.

He tapped finger on lips in warning, reached the door in two long strides and flung it open. Nobody in sight—but he heard the outer door at the foot of the stairs slam shut. He sidestepped to the window just in time to see Colonel Baranin of the KGB dive into his car and take off like a rocket.

Of his destination, Mirov had no doubt—the barbed-wire compound which contained his quarters and his private telephone connection to Moscow.

How long had he been standing at that corridor door? How much had he seen and heard? However much, someone in the KGB in Moscow would be hearing about it within five minutes.

"What's wrong, Shashka?" Irena demanded, her voice taut

with sudden anxiety.

"Keep very quiet," he ordered her, dropping into his desk chair. "Nobody's allowed in the room while I'm using this line."

He snatched the red telephone from its cradle.

"Damnation!" He heard only the musical tone which informed him that the corresponding instrument in the Marshal's desk was disconnected: as it always was when the Marshal was not in his office.

"What's wrong, Shashka?" Irena repeated sharply.

"Nothing I can't straighten out as soon as I can get my call through," he assured her.

"You don't sound too confident," she said. "You're in real trouble, aren't you, Shashka?"

"I don't think so." He remembered something he'd meant to ask and went right on: "What made you so sure all of a sudden that Comrade Broken-Nose was laying a trap for me? Is there something you've heard in Moscow—"

He left the question hanging.

"Of course not," she answered. "How would I hear anything about KGB business?"

"Then why—" he began.

"Partly because I heard you say that paper he gave you was a forgery, I think," she said slowly, the color rising a little in her face. "But mostly, as you said a minute ago—I was just sure all of a sudden that you were in terrible danger, that you mustn't go away with that man."

"Woman's intuition?" he suggested.

Her color deepened.

"A fine question to ask a scientist," she protested, a little smile beginning to quiver at her mouth-corners. "Does an electrical engineer with a graduate degree in nucleonics allow herself to be motivated by dream-stuff such as woman's intuition?"

The brown eyes, holding his steadily, widened a trifle as though their owner has just become sure of something else all of a sudden.

"The answer," she went on, "has to be yes—this time."

He got up from his chair, took her in his arms again and kissed the brown eyes.

"So you risked your career that you've worked so hard to build—even risked your life, for all you could tell—to warn me that I was in danger?" he asked.

"I chose my career instead of you that day in Sevastopol," she reminded him. "I've been taught that it's unforgivable for a graduate engineer to make the same mistake twice."

Again the gold spangles in her eyes were all a-dance.

She was laughing at him; but there was something else behind the laughter. Something at once

humble and demanding. Something expectant.

Watch your words, Mirov, his warning system was saying. You can't tell this lovely creature what she wants to hear, and you can't tell her why you can't. Desperately buying time, he kissed her eyes again, kissed her soft throat and came back to her ready lips. Her hands slipped up and clasped the back of his neck.

"I've been lonely, Shashka," he heard her whisper.

She's made her pitch, Mirov—she'll never forgive you if you don't say the right thing now. Kisses won't get you much farther—any more than they did that day in Sevastopol she remembers so well, when she ran off and left you because all you had for her were kisses and fumbling words. She's still the same woman, with the same pride. And if you fumble this time she's gone for good—

Maybe it has to be that way.

"Irena—" he began. He knew he was going to fumble.

There was a low whirring sound under his desk.

The red telephone was demanding his attention.

"There's my call, darling," he said quickly. "Forgive me, I've got to answer."

He picked up the phone.

"Mirov," he reported, adding the current code word.

"What's the KGB doing down there? Why the hell haven't you kept me informed?" roared the Marshal's angry voice.

So Baranin had got his foot in the door first.

"I called to report twenty minutes ago, Comrade Marshal. You weren't available," Mirov explained.

"I'm here now. Spill it."

Mirov told his story as briefly as he could, omitting nothing of consequence. Irena sat across the desk listening, watching his face. He wound up his statement with an account of Baranin's eavesdropping in the corridor.

"You handled yourself very well, Mirov," the Marshal acknowledged. "Your chum Baranin has made what—from your account—seems to have been a rather restrained report to his immediate superior which I've just learned of through a dependable source. He knew about the gunplay but he doesn't identify your three thugs as KGB people; merely says one of them claimed to be."

"Baranin's a little shook, as the fly-boys say," Mirov observed. "He knows what would've happened to those characters if they'd tried to march me out of my headquarters at pistol point, and he probably figures he might've been included in the massacre."

"They were KGB all right, I

gather: taking lefthanded orders from a superior who can't give official orders to Baranin," the Marshal said. "It's a typical KGB strong-arm gambit, using pawns which can be disclaimed and sacrificed if it doesn't win. Obviously the idea was to fly you across—umm—let's say to some place in China where there'd be plenty of time to persuade you to answer questions. Well now we know one useful fact: politicos here in Moscow who are behind this dirty trick may be getting more suspicious than I'd thought about your operation, but they haven't any hard information. Otherwise they wouldn't have taken such a long risk to try to get hold of some."

"I hope you can lay the baby right on their doorstep," Mirov said.

"This isn't the moment for any top-level showdown," the Marshal told him. "Time enough for that later, after you've made your move and knocked the other people off balance. You've no idea what Augustan hopes have become centered on your success. Right now what I need is an air-tight case against the KGB for allowing themelves to be involved in an attempt to kidnap a military officer engaged in weapons-tests involving the highest security."

"That could bring up some awkward questions," suggested Mirov. "Like why they did it."

"Under the circumstances, the KGB will be happy to forego any awkward questions in either direction, at least for the time being," the Marshal assured him. "Of course they'll never forgive and forget, but all that matters to you and to me is that they won't dare run any more East Kazakhstan errands for the wrong people for quite a while. We've bought time, Mirov, if we handle this right. Maybe just about enough time."

"That sounds fine," said Mirov. "We can use a little breathing spell."

He wished he could buy himself a little personal breathing spell of his own. Irena was smiling at him—but she wouldn't go on smiling when he had to start fumbling again—

"Now let's get to work," the Marshal was saying. "I want all your prisoners flown to the Moscow military airport at once: use one of your troop-carrier jets. Lavrentyev can take charge of 'em en route, with an officer guard. I'll have a reception committee of Army intelligence operatives waiting. We'll squeeze those bold policemen dry of everything they know before we hand 'em back to the KGB—with the Army's compliments and best wishes—to get what's coming to 'em for balling up

their mission and embarrassing their superiors. Send me that forged order by Lavrentyev's hand, too. I have your own statement recorded on tape here in my desk, of course. I'll be able to put together a carefully edited, top-secret, eyes-only report for my chief that I'm sure will be quite adequate for the occasion. He'll be a lot worse shook than Baranin when he hears how close you came to being eliminated altogether. There's just one loose end that I wish I could think of a good safe way to eliminate."

Somehow Mirov didn't quite like the way the Marshal said that.

"Can I help, Comrade Marshal?" he asked.

"You tell *me,*" said the Marshal. "The loose end in question is your lady friend Verskaya."

"What's wrong in that quarter?" Mirov inquired, hoping neither his voice nor his face betrayed the fact that his stomach started to turn over.

"Baranin's big mouth," rasped the Marshal. "He told his boss about how she warned you not to let those thugs get you into any plane, that it was a trap. I understand from my KGB source that this has caused quite a stir in the KGB upper hierarchy. They've jumped to the conclusion that somebody who was in on the deal—one of their own people or a politico higher up the line—must've leaked it to her, in bed or otherwise. As they see it, she went to your headquarters this morning for the express purpose of warning you."

Mirov snapped out a short word much used in the Army to express scornful disagreement. Irena grinned at him and waggled an admonitory finger.

"Whether their conclusion stinks or not," warned the Marshal, "it still appears that the KGB is most anxious to ask Madame Verskaya a few questions. They mightn't quite venture to start probing directly into the recent occurrences at your headquarters, but this unfortunate business of the alleged leak in their own organization gives them a plausible opening for an interrogation which eventually may lead them God knows where. I don't want her to become conveniently available for KGB questioning at present, Mirov: something in my guts tells me it wouldn't be safe. As long as she's at your headquarters, under the forthcoming circumstances, she won't be conveniently available. So it's my considered opinion that your weapons-tests require Deputy Minister Verskaya's continued presence there in a technical capacity, at least for a couple of months or so. Her Minister

will be so instructed. It's up to you to persuade the lady herself to go along with this program without kicking up any unseemly fuss. Especially without insisting on coming back here first. Can you do that?"

"I can try, Comrade Marshal," Mirov managed to say, fighting off a sudden swarm of buzzing notions that threatened to overwhelm his thinking faculties.

"Then see to it," barked the Marshal. "You shouldn't have too much difficulty. The lady's an old flame of yours, as I found out some time ago when I had her background looked into after learning that she'd been asking questions about you of Army officers passing through her Ministry. Apparently the flame's still burning bright, or she wouldn't be shooting policemen to save your hide, thereby risking a most promising career. Take it from there, Mirov. I understand you have an air-conditioned bedroom in your *dacha,* and you need a little diversion. Or lock her up if you have to. Use whatever means may be needed to keep her in East Kazakhstan until further orders. Enough of this by-play. Get those prisoners emplaned, and report back to me as soon as they're airborne."

The line went dead as the Marshal broke the connection.

Mirov hung up his receiver and bounced to his feet, seething.

So I'm supposed to make love to Irena till it's safe for me to toss her to the KGB to play with!

I'll see that kite-hearted old bastard in hell first. I'll find a way—

Think fast, Mirov. You were thinking fast a while ago about Irena and you came out 100% wrong. You've got to do a lot better this time. Cool off and think.

"That sounded as if it might have been an interesting conversation to hear both ends of," Irena was saying.

"You have no idea how right you are, darling," Mirov assured her.

In the back of his head, one of the buzzing notions was trying to grow up and amount to something.

He started around the desk toward Irena. She met him halfway. Her lips were ready enough, but her eyes were waiting, overdoing the kissing now would be all wrong. She'd think he was starting to fumble

You don't have to fumble any more, Mirov. You're off the hook.

The new idea was beginning to jell.

"That was my respected chief I was talking with, Irena," he

told her.

"Obviously, my Shashka," she said. "Do you take me for a ninny?"

A strange sense of relief, mingled with excitement, was taking hold of Mirov. The new idea was still communicating—

You were fumbling because she'd made a career for herself with a nice secure future, and you couldn't offer her any security at all, or even explain why you couldn't. Now she doesn't have any nice secure future of her own any more. If she gets back to Moscow, the KGB will start asking her who spilled the beans, and she won't have any answers they'll buy. They don't deal in abstractions like womanly intuition. They'll think she's holding out on them, and you know what'll happen then.

Especially as you know very well they'll never forget that she took a gun to one of their strong-arm lads.

No official with a job as sensitive as hers has any worthwhile future when she becomes an object of persistent police attention. They'll hound her into obscurity and misery. Maybe into something worse.

Irena has thrown her future away for your sake.

So you've got to share your future with her—such as it is.

All that thinking in thirty seconds, while Mirov covered his tracks by sinking back into his chair and drawing Irena down on his lap.

She came unresisting, but her eyes still waited—

"The Marshal," he told her, "says I've been driving myself too hard. He thinks I need a little diversion."

"He must be rather more considerate than most Marshals I've heard of," she murmured against his shoulder. "And so, my Shashka?"

This has to be done just right, Mirov. You don't dare tell her about her KGB problem or she'll get the notion that you're somehow endangering yourself to protect her and go all noble and self-sacrificing on you. What you need is the light romantic touch that appeals to women.

And afterward? When she finds out what's facing her? Danger and hardship in a strange land, riding behind a three-horse-tail standard? You can't tell her about that either. Not yet, anyway. All you can do is hope you can make her understand when you do have to tell her—

His warning system broke into this idyll with a frantic protest.

Are you out of your mind, you fool? What is the Marshal going to say when you tell him what you've done?

The hell with what he says.

He'll have to learn to live with the accomplished fact. So will his boss. I'm Shashka Mirov, the indispensable man, upon whom Augustan hopes are staked; and what I mean to do right here and now is to wrap my woman in the protecting mantle of my own indispensability. At any cost.

That was another quarter-minute of fast thinking.

Irena stirred in his arms—let's keep it light and gay a little longer—

"And so," Mirov went on, "it has occurred to the Marshal that a lady who shoots policemen to protect a gentleman friend might have some affection for the gentleman in question."

"That," pronounced Irena, "would appear to be a logical conclusion."

She cuddled a little, still waiting.

"With that thought in mind," proceeded Mirov, "he's taken it upon himself to arrange with your Minister for you to remain here for a time, my Irena. To supervise my missile-testing programs, of course. But he also went so far as to remind me that I have an air-conditioned bedroom in my *dacha.*"

Mirov felt her body stiffen slightly in his embrace.

"A considerate Marshal indeed," she remarked. There was a purring note in her voice. "Everything arranged so neatly."

Watch it, Mirov. The light touch isn't doing too well.

"Not quite everything," he said. "There's one small detail that I'm adding on my own initiative."

"Perhaps you'll tell me about that too?" suggested Irena, the offbeat tone still in her voice.

"Its like this," Mirov explained. "What I have here is an independent command, on the level of a field army. Therefore my headquarters includes a military court. The judge of that court has some of the powers of a civilian magistrate. Among other things, he can marry people. Right now I have some very urgent duties. Shall we say at four o'clock this afternoon, my Irena?"

Irena sat up straight on his knees, grabbed his ears with both hands and shook his head from side to side while the gold spangles danced merrily in her eyes.

"You great barbarian!" she cried. "What an approach! You and your damned air-conditioned bedroom! Do you realize I haven't so much as brought a night dress with me?"

instead of the saint — X

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

It has been remarked that Simon Templar, in the stories, almost never seems to encounter bad weather. There are, of course, two or three exceptions which I can bring to mind, not without effort; but on the whole it seems to be true that through most of his recorded days the sun shines on him as persistently as the goddess Fortune—a fact which prompted John Paddy Carstairs, who has directed Saint pictures for both the big and the small screen, but not nearly enough of either, to suggest a book title which I happily adopted, THE SAINT IN THE SUN.

There is an obvious basis for this in the fact that I am personally addicted to good weather—who isn't?—but especially I detest cold and the allied discomforts of the northern winter, a hatred which I honed to a bitter edge during an adolescence spent in England, which is not renowned for the world's most salubrious winter climate, and much of it at a Spartan type of boarding school situated in one of the bleakest corners of even that inclement isle. At some comparatively tender age, I swore to myself as I sat sniffling and rubbing my chilblains that if I ever had it made I would so order my life that I could follow the sun wherever it shone; and this undoubtedly was a strong contributory cause of my becoming a writer, a profession which can be pursued almost anywhere, the only geographical office to which one must be even loosely tied being a post office. A whole new science of psychometeorology might be pyramided on this (and probably many another available) example of the decisive influence of climate upon career.

And yet, I have always had a sentimental fondness for rain, when it can be separated from shivering, and in a way which

none of you unfortunates who live in a big city can appreciate, if you are separated from it by a roof several impersonal floors higher up. In a city apartment or a city street, rain is merely a nuisance; to feel the excitement of rain you have to be where the rain belongs, out in the open where you can see it falling all around, and separated from it by the least possible protection necessary to keep you dry—if even that.

I have loved rain in Malaya, where the tropical storms come down in a deluge, pounding the roof like a drum and streaming from the eaves in a hundred miniature cataracts, when you could sit on an open verandah and watch it with great dewdrops condensing on the glass in your hand, and the air was suddenly cool and fresh with temporary relief from the steaming heat. I have listened to it in Corsica, sputtering on the taut cloth of a tent top, and peered out from that precarious shelter to watch the drops dancing on the rocks and running down to swell a new torrent in the parched ravine. I have watched thunderheads building over the mountains in Tirol and exploding over the green valley where I didn't even have a tent but only a ground sheet to pull over my sleeping bag and hope that too much wet wouldn't creep in, which it invariably did.

I have loved rain in England, misting down in the mild sweetness of spring, and also when a rare summer cloudburst caught me in one of those baby cars, and I had to stop suddenly because you couldn't see six feet ahead, and it felt rather like being washed over Niagara in a tin can with the water banging on it like hammers. I remember soft rains in Connecticut that rustled through the trees and started a riot of ripples on the river, and it leaked through several places in the roof and made everything beautifully damp and clammy. In Florida once it was raining so hard when I was trying to settle my trailer that a raincoat was only an uncomfortable encumbrance, and the best solution was to strip down to swimming trunks, after which the rain didn't matter any more, but afterwards I could towel off inside and listen to its drum-roll on the roof with more than ordinary complacency.

That is the best way to enjoy rain—by crawling into a cave or taking refuge under the flimsiest of shelters or letting it beat on your bare skin. In that way there is a sense of primitive personal triumph, a challenge taken up and thrown back, an actual victory over the elements. You are a part of the epic of human achievement, battling the arrogant whims of nature to find a precarious

comfort and security. When a city grows big enough to take this feeling away, the people who live there have lost a great deal of the adventure of living.

It was while dodging the rain on some of the hiking trips which I enjoyed in my twenties, with a pack on my back and all the essentials for simple survival in it, that I first had to tackle the art of cooking. This was enforced not only by reasons of economy, but also because these hikes were plotted to go through the most unspoiled possible country, of which there was still plenty even in Europe, avoiding all highways and their disruptive traffic (hitch-hiking had not yet been invented, but we would have scorned it even if it had) and reveling in long stretches of landscape unspoiled by even the most seductive restaurant. But since the clean air and exertion engendered prodigious appetites, it was still necessary to create meals, for which bread and cheese would not suffice all day.

Thus I was introduced to the hobo's stand-by, the prototypical stew or mulligan, compounded of any meat and vegetables that could be carried, found, begged, or stolen, simmered together in one single vessel and eaten straight from it, because there cannot be many burners on a small and often secretive camp fire or portable stove, and dishwashing must be held to a minimum with largely providential water supplies and only a tuft of weeds with fine mud on the roots for scouring. It was in Corsica that I discovered, through some sort of blind instinct or groping, how to improve it by adding the remains of a bottle of coarse wine to the water, and sprigs of wild thyme to the salt and pepper we carried for seasoning. From which I was eventually to find a secondary career as an amateur gastronome, writing articles about cookery for publications as eclectic as *Gourmet.*

When I initiated this amorphous department in the SAINT MAGAZINE, frankly admitting that it stemmed from some similar meanderings which I once privately circulated as *A Letter from the Saint,* a long-ago subscriber to that venture, Anthony Boucher, now the distinguished mystery critic of the New York *Times,* wrote me that he hoped I would include some of the recipes that may have exercised the digestion of readers of the old *Letter.* At that

time, I had my doubts whether that would be acceptable in a thing called THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE; but as I write this, I am faced with the situation that tomorrow the London (England) *Observer,* as distinguished a newspaper as the New York *Times,* is coming to my temporary abode near London to take pictures of my kitchen and write an article about my prowess, not as an author, but as a cook. In preparation for which I have been asked to assemble some recipes, and in process of which I came upon the following, from an old file of that *Letter from the Saint.*

I was, in that item, discussing the stuffing of a goose. But my formula could, I think, be just as felicitously inserted in a turkey, or, in proportionately reduced quantity, into a duck. I would not recommend it for a chicken, unless you don't like the taste of chicken, which it should be strong enough to overpower.

Take two handfuls of the very hard and coarse black kind of pumpernickel without caraway seeds in it. Break it up in a bowl, douse it with drinkable Beaujolais and soak it until it is soft enough to mash with a fork. Dump on this mash two pounds of pork sausage meat. Now chop the following, not very finely

1 handful of parsley
4 outer stems of celery, leaves and all
2 medium onions
1 pound of chestnuts, peeled
½ pound of stoneless prunes.

Add this mince to your bowl. Chop two larger onions and fry them quite brown. Strain and dump these in, and season with the following:

½ teaspoon each of crushed sage, rosemary, and thyme
½ teaspoon each of powdered cloves and nutmeg
1 tablespoon each of Worcester sauce, mushroom sauce, and orange marmalade
2 cloves of garlic pulped through a press

Sprinkle with 1½ fluid ounces of Madeira and mix thoroughly, adding as much more wine as necessary to make the stuffing moist enough to handle conveniently. Fill your bird and sew it up carefully. Do this, preferably, 24 hours before you have to start cooking it.

Tony Boucher will recognize this recipe, but if there are not too many protests from other readers I shall probably print some

more here in months to come which will be new to him. I may of course be told that this is no place for notes from my kitchen, and yet I feel that even the most monomaniac devotee of crime and mystery stories may also like to eat.

Perhaps this is the time to develop that last thought still further.

The assumption that readers can be pigeonholed in tight little compartments—as readers of mystery stories, love stories, historical novels, travel books, westerns, or watever—is, I think, outdated and overdue for the junkyard. Personally I have often doubted whether it ever did have much validity, but I am quite sure that it has none today. If there ever were an important number of readers who refused to open more than one kind of book, television must have cured them: the private-eye series is followed by the western, which is followed by the musical-variety show, which is followed by the spy story, and under the hypnotic spell of the moron's movie-box the captives continue to sit in front of it, even if they change channels, and are thus dragged willy-nilly into various different forms of entertainment, and though they may have switched it on only to watch cops and robbers they are forced to discover, albeit at probably the lowest viable level, that there actually exist other subjects for story and drama. So that when separated from the clodpate's comforter, as for instance on a train or bus journey, or when forced to bask on some outlandish beach where no one has a portable TV, they might fearlessly pick up almost any sort of reading matter, undeterred by the fact that it is not in the one limited category to which they are supposed to confine themselves.

Readers of the Saint, above all, are less likely than anybody to have needed dislodgement from such a groove. Just as Simon Templar attempts to be a more complete and many-faceted person than most of his contemporary competitors and imitators, with a few interests beyond the murderous, the mercenary, or the mammary, so have his faithful readers (to judge by our correspondence) been drawn from a most wide-angled public, covering all layers of the social strata to the very top, which must inevitably bring in a great percentage whose preoccupations and curiosities have to range far beyond the bounds of a simple "mystery" story.

In this belief, as some of you must have noticed, we have for a long time been sneaking material into this Magazine which has ventured measurably beyond the traditional limitations of a "mystery" magazine. My own Introductions inside the front cover first began to succumb to a temptation to cut across the more hidebound limitations of criminological subjects, and the institution of this *Instead of the Saint* feature was a thicker part of the same entering wedge as the range of my dissertations progressively widened. That this should finally have led to the inclusion of anything so nominally incongruous as a cooking recipe is only a logical development. But it is not one which makes me rear back as at the brink of a precipice, in sudden horrified realization of where I have been heading. Far from it. On the contrary, it seems like the cue to acknowledge frankly that we have climbed over a barrier ridge and (to continue the metaphor) are moving on into as yet uncharted but certainly more open country.

With this in mind, I have urged on our publishers that we should drop the word "mystery" from our title, and henceforth be known simply as THE SAINT MAGAZINE.

Under that less trammeling banner, we shall be free to wander towards much wider horizons. This does not mean, I devoutly hope, that we shall print anything which would be either tedious or offensive to my concept of our typical reader. But we shall take the attitude that this reader is in fact a very superior type indeed, a true man or woman of the world, regardless of age, whose enjoyment of a Saint adventure, or any good crime story, does not prohibit a lively interest in other themes and other kinds of writing.

And at the same time, I may be venal enough to hope that other excellent readers who do not care very much at present for crime stories, if they are no longer put off by the "mystery" brand on our cover, may be curious enough to investigate a copy, and through that may be insidiously infected by the Saint virus, with the happiest consequences for all of us.

In this issue, especially since you have been warned, you will not fail to notice some new trends. There will be no overnight transformation; but, as our inventory of material turns over, the changes will become more and more unmistakable. We think you are much too intelligent to disapprove without giving us a chance. And we hope you will eventually be delighted.

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the authentic death of cotton clark

by Pat McMahon

I SUPPOSE there's been more written about Cotton Clark's death than was ever written about him while he was alive. Oh, people always noticed Cotton. They wrote about his singing and the marches and all the rest of the stuff, but somehow it wasn't until very late—almost at the end of his life—that the big news magazines started paying attention. Now, in the two years since he died, there have already been three books and maybe a hundred magazine articles, all trying to explain how he died, and why.

So maybe you're wondering why anybody needs to read one more article about Cotton Clark. Well, I think I knew him pretty good. I was close to him all through those stormy years, and I was there just before he died. When they started the campaign, I was the first one to wear a *Who Murdered Cotton Clark?* button, and I talked about it on TV.

Songs of protest have been a part of our traditions and of our literature for centuries. More and more, in our time, they have come to be recognized as a tool, as a weapon, the proper use of which could help to sway thousands. And more. The Cotton Clarks of this world were inevitable, as this came to be recognized as a political reality. What these hepsters have done (is there another word for them, I wonder?) has been to exploit this situation. As others did before them — and will do, after them... ***H.S.S.***

He was a guy who said he died a little every time he sang a song, but this is the story of his authentic death.

I guess the first time I met Cotton Clark was back out in the midwest, when he was working his way to Nashville by washing dishes in a chain of fly-specked lunch counters. He'd move from one town to the next, always with a recommendation of sorts from the previous manager, always moving southeast toward the fabled treasures of Nashville.

His name wasn't Cotton Clark in those days, but that doesn't matter. He decided early that Cotton Clark looked good on the signs outside the little bars where he sang—mostly at night, after he finished his dishwashing chores.

I went with him one night to a little place in southern Illinois, and I sat at the bar and listened to him strum that guitar and sing a song he'd written just that afternoon. It was a song about the atomic bomb and civil rights and a lot of other things. The people in the bar were mostly small town folk, so I guess the song didn't mean too much to them. Maybe it was more of a New York type of song.

We did better on a college campus where Cotton played and sang during a spring weekend. The kids really went for him, maybe because he was still pretty much of a kid himself and really spoke their language. By that time I was acting pretty much as his agent, dickering half the night for an extra twenty bucks, or spending hours on the long-distance phone lining up one-night stands along our route.

Pretty soon Cotton didn't have to wash dishes any more, and we were making enough to buy a fairly decent used car. We arrived in Nashville in real style, with a firm date to meet the A & R man at one of the leading record companies. The word about Cotton's success on college campuses and at one-night stands had preceded us, and he was all smiles as we talked over terms. What it amounted to was that the record company was willing to take a chance on waxing a pair of Cotton's protest songs. The pay—an advance against royalties—wouldn't be much, but at least he'd have a record.

I sat in on that first recording session, as I was to do at so many others, and I'd never heard Cotton sing a better song. It was something called *The Cowboy's Crucifixion,* about a wanderer from Texas who loved freedom, but was drafted into the army to fight a war in a strange, remote land. At the end of the song, the soldier cowboy dies pinned to a tree by a native spear, thrown

by a poor man defending his home from the American invader. On the last chorus, I really thought Cotton was going to die himself. Some of the musicians applauded when he finished.

The next part of his career is probably the best known. That first record caught on among a passionate fringe of liberals and college students. With some good plugs on network radio and a few television appearances, Cotton Clark was becoming a household word. His next song was a passionate plea for nuclear disarmament, and this was followed by a stinging protest against the treatment of Negroes in northern cities. Cotton made $37,000 after taxes that year, and we moved to New York.

Cotton took an apartment on Fifth Avenue, overlooking the Central Park Zoo. It wasn't exactly the penthouse, but it was the next best thing to it. Sometimes at night we'd sit in his living room over a drink and listen to the sea lions barking at the moon. It was a good life, but already Cotton Clark was growing impatient with it.

At about that time he met Sondra Devin. She was a young New York socialite, as beautiful as the newspapers said, and twice as intelligent as you had a right to expect. I'd probably have fallen in love with her myself if Cotton hadn't seen her first. Sondra had a profound influence on Cotton, because she was the one who convinced him it wasn't enough to sit in Manhattan recording songs of protest while living the good life. He was losing contact with the people, she told him, and that could be fatal to his career.

Well, Cotton took her advice. He packed up his guitar and went out among the people he'd been singing for. He appeared at Harlem rallies and helped lead freedom marches. He wore a ban-the-bomb button in his lapel all the time, and when he and Sondra went out on dates, they were more than likely to turn up at a rally somewhere.

I went along with this for a while, because it was good publicity and I was still getting my ten percent, but after he slugged the cop during the school boycott I felt it was time to have a talk with him. He got out of that one with a stiff fine, and his fans loved him all the more, chanting on the sidewalk in anticipation as he walked out of the courtroom. But I wasn't satisfied.

That night, sitting in his apartment while Sondra mixed the drinks, I tried to tell him that he was confusing moral issues with mere protest. Sure, I went along with most of the stuff he was crusading for—but somehow he never seemed to know where to

draw the line. Somehow everything about America these days seemed to be wrong to the people he was associating with. They talked a lot about peace and civil liberties and freedom from want, but every once in a while they sneaked a few crackpot ideas in with all the good ones. They gave the writers more freedom, and the pornographers too.

But by this time Cotton was already too much under Sondra's influence. Maybe she was just a rich girl out on a spree, revolting against her parents in their shadowy Beekman Place duplex, or maybe she really believed in the causes she argued for. The trouble was, a lot of the things she said about Negroes and the war and the government were certainly true, and sometimes it was tough to spot the untruths without sounding like some sort of "fascist."

So Cotton and I came pretty close to splitting. I think about the only thing that kept us together was the threatening letters and phone calls, which had begun to arrive after every big appearance at a demonstration or march. Maybe he thought of me as a bodyguard, something to go along with the little Italian pistol he'd taken to carrying under his left armpit.

He was being attacked quite regularly by that time, accused by angry whispered voices of being everything from a Communist to a homosexual and worse. There'd been several threats on his life, but these didn't really seem to bother him too much. The gun, and my companionship, were really designed for Sondra's protection, because we both feared that his new-found enemies might strike at her.

The amazing fact was that through all of this he continued to sing his songs with all the old vigor and life. I remember one recording session toward the end, on a windy night at the beginning of a rare New York snowstorm. Sondra lounged with mink coat and hot coffee in one corner of the studio, while I paced back and forth in the control booth, watching the tiny red needle bob back and forth as that wonderful voice of his came through the microphone.

It was a song about a child's death under the wheels of a shiny new auto, a sort of symbol of Twentieth Century man's dilemma. I watched Sondra during the song, and wasn't surprised to see that she was almost crying. When Cotton was singing up a storm, he could really get to you. I went down and congratulated him after it was over, and for a little while it was just like our early days together.

The following week was when that final trouble began. He'd gotten some more threatening

mail after a speech against a veterans' organization, but he hardly looked at it any more. He seemed resigned to the fact that someone—some nut—might try to kill him. He'd made a lot of enemies, and he was the first to admit it. He went downstairs that day and found a cop putting a ticket on his illegally parked car. They had a brief skirmish on the sidewalk and the cop finally hit him a glancing blow with his club.

Well, Cotton wasn't really hurt, but before morning he'd filed suit against the city charging police brutality. The cry was quickly taken up by his followers, and by Sondra in particular. The thing was in all the papers, and I figured Cotton was probably penning a song about it that very day. But he surprised me and suggested instead that we go for a ride in the country so he could relax a little. Sondra came along, and I don't really know why they wanted me. But I curled up in the back seat and dozed through most of the trip, tired of gazing at endless miles of snow-spotted fields.

We stopped for lunch at a little New England town, and of course that's where it happened. I learned much later that it was called New Forest, but at the time I had no idea where we were. All I knew, looking at the drab sameness of whitewashed cottages and junky shops, was that it wasn't much of a place to live. And it was a hell of a place to die.

After lunch, over weak coffee served by a sleepy waitress, Sondra explained that it was a resort town, more or less closed down for the winter months. I wondered what it was like in summer, and Cotton commented that it was one place he could come to without being recognized. It was true enough—the waitress hadn't given him a second look.

I guess this was what started us on a discussion of his career. Of course he was already big, with records and TV appearances, but he was big with only one segment of the population. He was a hero to the young, the disenchanted, the protesters. Those who made up the real American establishment might never even have known he existed. Even the skirmish with the cop had only rated passing mention in the papers. He was a household word, all right, but not in the households where it counted. Not in a staid New England seaside resort that happened to be closed for the winter.

Something happened as we were leaving that place. A simple thing—the sleepy cashier shortchanged him five dollars. I don't know what it was that made him do it. Maybe in that moment he was simply protesting still, protesting against all the stupid and

indifferent people in the world. He took out the gun he carried for protection and waved it in the woman's face, demanding his money. The manager appeared from somewhere, and Cotton waved the gun at him too. His finger wasn't even in the trigger guard. He was only scaring them.

But that was when the state trooper walked through the door. His name was Harry Sullivan, and he'd only been stopping off for lunch. It was just that he'd picked that moment out of all the moments of eternity to walk through the door. He shouted for Cotton to drop the gun, and drew his own weapon. For maybe an instant they faced each other like that, with Sondra shouting something over my shoulder and Cotton's face all white with indecision.

Then I guess Cotton decided, and he shot the trooper through the heart.

That was when the newspapers and magazines really discovered Cotton Clark. A hundred reporters covered his trial and the appeal, and when he died in the electric chair the news was flashed around the world. It was Sondra, of course, who organized the big campaign against capital punishment, with buttons and slogans and full-page newspaper ads. *End Capital Punishment,* they shouted, and after it was over, *Who Murdered Cotton Clark?* I think he would have liked it, and maybe even written a song about it if they'd have let him keep his guitar at the end.

So that's how he died, really, and I guess if anybody murdered him it was somebody back a long time ago. The first person to applaud when he sang one of his songs. . . .

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the gangster

by Peter Cheyney

DID you ever hear of a guy called Jimmy Jason? A big shot now, a G Man working for Uncle Sam, but I can remember when I was stringing along with him on a sixth floor office on the corner of Broadway and East Eleventh. "Jimmy Jason, Private Investigations," was on the door.

Jason was a wow. He was tall and big and good-looking. Dames used to fall for him. But he was stand-offish.

One night him and me is sittin' in the office doin' some heavy thinking. All of a sudden the outer door opens and in comes some dame.

Gee, was she lovely? I have seen some good-lookers in my time but that dame had what it takes. She was tall an' she was slim. She had black hair, an' big turquoise eyes, and her skin was so fine it looked like it was transparent.

She don't waste no time. She opens up her handbag an' she

Petter Cheyney's New York obviously bears little resemblance to the New York we know. And the American law enforcement officers described by him and others, at that time, likewise bore little or no resemblance to the genuine article. Jimmy Jason, for instance, could never have become "a big shot now, a G man working or Uncle Sam." But there was an aliveness to his stories, which will always keep Cheyney's name alive in the field.

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takes out a packet of dough. She puts it on the corner of the desk. Then she starts talkin'.

She speaks as good as she looks and her voice is low and husky. Every now and then she stops and coughs. It looks to me like this dame is sick.

"Mr. Jason," she says, "I've heard about you. They tell me that you are a man who is not afraid to take a chance, and that you are one of the cleverest private operators in New York. There are 10,000 dollars. Tell me, can you get a man out of prison for that?"

Jason grins.

"That depends on the prison lady," he says.

She tells him the name of the pen and Jason looks at me. It just happened to be one of them dumps where money talks plenty. Then she comes across with the story.

It looks like that she is in love with Tony Fremer. Now everybody knows that Tony was sent up a year before on a ten years' rustication for usin' a gun on Willie Lacazzi. It is also a cinch by the way this dame is talking that she is well stuck on Fremer, and she wants to get him out. When she's finished spielin', Jason says, "I think it might be done. Anyhow we can try."

"I'm glad you can help, Mr. Jason," she says, "there's only one thing, but it's rather important. You've got to get Tony out before September."

Jason raised his eyebrows.

"You ain't giving me much time lady," he says. "We're in the middle of July now."

"I'm sorry," she says, "but he's got to be out by September, and if he is there'll be another 10,000 dollars for you."

Jason grins at her.

"O.K., lady," he says. "You can consider him sprung. Just leave your address with Riscoe, will you? I'll contact you later."

She gives me her address, she says goodnight an' she goes out.

"Well, what do you know about that, Willie?" says Jason.

"It looks good to me," I say. "I reckon it'll cost us about 5000 to spring that guy out of that dump and we ought to be on 15,000 profit. Nice work. Jimmy."

"Yeah?" he says. "Well, there's something screwy about it. Listen to this. Did you see that woman's shoes? You didn't, you never see a thing. Well, one of them wanted mending, an' her clothes were good but they were darned old. What's a woman in that state doing with ten grand?"

He picks up the bills off the table. They are one-hundred-dollar bills and they are new.

"Listen, sourpuss," he says. "Get around first thing in the morning. Check up on these bills, find out the bank they came from

and find out whose account paid 'em.

"When you've done that, do a little checking up on Tony Fremer. I want his record, an' let me know where the contact is between him and this dame."

Next morning I rustle around, and at 12 o'clock I have got the dope like he said.

The woman is a dame named Cynthis Fernand but I can't find out very much about her before she contacted with Tony, which was 18 months before. She fell for this guy Fremer with a bump, and it looked like she was helping him in a dope peddling racket that he was running at the time.

Fremer was a bad guy. What a woman who looked as nice as she did was doing stringing along with a slug like him I don't know. Dames do funny things anyway, or ain't you heard about that?

Now about the dough. It looked like that was fairly normal. I traced the money to the Sixth National Bank of Illinois, New York branch.

She cashed a cheque there for it, and the cheque had been made out by Fritz Schrelt, who was one of the hottest shyster lawyers in the city. He was a gangsters' mouthpiece, and he was good at his business.

It looked liked sense to me that Fremer had pulled the usual stunt of turning over his dough to Schrelt when he was sent up and it looked like Schrelt had done the normal thing and handed ten grand to the woman to contact Jason in order to get Fremer out.

I tell Jason all this.

"Relax, Sherlock," he says.

"You'd have thought that as Fremer an' this dame was so stuck on each other, he'd have fixed that Schrelt would let her have money for shoe repairs while he was in jail, wouldn't you? It's funny that this dame should go to Schrelt to get the money and walk out with ten grand and bring it round here to us when she looks as if she could do with a man's size steak."

I don't see what all that matters, and I tell him so.

"O.K., Willie," he says. "Now you get busy. You take a little trip up the river. Take a coupla grand of the money and just get around with some of the guards of that prison. See if you can arrange a nice little escape, and see if you can fix it quick."

Well, I fix it. I get three prison guards in on our side, an' the whole thing is hunky dory. These boys think a nice little escape can be arranged, and I fix it shall come off the first week in August. So we just stick around and wait.

Well, it just don't happen,

Fremer is pinched at the last minute by a coupla guards who are not playin' with our team.

I tell Jason this an' I reckon that he will be burned up considerable, but he just says that he reckons that this dame Cynthis Fernand has got tubercular and I am to go and get a line on whether she is havin' medical treatment any place for it.

Can you beat that? Will you tell me what this dame havin' consumption has got to do with our escape plot goin' haywire?

All right. I find out that this dame is havin' treatment at St. Mary's, and when I tell Jimmy he goes around there, and when he comes back he says that the doctor says that he reckons that this Cynthis Fernand can last about a coupla months.

She is as bad as that. He also says that if she could go to some sanatorium in Switzerland she might have a good chance.

"I'm seeing daylight," I tell him. "The idea is to get Fremer sprung out of the pen so that they can take a run-out powder to Switzerland together."

He don't say nothin'. He just looks at me.

"Now listen, Brilliance," he says after a bit. "We're goin' to have another go to spring this guy, but this time we ain't goin' to work the same way. I see that Red Schultz is in that pen, too, an' I have been talkin' to some pals of his an' they want him sprung, an' I have told 'em that I will look after the job.

"You gotta fix a watertight scheme to get this Fremer out within a coupla weeks, an' Red Schultz has got to be sprung, too. Then everybody is goin' to think that Schultz's pals have pulled it. But nobody is to say a word to Fremer. Schultz can know an' when the time comes for the break he can bring Fremer out with him. Now go an' get busy."

Well, this time we fix it.

Six nights later, Jimmy an' me are sittin' in a roadhouse like we have planned an' I get a tinkle there from one of the prison guards' wives who is on the job that Schultz an' Fremer are out an' that it will be about half an hour before the escape is known.

McGonnigle—another one of Jimmy's boys — is pickin' up Fremer in a car at an arranged spot, an' Schultz's pals are meetin' him with a car at another place.

Jimmy is drinkin' a highball at the bar, an' I go over an' tell him that everything is O.K.

We go outside an' we get in the car an' we drive off.

It is two o'clock in the mornin' when we pull up at Schrelt's house. Jimmy rings the bell an' after a bit Schrelt opens up the door Jimmy steps inside an' Schrelt asks him what he wants.

"Twenty grand," says Jimmy.

Schrelt looks at Jimmy like he was goofy, but he takes us into some room an' asks what all this hooey is about.

Jimmy lights a cigar.

"Listen, Schrelt," he says. "You're in bad an' you're goin' to pay plenty to get out."

"You knew that this dame Fernand was all set to pass out with tubercular, an' you also knew that there was only one thing she wanted to do before she died, an' that was to kill Fremer because he was the guy who was responsible for all that had happened to her.

"So you get her along an' give her ten grand for me to spring Fremer so that she would bump him off, an' then you would have the dough he turned over to you before he was sent up. An' you also knew that she won't worry you any more because she would get herself pinched for the killin'.

"But you oughta have got her shoes mended before she came around to see me, because that made me start thinkin'.

"Now Fremer is out, an' if I tell him about your little game what do you thing he is goin' to do to you? He's goin' to bump you off, ain't he?"

"Now if I get twenty grand I'll look after him. If I don't, then I'm goin' to bring you boys together.

"Well, do we trade?"

Schrelt is scared stiff. He makes a lot of talk, but he pays up. Jimmy puts the dough in his pocket an' we say good-night an' scram.

We drive around to the Madison Arms, where this Cynthis Fernand is stayin', an' we go up to her apartment an' knock her up. Is she surprised?

Jimmy puts the dough on the table and hands her a packet.

"Listen lady," he says. "There's your steamer tickets and reservations for Switzerland, an' there's twenty grand for expenses. You're leavin' tomorrow."

He says good-night an' we go off, leavin' her with her mouth open.

We drive round to the office an' Jimmy pours two stiff ones out of a flask, an' then he hands me five hundred-dollar bills.

"That's for you, Faceache," he says, "an' I don't think you was worth it."

"Say listen, Jimmy," I say. "What is this? What's the set-up. Where's Fremer, an' what do you get outa this?"

He grins.

"I knew that Fremer would fix so that he wouldn't escape the first time because he knew the dame was all set to get him," he said. "But that suited me.

"When that broke I went to

the Commissioner an' told him that I'd got information that there would be more attempts to break out; that the guards was all fixed, but that I could handle the job for five grand.

"It worked. McGonnigle and me was sworn in as special deputies to bust the plot—an' we bust it. The Schultz mob was pinched by some other guys, an' when McGonnigle met Fremer he shot him for resistin' arrest—like I told him to."

He puts his hat over one eye.

"Listen. Unconscious," he says. "You gotta look after the office for a bit. I'm takin' a vacation."

"Where you goin', Jimmy." I say, "the coast?"

"No," he says "Switzerland."

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black spot

by S. L. M. Barlow

As usual, at no matter what hour, Miss Rose Brimbal was surrounded by books. Being the official librarian, antiquary and registrar of the Annisquam Memorial, for her to shuttle volumes from the Library to her own fireside for a quick perusal was only natural. As she intended to go to the Lanesville Flower Show that afternoon, her selection had been pertinent. She closed one large illustrated tome when her knocker sounded, and went to the door to admit an expected guest.

"You are early but I'm glad of it", said Miss Brimbal, and continued without pause, "that hat with the pink poppies over your right eye is extremely dashing."

"Not dashing, dear. Daché." Mrs. Laura Mapleson was monumental. Even a poppy over the temple could not diminish her. "I thought it appropriate for the Garden Club".

"So it is. And for my part I've

Rose Brimbal, librarian, antiquary, and registrar of Annisquam Memorial Library and Museum, on "Cape Ann", is by now an old friend of ours. We met her first in MONOLOGUE OF MURDER (SMM, Dec. 1961), and then MURDER BY CODE (May '65) and SLAM IN DIAMONDS (Sept. '65).

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been reading up on horticulture. Look, here is Dioscorides, a Roman army surgeon. Time of Augustus, I think. He says that a broth of hollyhock root is good for 'such as are bitten by a Phalanx, and it brings out milk. But ye seed, being mixed with wild Lote and drunk with wine, doth assuage the griefs about the bladder."

"At the same time as it kills you," said Mrs. Mapleson. "And what sort of a phalanx and how can it bite? I thought it was a military formation."

"I'm sure I don't know. I also pulled out, for no reason especially, Pammel's Manual of Poison Plants. Most fascinating, but I've only dipped here and there. Let me show you these illustrations . . ."

"No, Rose. I'm fetching you for a purpose. The Flower Show opens at three and by five it looks wilted. Also I'm curious to see what the Culpeppers are exhibiting. Do you know them?"

"The ones with the garden?" asked Miss Brimbal.

"Of course. Launcelot and Maia."

"O, yes—hardly at all. Maia Culpepper I believe is known to people who dislike her as *Mea Culpa* . . ."

"Nonsense. No one dislikes Maia, she's so beautiful. She is a remarkable and admirable woman. Some day soon we'll drive over and see her and the house."

"Very well," said Rose with resignation." But since I'm to meet them today do tell me about them first."

"Launcelot is an ill man. Asthma, I believe. He was widowed years ago and his stepdaughter Maia (the cripple, you know) has looked after him ever since. Quite a martyr she is. Absolutely devoted."

"I don't see what else she could do, with paralyzed legs," said Rose.

"You're very unfeeling, my dear," said Mrs. Mapleson. "Of course I won't say she could have married, but considering how well-off they are, she could have had some independence. Launcelot is crotchety."

Miss Brimbal's nose twitched and, with one hand, she patted the tight bun of hair on top of her head—all signs of rumination, of searching in her memory. "Haven't I heard their house is haunted?"

"Dear me," said Laura, "I don't think so . . ."

"Anyway," pursued Rose, "I vaguely remember something sinister."

"Perhaps you've heard tales of the adopted son. Launcelot adopted some European lad years ago. Heaven knows who his parents were. I don't think I ever saw him. Have you?"

"No," answered Rose. "And I've seen the Culpeppers only once in the distance. What's ominous about the boy?"

"A sort of Balkan, I believe. Forbidding looking, I hear. Foreign name. I suspect he's delinquent. I sometimes wonder if he's not the murderous type. If Maia died, he'd inherit everything."

"Curiouser and curiouser," quoted Miss Brimbal. "But don't let your imagination run away with you."

"Shall we drive over there next week?"

"Love to," said Miss Brimbal.

Miss Brimball usually went wherever Mrs. Mapleson decided to drive her. Laura Mapleson was wealthy and toured around in a Bentley with a chauffeur. She was a summer visitor on Cape Ann, opening her cottage at Pigeon Cove for a short three months. Both women belonged to the Lanesville Ladies Garden Club and saw each other not only at meetings but frequently at tea or on long drives. Laura Mapleson was a pillar of conventionality but somehow managed to be delighted with what she called Rose Brimbal's eccentricities. They got on well together and—barring liberal politics, sex or current movies—could enjoy each other's conversation. It seemed odd to Laura that her friend Rose should on occasion display such a curious interest in things Laura preferred to ignore. But there was no doubt about the slightly incredulous fascination exerted.

"And," continued Laura, "Maia's a perfectionist!" as though that set the seal of righteousness.

"Dear me," said Miss Rose. "How alarming! I always feel that a perfectionist merely wants things done her way. Like 'mother knows best.' I've always liked the French saying *Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien.* Or as we say, let well enough alone."

"At all events, Rose," Mrs. Mapleson went on, "the Culpepper gardens are famous."

"Gardens?"

"Why yes. There are several small ones. A rose garden naturally; also herb gardens that Maia's very proud of. They're unique, in fact. And some special small plots I forget of what, as well as marvelous herbaceous borders, and green-houses," said Mrs. Mapleson. "Come! We must be off."

The Flower Show was held in Miss Anita Cabot Ingolsby's barn. It was called, on the invitations, The Granary. On one side, the lawn swept up to the house, on the other lay the black velvet water of an abandoned quarry. Gardeners and chauffeurs were belatedly tucking in

the last exhibits, garnishing with peatmoss or fern; and ladies were still pinning price-tags and Latin names.

As Miss Brimbal and Mrs. Mapleson entered the enclosure, a tall and distinguished woman was putting the final touches to a bank of varied flowers, all blue, like a drift of sky. She obviously fancied lavender for herself, since her lace gown was of that color and she had lavender plumes in her hat and her feather-boa.

"Who's that?" asked Miss Brimbal under her breath.

"Mrs. Wendell Van Tuyl. Chicago," answered Mrs. Mapleson. "Dodge Motors. Five gardeners."

"O," commented Miss Rose. "Let's see."

Laura Mapleson caught up with Mrs. Van Tuyl. "Such a celestial display! And some varieties I don't even know. That tall gray-blue . . ."

"Sagittarius" said Mrs. Van Tuyl. "Seedling from my swamp. I call it 'Ponkapog Perfection'. Chief Ponkapog once camped on Cape Ann, you know."

Her eyes fascinated, Rose Brimbal had hovered over the blue bed. With most of the flowers she was familiar; but one stumped her and she pointed questioningly at it.

"Lobelia," said Mrs. Van Tuyl.

"Yes, but the variety . . .?" asked Rose.

Mrs. Van Tuyl's chin rose. The feathers on her boa (Rose said later) positively bristled. "Lobelia Syphilitica," said Mrs. Van Tuyl, biting off each word with disgust. "Named, of course, after the Arcadian Shepherd."

Mrs. Mapleson, somewhat unnerved, moved on. "There," she cried in a moment, "there's the Culpepper stand!"

A long bench by the wall displayed a large assortment of pots, big and little. Dozens of different flowering plants—some were forced, some at the time of their natural flowering,—all haphazard and gay. Behind the bench, with a proprietary air, stood a frail, handsome man with the dark eyes and suffering look of an El Greco monk.

"Dear Launcelot," burbled Laura. "You know Miss Brimbal? We're so anxious to admire everything!"

He waved a thin hand. "Forgive me, but my nails are in mourning. I've been replanting for hours."

"O, what gorgeous monkshood, and that foxglove! . . ."

"I do wish," said Miss Brimbal sadly, "that I could grow such delphiniums."

"A hot-house, dear friends, that is indispensable. I start everything there. My daughter won't hear of it. She calls it artificial."

"Is she showing today?" asked

Laura Mapleson.

"O, no! but my son is around somewhere. He goes in for *Ikebana*—you know, Japanese arrangements, where the art appears to consist in making every bouquet lopsided and every tree a dwarf. I call *that* artificial. But if you care to see, he's over in that corner."

The two ladies, more out of curiosity to see the young man than to see his exhibits, drifted over to a card which read "Karolik Culpepper."

Mrs. Mapleson nudged Miss Brimbal. "You see! I told you he had a foreign name.

Miss Brimbal observed him with interest. He was beetle-browed, to be sure, but he flashed an engaging smile.

"This is Miss Brimbal. And I am Mrs. Mapleson, your father's friend."

"Yes, indeed; I've often heard of you," and then, with a child's enthusiasm, he touched some of his oriental jars and containers, each with some special, if esoteric, meaning.

"This," he said, "is most rare. *Nageire*. It is used at the Tea-ceremony. It denotes simplicity."

"It would," said Miss Brimbal, looking intently at a large bulbous vase containing one tiny sprig.

"This is *Rikka,*" continued Karolik, "a favorite of the warrior caste. This other one expresses the New Year." He pointed to two branches of stunted pine, two sprouts of Japanese broccoli and one Kaladium leaf in a blue jar.

"Why?" asked Rose, in apparent innocence.

"Ah, Miss Brimbal," said Karolik earnestly, "in the tenth century in Japan they said 'Man with his moods would place flowers in a vase.' "

"Quite," said Miss Rose.

"I have lots more at the house . . ."

"We'd love to come and see them." There was real consolation in Mrs. Mapleson's voice. "I'll speak to your father now. By the way, is your sister not showing here?"

"O, no," Karolik grinned, "we have a day off . . ."

The two ladies wandered here and there in various degrees of admiration and with appropriate exclamations. At one sharp corner, Miss Brimbal nearly overturned a large protruding clump of snowflakes. "What an inordinate Gypsophila!" she exclaimed.

"Why, Rose, I thought you never used Latin names if you could help it! Why not Baby's Breath?" suggested Laura, provokingly.

"True. You're the one who's good at Latin. For me, I prefer the homely ones: Touch-me-not, Forget-me-not, Snake-root. A murrain on *Cimicifuga!*"

"O, Rose! How un-Garden Club of you!"

"I like folk-words and folks-ways. But, as for Baby's Breath, I dislike all infant vapours. Besides, I begin to forget my Latin. My mind is more and more like a top-drawer. I used to be able to lay my hand on what I knew was there. Now I can't any more."

"Aren't we all—at our age?" sighed Mrs. Mapleson, as they moved in and out among the banks of bloom until they were back at Mr. Culpepper's stand.

"And how did you like *Moku,* which means 'sunset sky'?" he asked mockingly.

"I don't think your son showed us that one. I must say that I understand none of it. But he promised to show us more examples at home . . ."

"Excellent," said Mr. Culpepper, with a show of enthusiasm. "And you must see my greenhouses. Could you come tomorrow afternoon? I'll have some datura in bloom."

"With pleasure," said Mrs. Mapleson.

Shortly after that, the two ladies were back at Miss Brimbal's door.

"Please don't just drop me, but come in for tea. I want to show you something."

"I intended to," said Laura, settling herself by her neighbor's table and expertly spreading honey on a crumpet. "What have you to show me?"

"These books," Rose touched the pile beside her. "Forensic medecine has always fascinated me."

"Good heavens! What's forensic?"

"Anything to do with the law. Often, criminal law. I told you before about this manual of toxic plants. Now, my dear, did you observe that every plant Mr. Culpepper grows has poisonous properties? Aconite, digitalis, lupin, datura, larkspur, oleander—I counted them. The only thing missing was a mandrake."

"O, Rose, surely . . ."

"No, Laura. I'm certain that that family is peculiar. Here; let me read from Dioscorides. Some of these old herbals are pure delight. Of aconite he says, "it kills panthers and sows and wolves, and a root being laid on a scorpion doth mortify him'. As a matter of fact, American Indians used aconite *'ferox'* to poison their arrows."

"Rose, you're up to your old tricks of reading a murder into a . . . into a . . . into a Flower Show!"

"Perhaps. But what did you make of Karolik's remark about a 'day off'?"

"We'll find out tomorrow if you're still of a mind to drive there with me. Shall we say four o'clock?"

In honor of the occasion, the next afternoon, Miss Brimbal put on a chartreuse dress — "my greenery-yallery", she called it— and added a string of amber-colored tree-snail shells her cousin had sent her from Florida.

Promptly at four o'clock the Bentley was at the front door. Before it came to a halt, Mrs. Mapleson thrust her head through the window. "Rose, my dear, what a frock!"

Miss Brimbal turned her plump but agile body in a pirouette to show off the masterpiece. "I told the local seamstress that I may be as poor as a church mouse but that I don't intend always to look like one. Tweeds accord with my work at the Library; but at heart I'm a gadabout. The 'indispensable little woman who sews for me 'nearly fainted when I showed her the material and heard me say, 'Miss Claggerty, I desire something dramatic and inappropriate.' "

With that, Miss Brimbal climbed in and sat next to Laura. The two ladies drove off in some splendor for the twelve miles across Cape Ann to where Eastern Point juts into the Atlantic and the whistling-buoy moans, the harbor-buoy clangs a deep-chested bell, and cotton-balls of fog drift over the bay.

"You'll see, Rose, you'll like Maia. She is *so* sweet," said Laura.

"I wonder," answered Rose. "I usually dislike 'sweet' women. Most often they have what somebody called 'a Whim of iron'."

What Mrs. Mapleson might have said to that she would never know. For at that moment the motor turned into a square of gravel off the road. A small garage and two or three inviting woodsy paths, but no formal drive.

"How odd," said Rose as she got out of the car. "Where's the house?"

"So *personal* of them, don't you think, dear? You'll see. It all bursts upon you at the end of these boskets."

It was indeed charming. Paths edged with maidenhair and royal fern, jack-in-the-pulpit, violets. And overhead, in cool if sombre arbors, the interlocking branches of sweet-pepper, viburnum, wild clematis and the countless shrubs that cover Cape Ann in continuous blossom and delicious odors all summer long.

When they reached it, the house was seen to be spacious— Georgian, red brick — with a large central block and two wings. Each wing ended in a neat terrace. The ladies found themselves by the southern wing and went up a few steps, with pots of clivia on every landing.

"My goodness," exclaimed Rose, "work for a regiment!"

"I don't know, but I do know

that Maia does a tremendous amount, even from her wheel-chair."

Windows were open near the terrace, and from one came a sharp, acrid voice. "Bridget, I've told you *never* to put flowers in cold water. Always warm. And, really it's disgraceful! There are ants in the breadbox. And I've said a thousand times to wash the dishrags every day." Rose and Laura stood still, looking enquiringly at each other, wondering what etiquette required: perhaps a discreet cough or sneeze. But less than a minute later the screen door flew open and a vision floated on to the terrace.

A pale-green wheel-chair was unexpected, but much more remarkable was the beauty of its occupant. Wheat-gold hair and great blue eyes smudged with violet shadings. Oval face, white skin. A billowing sea-green dress that concealed the pitiful legs and draped most of the chair. The skill with which the cripple moved about, deftly, effortlessly, steering, stopping, was almost unbelievable. And a voice of honey.

"Dear Laura," said Miss Culpepper, "I thought I saw you from the kitchen. This wing, you know. You should have come in the other way. But no matter. Bring Miss Brimbal—how nice to see you!—right through here. Everything's on a level because of my precious chair. Forgive the kitchen . . ."

She led the way swiftly. On an immaculate kitchen-table stood an inhaler: a sort of kettle with a long spout and a mouth-guard, often used for steam of Benzoin. Also on the table were flower-cuttings, scattered leaves, bits of twigs. "Just been gardening," sang Miss Culpepper.

She led the other two (there was no sign of the Bridget) into the main part of the house: a fine living-room with long French windows through which one saw the serried gardens and a walk that led down to the stone pier set in the pewter-colored water of Gloucester Harbor.

In a corner of the room were two people, seated—one an elderly man, the other a dark young boy in his late teens who was reading aloud. They both rose, the man supporting himself lightly on the back of his chair.

"Don't get up, Launcelot," said Mrs. Mapleson. "You remember Miss Brimbal."

"How do you do?" He bowed. "But I'm quite able to be up and about. No crises today. I think you met Karolik yesterday."

Miss Brimbal again looked closely at the lad. He said nothing, but his eyes seemed to dart about the room. Miss Brimbal was conscious of a sense of disquiet, though certainly the scene —the man and boy sitting to-

gether reading—had been reassuring enough.

"I feel almost perky," continued Culpepper, "though Maia insists on inhalations and other noxious things." He spoke with a wry smile.

"Darling papa is so difficult," cooed Miss Culpepper. "And—O, dear—you *must* not smoke." She whisked away an ash tray.

"Maia thinks ashtrays are to be emptied. I think they're there to be filled." A crinkle of humor around the eyes belied the lines of suffering.

"No doubt Maia's right," said Mrs. Mapleson.

"She always is," said Launcelot.

"Come," Miss Culpepper interrupted. "We'll tire dearest papa. And I want to show Miss Brimbal the gardens."

Mr. Culpepper was obviously annoyed. He would, thought Miss Brimbal, have enjoyed a pleasant chat. And he said, "Please, after that, you will visit my green-houses? Surely?"

Karolik also appeared to be about to put in a word for his *Ikebana,* but Maia cut them both short.

"Nonsense! Father will be exhausted. And Karolik's delicious dwarf trees—junipers, jasmines, and female Chamaecyparis—can wait, all hung with their fetching names."

They left Mr. Culpepper with the boy and were led out through one of the French windows.

"Such a lovely view, I always think, over the harbor, and the setting sun right across . . ." chirped Laura.

"And lovely to have one's own beach and pier," continued Rose. "Do you swim?" She remembered that swimming was one of the few exercises possible for paralytics.

"Dear me, no!" said Maia. "I don't know how. And the water's icy.—Now, let us turn down this path. Here, this tiny plot, I planted in memory of darling mother. Nothing but Heart's Ease . . ."

"Viola Tricolor," boomed Mrs. Mapleson.

"Pansies to me," murmured Miss Brimbal.

"A lovesome spot, don't you think?" said Miss Culpepper.

"God wot!" said Miss Brimbal in such a tone that Laura looked at her in dismay.

"Now, here, further," Maia wheeled herself along artfully, "is the rose-garden. But, alas, so many have Black Spot. I spray, powders and liquids, but naught availeth . . ."

"I believe," said Rose Brimbal, "it is what is called an 'atmosphere infection.' It just wafts about on the air."

"I put sulphur, nicotine, bicarbonate . . ." said Miss Culpepper ruefully.

"My book," put in Mrs. Ma-

pleson, "says it can be prevented but not cured. The leaves that have it are functionally dead and must be burned."

"A desolation indeed . . . Let us move on." Maia swung a circle over to her herb garden. "My pride and joy."

Here Mrs. Mapleson's Latin names would have fallen like a shower of erudition. She got as far as *Impatiens, Artemisia Dracunculoides* and *Lavendula* when Rose Brimbal cut her short.

"For heaven's sake, Laura. Just tarragon and lavender. But splendid herbs for all that."

The views were admired again; the great herbaceous borders marvelled at. Here were waves of color: a contagion of yellows and golds. Among them, blue spikes of veronica and some late delphinium. "Joan Evans," said Miss Culpepper. "Such a lovely chrome lily, like an inverted pagoda. And I save even the black-eyed Susans." The three ladies moved back to the house.

As they reached the French window, it was flung open by Karolik, his dark eyes ablaze, his voice harsh and urgent. "Quick! Father is . . ." He turned and rushed back into the living room.

It was obvious that Mr. Culpepper was having an attack. A mild one, but sufficient to strangle his voice and drain his face to ash color. He tried to rise to greet the guests but could not.

"Darling papa!" Maia wheeled herself like a swallow to her father's chair. "An inhalation! I'll get the machine . . ."

"We must go, my dear," said Mrs. Mapleson. "Mustn't be in the way."

Maia Culpepper looked grateful.

They went out as they had come in. When Miss Brimbal looked back from the terrace steps, she saw—above the pots of clivia—Miss Culpepper busy with the inhaler.

Out of ear-shot, Miss Brimbal asked, "Tell me, Laura, when you spoke of Maia wanting 'independence,' what would she do with it?"

"Well, my dear, between you and me, I suspect she does not like her role here. I don't really know how to say it. She'd like to change the house in many ways. Launcelot won't let her. He's probably jealous of her gardens, too. And then . . ."

"Go on, Laura."

"And then there was talk of a young man. After her money. Utterly unsuitable . . ."

"After Mr. Culpeppers money?"

"Of course. Maia has nothing of her own."

"Dear me," sighed Miss Rose.

"And you've seen the son twice now. What a strange lad!" said Mrs. Mapleson. "You noticed how his eyes followed Maia

everywhere?"

"Yes; but she never looked at him," said Rose.

"Do you suppose she hates him?"

"No. Perhaps, even, he's the 'unsuitable' young man you spoke of . . ."

"Heavens, Rose! What a thought! But his eyes followed Maia as though she were a magnet. And his intense look. Love might . . ."

"No, Laura. His look was not full of love."

"Of what?" asked Mrs. Mapleson as they got into the car.

"Of . . . of fear," said Miss Brimbal. And then she cried out, "Stop, please!" so peremptorily that the chauffeur took his hand off the starter and Mrs. Mapleson gasped.

"Forgive me, Laura. So stupid of me. I forgot my parasol . . . Stupid, criminally stupid of me . . ."

"Rose, you had no parasol!"

But Miss Brimbal was out of the car and padding back toward the house. Mrs. Mapleson followed after.

She was close behind Rose as they hurried into the big room. Mr. Culpepper was slumped down in his chair, his face congested, his breathing a hiss of intermittent gasps. On the floor next to him crouched Karolik, his head buried in his father's lap. Maia held the steaming inhaler by its insulated handle.

With horror, Mrs. Mapleson saw Rose Brimbal rush at Maia and dash the inhaler from her hand. "I thought so!" cried Rose in anguish as the inhaler clattered to the floor, scattering water and leaves in a cloud of steam.

The boy lifted his face. It was covered with tears. "I was afraid," he whispered. "I was not sure." He held tightly to Mr. Culpepper's hand. "Father! Father! Don't leave me . . ."

Miss Brimbal turned to Mrs. Mapleson. "Laura, please, quick! Fetch me from the herb garden some Touch-me-not, you know, Jewelweed. O dear, of course, you call it *Impatiens*. I'll see what I can do here."

Laura looked for Maia, but without sign nor sound the wheel-chair had vanished. Shakily, heroically, Laura hurried out on her errand. Her inner world was a shambles of shattered values and her visible world, the scene she had just witnessed, was as incomprehensible as it was horrifying. But she managed to find the jewelweed and bring it to Rose, who had mopped up the floor and retrieved the inhaler.

Rose flew to the kitchen. There she set the inhaler with fresh water on the burner and stuffed it with the weed. As soon as steam showed she carried it back to Mr. Culpepper. Karolik

still crouched by his father, holding tight to his hand.

"Help me! It's an antidote," said Rose with so much assurance that, without questioning, Karolik helped raise Mr. Culpeppre's head and enabled Rose to get the fumes to his nose and mouth.

"Thank you, Laura," said Rose belatedly. "He'll be better presently. A bad attack, of course . . . aggravated I fear . . . but, this time, thank God, not fatal. I'll call a doctor and suggest that Launcelot have a nurse as a guardian."

"For God' s sake, Rose!" cried Laura, "What *is* this all about?"

Rose drew her friend into a corner where Launcelot could not hear what she said. "Only this: there were poison-ivy leaves in that pot. Fatal to asthmatics. Even the smoke from a brush-fire with poison-ivy leaves has been known to blind people."

"I can't believe it! How horrible! And not of Maia, of all people!"

Miss Brimbal suddenly froze. "Where is she?"

"Heavens! I forgot even to think of it. But when I went to fetch the herb I thought I saw her near the dock . . ."

"Lord help us!" said Rose piteously.

"We must rush and find her!" Laura waved agonized hands.

"No," said Rose. "What is done is done. I can guess.—Come to the window." They could see as far as the end of the pier. An empty wheel-chair teetered at the edge.

Some hours later, safely back in Miss Brimbal's parlor, Laura Mapleson drew a less troubled breath and looked in astonishment at her friend. "Rose, what put you on to it?"

"My dear, I told you my mind is like a top-drawer. Dozens of small things, including all my prejudices. In a way, I was suspicious of Maia because, as I said, I find that 'sweet' women are usually wilful to an extreme. Rather, inversely, like the so much admired 'strong, silent man' whom I find to be silent because he has nothing to say.

"Do you remember a verse by Browning—I can't quote it all—but it's about a sweet woman. And when I saw Maia near to, I remembered it.

'That fawn-skin-dappled hair
of hers,
And the blue eye,
And that infantile fresh air
of hers.'

Something like that. And I remembered that Billy the Kid was famous for his hard blue eyes. Lots of gangsters have them.

"Then the voice she used to Bridget and the treacle reserved for us. You remember the first time we passed the inhaler in

the kitchen? There I was stupidly slow, because I did notice even then—amid flower snippets and some herbs—a handful of poison-ivy leaves. What in God's name—O, certainly not in His name—were they doing there?

"We both noticed that Maia never looked at Karolik. Either she was playing cat and mouse with him, or she was afraid her own eyes would give her away. She wanted Karolik. O, the blackness! Yes, and later, when we talked of Black Spot, I thought of certain characters and characteristics. You yourself said 'it can be prevented but not cured.' Maia had a black spot. It spread till it devoured her. And, at the end, she would not stay and face the music."

"How utterly tragic!" Mrs. Mapleson burst into long sobs. "How monstrous . . . how monstrous . . ."

Miss Brimbal disliked scenes. "Most Associations," she remarked drily "are so muddle-headed, be they medical or historical or horticultural . . ."

Mrs. Mapleson pulled herself together. "Rose, what about the *Impatiens?*"

"As I was saying," continued Miss Brimbal, "doctors take no stock of folklore. American Indians knew the properties of penicillin. They got it from swamp mildew. Now, jewelweed is a specific against poison-ivy. How many doctors know that?"

Mrs. Mapleson blew her nose and wiped her tears. "What, O what," she asked, "makes people behave that way?"

Rose Brimbal thought a moment and then said, "Laura, you remember that 'man with his moods would place flowers in a vase'. Well, some women in certain moods would place poison-ivy in a pot. I fancy that's all there is to it . . ."

THE SOLUTION
to the
PUZZLE
on page 89

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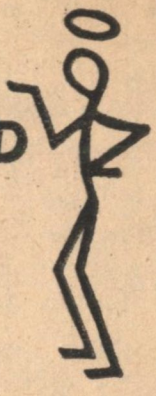
I	C	E	S	■	E	V	I	L	S	■	R	I	P	E
T	R	E	E	■	N	I	E	V	E	■	S	K	I	P
E	E	L	S	■	T	E	N	E	T	■	T	E	A	S

The saint CROSSWORD



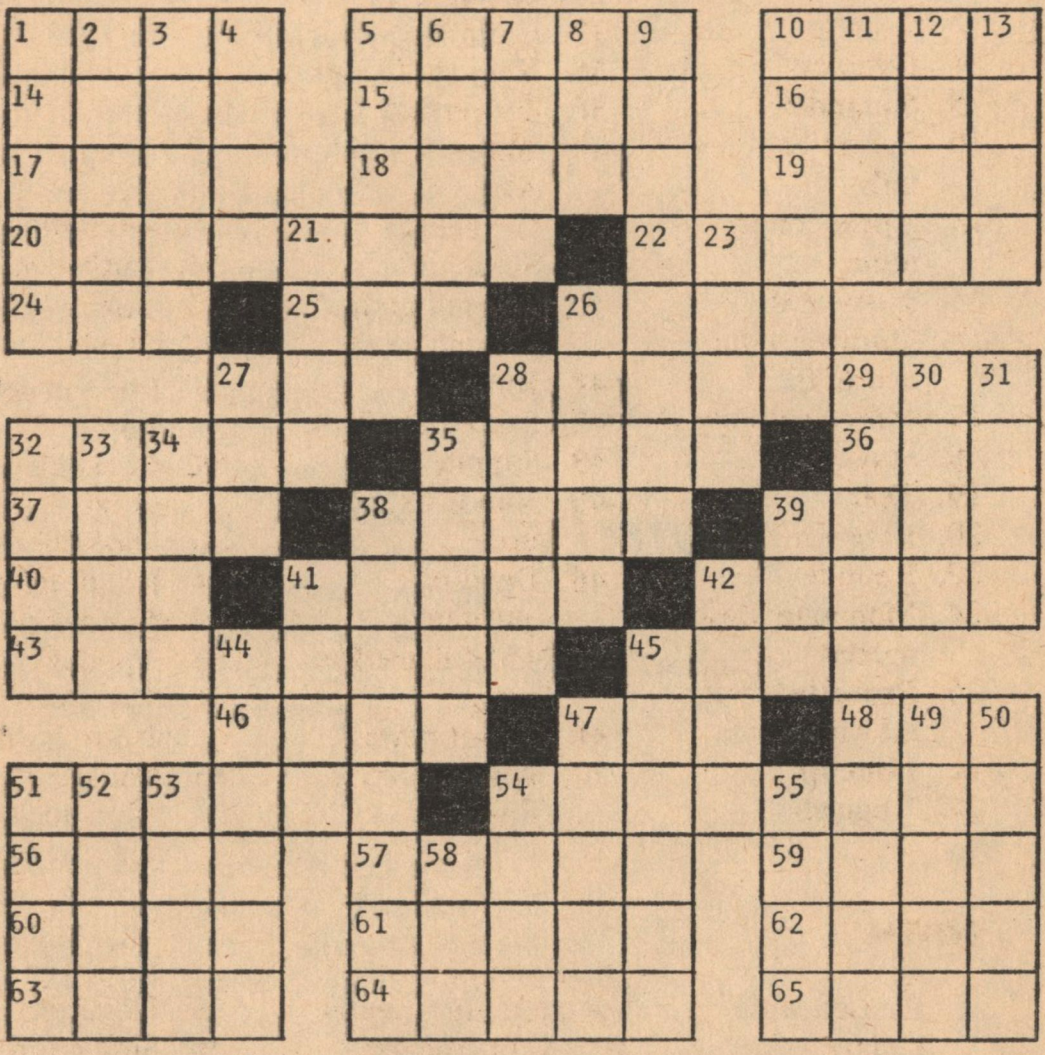
ACROSS

1. Overacts
5. Squander
10. Found between hills
14. Approach to mine
15. Tasty bulb
16. Study with the end in front
17. Marco's family
18. Stays
19. Tear
20. Foreword
22. Rebukes
24. Man who always agrees
25. Proverbially linked with cakes
26. Foul up
27. Roguish
28. Comic
32. Case
35. Very short time
36. TV menace
37. Actually without Al
38. Increase
39. Stain
40. Horned animal with no head
41. Rumble
42. Looks like Tom
43. Supplied
45. Vapor backing up
46. Devil of puritans
47. 1914 name for kraut
48. Soviet news agency misses drink
51. Tank for 25
54. Little old cape
56. Chills
57. Lives in confusion
59. Cockney conquest
60. Shoe filler
61. Handful
62. Jump rope
63. Apodes
64. Take men from a slum
65. Endless torment

DOWN

1. Pleased with Uniatz
2. Worship
3. Man who could not die
4. Tailless weasel
5. Unsteady
6. Like indigo
7. Questions usually have two
8. Point of foot
9. Settle in snugly
10. Authenticate
11. In the sack
12. Well-known wolf
13. Divinity shapes
21. Unfeminine
23. Unfinished endearment
26. French duke
27. Pork palace
28. Boiled in oil
29. Heelless slipper
30. Simile for spinning
31. Used for hair and fish
32. Cut short
33. Raise behind
34. Vocal register
35. Yarns
38. Smelly

39. Plead
41. Sink in mud
42. Only wearable in plural
44. Stanzas
45. End of day
47. Split 50-50
48. Similar
49. Brown
50. Thirtynine made a book
51. Borrowers put this on
52. Besieged by Saracens
53. Scottish or news
54. Mixed ownership
55. Disturbed repose
58. Three-quarters vice



(Please turn to page 87 for the solution.)

NOTE by the SUPERVISING EDITOR:

MANY of these "clues" are quite outrageous; but we firmly decline to apologize, explain, or answer letters about any of them. We weren't trying to make it easy.

all in the family

by Robert Bloch

IT is sometimes easier for a husband to kill his wife than for a wife to dispose of her husband.

This is particularly true if the husband is fortunate enough to be a mortician by profession.

Carl Somers came to this conclusion one night in May, and by the end of June he was ready to test his theory. He had his plan perfected and all he needed now was an opportunity.

Everything was in his favor. His wife, Celia, was a semi-invalid who had made no friends in the community, and there would be no questions asked when he circulated the news that she had gone to Arizona for her health. In fact, several doctors had already urged her to do just that. He could fake some letters from her if necessary, but there wouldn't be much talk. By the time anyone became suspicious, Carl himself would have disappeared. He planned to sell the funeral home immediately and tell people he was joining Celia in Arizona. Oh, it would work

Robert Bloch, author of the best-selling PSYCHO (S&S) and other novels, has become widely known in recent years for his stories and novels about minds in the shadows—tormented minds... But here is a vignette about a man who proposed to dispose of his wife—and anticipated as problems . . .

splendidly—and he knew just what he was going to do.

There was only one fly in the ointment; a big fat fly named Elmer. Elmer was Carl's brother, and a sanctimonious prig. He lived in a town about forty miles away, and the two of them met infrequently.

But Elmer knew that Carl had married Celia for her late father's mortuary establishment, and he didn't approve of it. He also knew that Carl liked to step out occasionally, and he didn't approve of that, either. In fact he disapproved of everything not connected with his own preoccupation with the church choir.

When Carl thought about his brother and his possible suspicions, he hesitated. And then Fate stepped in and provided him with an unexpected opportunity. For on the Fourth of July, Elmer's wife died.

It was a sudden heart attack, sustained after a picnic outing, and when Elmer came to Carl with the news he was desolated. Carl pretended to share his brother's grief, but inwardly he was overjoyed. It wasn't likely, under the circumstances, that Elmer would be snooping around or asking questions.

Carl lost no time in telling him there'd be difficulty in getting word to Celia so that she could return for the funeral—she was already en route to Arizona, by train, he said.

Elmer was too distraught to do anything more than nod. He didn't pursue the matter; just broke down completely in the midst of choosing a coffin from Carl's ample stock.

In the end, Carl selected the coffin for Elmer's wife, and that suited him perfectly. He picked a nice large one, then went upstairs and told Celia about it.

"You see, it has to be big," he explained. "Because you're going to be buried in it, too."

Celia's only answer was a gurgle, for at that moment Carl thrust the scalpel into her neck.

It was a rather messy death, but Carl didn't mind. He dragged the body down and laid it out on a slab, next to that of his sister-in-law. He made a nice job of it on *her*—using the best materials and putting in the fancy smilers. He wanted her to look good when the mourners came. With Celia, he didn't do a thing. It wouldn't be at all necessary. Right after the funeral service Carl would take the coffin around in back and load it onto the hearse. But before he did so, he'd just dismiss his assistant for a moment on some pretext or another and pop Celia inside. By the time the pall-bearers were ready to do their token service at the door of the funeral home, Celia would be right where he wanted her. And in another half

hour she'd be buried.

That's exactly how it worked out. There wasn't a flaw or a hitch in the entire scheme. Carl gloated as he watched the coffin being lowered into the grave, wondering why his brother carried on so. You'd think Elmer would be happy to get rid of his wife, too, the old horror. Odd that his brother should be so different.

At least Carl thought it was odd, until he returned to the mortuary and found the tall man waiting for him.

"My name's Swenson," the tall man said. "Police. I hate to disturb you at a time like this, but I'm afraid I'll have to ask you a few questions about your brother and his relations with his wife. Do you happen to know if they ever had any serious differences of opinion?"

"My brother? Differences of opinion—?"

"I'll be blunt," Swenson said. "There's talk going around that they quarreled. Your brother got mixed up with some girl in the church choir. We checked with a pharmacist who tells us he sold your brother some arsenic last week, and it sounds bad."

Carl began to tremble violently.

Swenson put his hand on Carl's shoulder and sighed. "Sorry," he said. "I know I shouldn't bother you. All this must come as quite a shock, but sometimes one never knows what's going on, even with one's own brother. Of course there's one sure way of finding out that will spare you any further trouble or embarrassment. I've got the permit right here. We're going to dig up the grave and reopen the coffin."

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO—

Francois de Callières, who had represented France in the negotiations which ended with the Treaty of Ryswick, dedicated a book to His Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans. Regent of the Kingdom. He proposed, in THE ART OF NEGOTIATING WITH SOVEREIGN PRINCES, "to give an idea of the qualifications and sciences that are necessary towards forming good Ministers; to point out to them the course which they ought to steer, and the rocks which they are to avoid."

M. de Callières, to quote from the Introduction to the British Edition, had been sent by Louis XIVth "to several Courts of the North, upon affairs of great importance. He was the person chiefly intrusted by him to settle with the Dutch, the preliminaries of the Peace of Ryswick, and for that end, was sent into Holland, where he resided incognito near two years before the Congress was opened for the Treaty at Ryswick; when he took upon him the publik character of Ambassador and Plenipotentiary."

Next month, we will publish a chapter from his "collection of rules and directions to all Foreign Ministers".

the house by the ferris

by Edward D. Hoch

BY the time Captain Leopold arrived on the scene, the tow truck was already in position, poised in the glare of a half-dozen fire department spotlights. He peered over the edge of the dock, toward the silver ripples where skindivers worked in murky black waters.

"Have they located the car?" he asked Sergeant Fletcher, seeing him standing to one side while the first of the divers clambered out of the water.

"They've got a cable on the rear bumper, if it holds," Fletcher said.

When the last of the rubber-skinned divers stood on the dock, black and wet and glistening, the signal was given and the tow truck's winch began to hum. Leopold watched the cable tighten and strain almost to the breaking point, and then finally begin to move. After another moment the gray underside of the car broke through the water. It might have been some giant beetle surfacing after a storm, or the flotsam of a forgotten war.

They told Captain Leopold that Stella Gaze was a witch. She had to be! She had predicted — she had "seen", as she herself put it — how they would die! Sometimes the ticket seller at the ferris wheel, trying to drum up trade, would shout, "See the witch's house! Ride over the witch's house!"

The newspapers would call it *the death car,* and perhaps that was all it was, now.

His body was still behind the wheel, hunched in death, spewing water from a dozen cavities of clothing and flesh. "Otto Held," Fletcher said as Leopold bent to examine the dead man. "Thirty-eight, married, two children. Looks like his brakes failed as he got to the pier, but it might have been suicide."

"Why call me in either case?" Leopold asked. He dealt only in murder.

"Well, it's a funny one, Captain. The beat patrolman rang me as soon as he talked to the wife."

"Mrs. Held?"

Fletcher nodded. "She says her husband was killed by a witch. She says there'll be other murders, too."

"A witch?"

"A witch."

Leopold sighed. The night was shot anyway. "We'd better speak to Mrs. Held."

She was a tearful blonde in her early thirties worth a second look but not a third one. The tears were real enough, though Leopold thought perhaps they were a trifle overdone. She stopped crying long enough to face them across a plain-looking living room that reflected nothing of the people who lived there.

"You're detectives," she said, making it some sort of accusation.

"Captain Leopold, and this is Sergeant Fletcher. We're sorry to bother you at a time like this, Mrs. Held."

"It's as good a time as any."

"You expressed the opinion that your husand was murdered."

"He was killed by that damned witch! They'll all be dead before she's through!" The woman was clearly alarmed, but the flash of her eyes was not quite as rational as Leopold might have wished.

"Suppose you tell me about it," he said quietly.

"They bought the amusement park—my husband and three other men. They expanded it and tried to force her to move out of her house. She put a curse on them—all four of them. She said they'd die by earth, air, fire and water."

"Your husband was the first to die?"

She nodded and a tear rolled down her cheek. "By water, just as she said."

"How long ago was this curse put on them?"

"It would have been almost a month. Of course they laughed it off, but maybe they've stopped laughing now."

"What's her name? This witch."

"Stella Gaze. She lives in an old house by the ferris wheel."

"They built a ferris wheel next to her house? She might have reason to be disturbed by that," Leopold observed. "Give us the names of the other men, please."

"They were all equal partners with my husband. There was George Quenton, and Walter Smith, and Felix O'Brian."

"And I suppose they now share equally in your husband's share of the business?"

"No, it comes to me."

"Oh?"

"What there is of it! The park has been losing money all summer. People don't seem to want that sort of amusement any more. Otto could never figure out what they wanted."

"It's a world of overrated pleasures at best, Mrs. Held. Thank you for your help. We'll talk to Stella Gaze and the others."

Leopold and Fletcher left the house and drove back toward downtown. There was a chill in the air and summer was almost ended. "Should we go see this witch?" Fletcher asked.

"She'll keep till morning. It's not really a case for Homicide."

"Think she's real, Captain?"

"A real witch? I'll tell you after I see her."

In the morning, Leopold was tempted to forget all about it. There was, after all, no suspicion of foul play in the death of Otto Held, and no reason for questioning Stella Gaze. He was glancing over the morning report, his mind far away, when the call came in from Walter Smith.

"The man who was killed last night—Otto Held—was my partner. I have reason to believe he was murdered, and I'm requesting a police investigation." The voice was harsh and rasping and Leopold didn't like it.

"We've already spoken to Mrs. Held. Do you have any concrete suspicions, sir?"

"A woman named Stella Gaze. She has a house near our amusement park."

Leopold covered his sigh. "Yes. We're going to speak to Stella Gaze. And I may want to talk to you and your other partners."

"We'll be at the park. Labor Day weekend coming up, you know."

"Thank you for calling, Mr. Smith."

Leopold hung up and sat staring at the telephone for some time. Well, it was a quiet morning anyway, and there seemed no way out of a visit to Stella Gaze's house. He flipped the intercom switch and told Sergeant Fletcher the news.

They drove out to the Four Kings Sportland, a rambling sort of place which seemed to stretch in all directions under the fluffy white clouds of an early Septem-

ber sky. It had started life, a generation earlier, as a miniature golf course and a scattering of kiddy rides, frequented by neighborhood children during the day and teen-agers by night. Gradually it had built upon itself, adding the constant trappings of an amusement park—the fun house and ghost train and roller coaster and ferris wheel. Now in the Sixties, the place had acquired four partners and a certain sporting air evidenced by a bowling alley and billiard parlor.

They sought out Walter Smith first, and found him to be as harsh in appearance as his voice had indicated. He wore a pale blue sport shirt open at the neck, revealing hairy arms and a chest that might have belonged to a gorilla.

"Yeah, you're the detectives, huh?"

"We're the detectives, Mr. Smith."

"Felix! Come here and meet the detectives!" He was calling to a slight, well-dressed man with a very British look about him. "This is Felix O'Brian, another of my partners. George is off somewhere right now."

O'Brian eyed them with interest. "You're here about this witch? And her threats?"

"We'll talk to her, sir. That's all we can do at this point."

"All?"

Leopold was watching a mother pulling her small child away from the roller coaster. "Our reports show the car had defective brakes. Otto Held's death was accidental."

"His wife doesn't think so," Smith said. "I don't think so."

Leopold shrugged. "We'll talk to Stella Gaze. Where's her house?"

"I'll take you," O'Brian offered. He led them over toward the far end of the place, where only the ferris wheel seemed to rise.

"You English?" Leopold asked, making conversation.

"Irish, educated in London, sent over here twenty-five years ago to escape the bombings. I just never went back."

"The four of you were equal partners in this place?"

"Equal partners in nothing. Don't let the crowds fool you. The money isn't in this nickel and dime stuff any more. It's in the bowling and big-ticket items. Look over there—next season we'll have indoor fishing in that new building. It's very popular in Japan right now."

"Indoor fishing?" Leopold puckered his lips and decided he had nothing more to say on the subject. "And Stella Gaze?"

"She's lived in that old house all her life. Mother died, you know the sort. Never married. Maybe a man could have done something for her. Anyway, she

wouldn't sell us her land so we built around her."

And they had certainly built around her. The ferris wheel, as tall as a five-story building, seemed to tower over the little cottage with its weathered shingles and crooked chimney. The park itself was fenced with chain-link steel, but it skirted dangerously near the little house of Stella Gaze.

"Why wouldn't she move?" Fletcher wanted to know.

"Ask her. You'll see the kind of answer you get."

Felix O'Brian left them then, hurrying back the way he had come as if pursued by some noonday demon. They mounted the shabby, sagging steps of the house and pushed the bell. After a moment the door was opened by a pale woman who must have been in her mid-forties.

"I am Stella Gaze," she said simply. "Do you wish to enter?"

Leopold introduced them and followed her into a sort of sitting room that was almost a relic of another century. A cut-glass lamp burned in one corner of the room, casting a yellowish glow that partly relieved—or perhaps added to—the forbidding gloom of the place.

"We've come about the death of Otto Held," he said quietly, because it was the sort of place where everything was said quietly.

"Oh?" Her eyes held them, big brown eyes that were the remains of some past beauty now submerged beneath thin hands and a lined, aging face. She pushed back a strand of coal-black hair and then returned the hand in her lap. "I read about it in the newspapers."

"Several people have stated that you made threats against Otto Held's life."

"Oh, no! Heavens, no! I wouldn't do a thing like that!"

"What did you say, then?"

"I merely told them how they would die—all four of them."

"I see," Leopold said, staring at her wrists. "Just how was that?"

"Four of them—earth, air, fire and water."

"Did you say Held would die in the water?"

"It was not clear which death would claim each of them. I only saw that they would die."

Leopold blinked. "You resented the amusement park, didn't you?"

"I did, and I still do. I look out my window at night and I see that ferris wheel turning, turning. Even with my shade down the lights still come through. And sometimes the ticket seller shouts *See the witch's house! Ride over the witch's house!,* and that's when it's the worst."

"Do you consider yourself a

witch, Miss Gaze?" Leopold asked.

She stared off at the cut-glass lamp for a moment before replying. Then she said, "There are no such things as witches, are there, Captain Leopold? Is there a witch law on your books, still?"

"Hardly."

"Then why do you question me like this?"

"Yes, why?"

"Come on, Fletcher," Leopold said. "We'd better be going." But at the door he turned and asked, "Have you ever considered moving from here, Miss Gaze?"

"No, never. I will be in this house long after that ferris wheel has ceased its turning."

She stood at the door for a long time, watching them walk away. It was Friday afternoon, and already the crowds were beginning to gather for the Labor Day weekend.

"Now what?" Fletcher asked.

"Nothing. There's nothing here for us. I'm going fishing, Fletcher. It's the last weekend of the summer."

"Do you think she's a witch?"

"No," Leopold said.

"Why not?"

"Did you notice the old scars on both wrists, Fletcher? Ever hear of a witch trying to commit suicide?"

Leopold had no family, and his friends were usually occupied with theirs on long weekends. He fished alone, renting a little boat at one of the large island lakes north of the city. But this weekend his mind was not geared to the relaxation of fishing, and he came in after only two hours on the silvery surface of the water.

He phoned headquarters and talked to the detective on duty, but all was quiet. Perhaps he'd almost been wishing for a murder, something to call him back from the holiday boredom. But there was nothing.

It was cloudy on Sunday, and all day long the weatherman was predicting rain for Labor Day. Toward evening, Leopold went out for a ride, driving through the muggy streets in the general direction of the Four Kings Sportland. He could see the lights from far off, dotting the sky as they competed with the cloud-strewn sunset.

He stopped in a bar not far from the place and drank a beer, thinking about Stella Gaze and tempted almost to visit her again. Then he met a man he knew, a small-time political leader who'd done him a favor once. They chatted over another beer, and evening passed unnoticed into night.

At a little after one, while the bartender was cashing up and eying the clock, somebody shouted, "Look! The amusement park's on fire!"

Leopold was on his feet, the loggy effects of the beer shaken off in an instant. "Call the police," he shouted at the bartender. "Sergeant Fletcher at Homicide." Then he was out the door, running toward his car.

The flames had started somewhere near the back of the fun house, and spread with lightning-like speed through the dry timbers of the old buildings. Driven by a slight breeze, the tongues of fire had only to lick at the next building in line before it too was a crackling mass of spark and cinder.

The park had been closed already for the night, and Leopold had no idea if anyone still remained inside. He pinned his badge to his coat and ran aimlessly among struggling firemen, searching for the thing he feared to find. He located the park office, safely removed from the flames, but it was empty. The bowling alley likewise was deserted. Heading back toward the fire, he came upon a sweating and soot-streaked Walter Smith.

"Captain Leopold! What are you . . .?"

"Quickly, man! Are the others safe?"

"Others?"

"Your partners—Quenton and O'Brian."

"Why . . . I don't know."

Leopold left him and ran on, now in the direction of the great ferris wheel standing silent in the night, bathed in the flickering glow from the flames behind him. Beyond the ferris, the house of Stella Gaze slept dark and peaceful in the night.

He paused and turned, hearing someone shouting his name. It was Fletcher, looking as if he'd been dragged out of bed. "They found him, Captain."

"Which one?" Leopold asked.

"O'Brian, the one we met out here the other day. Looks like a beam fell on him and trapped him in there."

Leopold watched the fireman gradually advancing with high pressure hoses against the dying fury of the flames. "Dead?"

"He didn't have a chance. What do we do now, Captain?"

Leopold gazed back toward the ferris wheel, and the shabby little house. "I don't know," he answered. "I just don't know."

George Quenton was quite obviously the brains of the Four Kings Sportland. He spoke and acted like a businessman who knew how the game was played. Now, in the early morning hours of a dawning Labor Day, he paced his little office with a long cigar unlit in one hand, glancing now and then at Leopold from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

"What are you going to do, Captain?" he demanded. "Wait until that woman kills Walter

and me too?"

"There's no basis for an investigation," Leopold told him quietly. "Both deaths have been apparent accidents."

Walter Smith grunted. "Hell, yes! And we'll be accidents too."

"Very well," Leopold sighed. "Tell me everything you know. "When was the last time you two saw Felix O'Brian alive?"

"I was in town," George Quenton said. "At the funeral parlor with Mrs. Held. Walter saw him about midnight, didn't you?"

Smith nodded his squat head. "He told me to go home and he'd close up. I didn't see him any more after that."

It was daylight outside, and George Quenton was gazing through the blinds at the smoking shambles. "Nothing left but the ferris wheel and the bowling alley! And this is one of the biggest crowd days of the whole summer!"

"Did O'Brian have a wife?"

"No. His share goes to some sister out west."

Sergeant Fletcher had been sent for Mrs. Held, and now he returned, ushering her into the office. "Are you satisfied now?" she asked Leopold, her eyes puffed from either sleep or sadness.

"I'm doing what I can, Mrs. Held. It's an unusual case."

"What's unusual about it?" Walter Smith rasped. "We're even telling you who killed them."

"Yes," Leopold said, walking over to stand beside Quenton at the window. "It all gets back to Stella Gaze, doesn't it?"

"That damned witch!" Mrs. Held sat down and took out a cigarette.

"We still need evidence," Leopold said. "All we have are two accidental deaths."

"Earth, air, fire and water," George Quenton mumbled, half to himself. "That leaves earth and air for the two of us, Walter."

They were scared; Leopold could see that much. He asked them some more questions and then at last turned to Fletcher. "How about checking with the arson squad? See if they've come up with anything."

Off in the distance, over near Stella Gaze's cottage, someone had started the ferris wheel. After a time they left the little office and drifted over under the cloudy morning sky to watch its turnings toward heaven. From somewhere inside it, music was playing, like on a merry-go-round. Leopold felt somehow saddened.

"It's the end of summer," Mrs. Held said.

Sergeant Fletcher came back from his mission. His face was grim, but it was an expression

Leopold knew and respected. "We've got it, Captain. Arson. Found a can that had held kerosene. And some fuses. The fire was set."

Leopold nodded. Suddenly the country was familiar, the scenery was remembered. "And that makes it murder," he said.

This time Leopold went alone to see Stella Gaze. He sat on a straight-backed chair facing her across the dimly cluttered living room, drinking green tea from a china cup.

"You are a strange man," she told him. "Not like the other detectives."

"You've known many?"

"Many. Sometimes I think I do not even belong of this century. In another century . . ."

"In another century you might have been burned at the stake, or hanged from a tree in Salem."

"You think I'm a witch?"

"There are three possible solutions to the deaths of Otto Held and Felix O'Brian — assuming that we've passed the point of mere coincidence. One—you're a witch; two—you murdered them, plain and simple; three—someone else murdered them and is trying to frame you for the crimes. Do you have any choice among those theories?"

She closed her eyes for a moment, and he noticed again those scarred wrists that rested on her lap. "My choice is the truth, of course. I know nothing of their deaths."

"And yet you knew how they would die."

Her eyes studied his, seeming almost to bore their way through his skull. "Did you ever gaze out of a window, Captain Leopold, on a day when the air was clear and sparkling, in the early morning from a hilltop when the whole world was laid out before you? Did you ever see something far, far off in the distance, something naked and very real, like the truth? You see it, not as in a dream at all, but as perhaps in a motion picture unfolding at a distance."

"And that's how you saw those four dying?"

"Yes. I would never have told them if I hadn't been angry about the land. But that is how I saw them. Call it witchcraft if you want, or extrasensory perception, or any of the other names they have for it."

"Has this ever happened to you before, Miss Gaze?"

"It's been happening all my life." She tried to laugh, but it came out a sob. "I saw my mother lying dead before me. I saw a battlefield with my lover's body." And then she held up her wrists. "You see this? You see these scars? Sometimes you get so you can't stand it any longer. You lock yourself in this old

house and never see anybody any more, but that doesn't help—they only call you a witch then. And sometimes when it gets really bad you take a razor and slit your wrists and try to change the life that you've seen before you. Try to say, *Look, I cheated you after all! I'm dead ahead of my time!*"

"Say it to whom?"

"To God, to Satan. Does it matter? Can you tell me if this thing is a gift or a curse? Can you?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Gaze," he said quietly, because there was nothing else to say.

"Be sorry," she told him, turning tearfully away. "Be sorry! Maybe that's a beginning! Nobody's ever been sorry before."

"Goodbye, Miss Gaze," he said, rising from his chair. "I'll come to see you again."

Outside, it was beginning to rain. The ferris wheel was still turning, but there was no one on it.

"Funny thing," Fletcher said the following morning. "I've been talking to the firemen, and I've found one who thinks he caught a glimpse of O'Brian just before the roof fell in on him."

Leopold put down the paper he was reading. "What?"

"This fireman, Captain. He says O'Brian was just standing there, not trying to escape at all. He looked as if he was waiting for a bus, the fireman said. And then the flimsy roof started to give, and he never had a chance."

"As if he were waiting for a bus . . ."

"Or under a spell, huh, Captain?"

"Yes," Leopold said. "Or under a spell."

He sat for a long time alone in his office, gazing out the window and trying to fit the pieces together. Two men were dead, two others were threatened.

Did it have to be Stella Gaze? Was there no other answer?

"I'm going back out there, Fletcher," he called into the intercom.

"What for, Captain?"

"Maye I'll take a ride on the ferris wheel. Who knows?"

The place was deserted when he reached it, and he stepped carefully over the blackened pieces of wood that littered the area. Here and there puddles remained, from yesterday's rain or the firemen's hoses. It might have been a battlefield, after the army had moved on.

"Captain Leopold!"

He turned at the sound of his name and saw George Quenton strolling toward him with another unlit cigar between his fingers. "You don't even have any customers for your ferris wheel," Leopold observed.

"In this county the schools reopen the day after Labor Day. Down in New York they get another week of business. But what the hell — how much money could I make with a rusty ferris wheel?"

"Could you take me up in it?"

"What?"

"The wheel," Leopold said. "Could you take me up in it?"

"Someone has to stay on the ground to operate it. But we could sit in one of the cars on the ground."

They did that, and Leopold felt the metal armrests under his hands, with their layers of paint chipped and worn. "It's pleasant here today," he said.

"What about her?" Quenton asked, gesturing toward the little cottage with his unlit cigar. "Will you arrest her?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Until that moment, Leopold couldn't have put it into words. It was more of a feeling than anything else. He was almost surprised when he heard his voice say, "Because it rained yesterday."

"Rained?" The seat was rocking gently in the breeze. "What does the rain have to do with it?"

"Everything," Leopold said. "You see, this was never a case for me. There was never any murder. The deaths of Held and O'Brian were both accidents."

"That would be quite a coincidence, wouldn't it?"

"Not as much so as it might seem. I didn't say no crime had been committed."

"But what crime was there, other than the deaths?"

Leopold watched a cloud pass hesitantly over the sun. "Arson," he replied. "I think you three plotted to burn this place for the insurance."

"You couldn't prove that."

"Otto Held's death was an accident. But it fit the pattern of Stella Gaze's prediction. Business had been bad all summer, so you three decided to make another prediction come true. Felix O'Brian set fire to the place after closing on Sunday night. The scheme was that he'd remain in the burning building, to be rescued or dash to freedom at the very last moment. That way, it could look as if the witch's second prediction had almost come true. If arson was suspected, people would think of Stella Gaze, not of an insurance fraud. Only O'Brian waited a moment too long, and the roof fell in."

"Your visions are almost as vivid as that woman's, Captain."

"A fireman saw O'Brian a moment before he died, just standing in there. And we have plenty of proof of arson. As well as proof that your business was bad."

"Would we burn down the

place before our biggest day?" Quenton asked.

"You might if the weatherman was predicting rain. Which he was. You figured you had nothing to lose but a thin rainy day crowd. And you had all that insurance money to gain."

"Are you arresting me?"

"Not at all," Leopold said. "I'll turn over my ideas to the Arson Squad and let them take it from there. We can build up a pretty good case against O'Brian, but it might be tougher to prove that you and Smith had knowledge of it. I hardly think he'd have been acting on his own, though. Maybe you two were even supposed to rescue him and decided to let him burn, to fulfill the prophecy. When I met Smith at the fire, he claimed he didn't know where O'Brian was. Later, he told us O'Brian had sent him home and was closing up the place. I just think Smith might tell us something if we confront him with that bit."

"All right," Quenton said. He got to his feet and hopped to the ground.

"Don't go running off after Smith," Leopold advised with a slight smile. "They're already questioning him."

"Whatever you say, whatever theories you have, the fact remains that they died the way she predicted."

"Yes," Leopold admitted. "Yes."

"Does that prove she's a witch?"

"We will need more evidence. But I will be interested in you and Smith. In how you die."

He left Quenton standing by the ferris wheel and walked away, down toward the house of Stella Gaze.

He found her in bed, wrapped with blankets despite the warmth of the day. There was an empty bottle of sleeping pills by her side, and he knew he had come too late to help Stella Gaze.

There was a letter by the empty bottle, addressed to him. He opened it and read it through twice. Then he crumpled it into a ball and stuffed it into his pocket. It would do nobody any good, least of all Stella Gaze. Later he would burn it, and perhaps that was what she had expected, anyway.

There was a noise from outside the window, and Leopold saw that Quenton had started the ferris wheel turning. The man lit his cigar and stood for a time watching it turn.

And from the window of Stella Gaze's house, Leopold watched him watching it.

he found out too late

by Anthony Gilbert

AT 6.30 that evening the telephone in the flat below mine began to ring and 15 minutes later Herbert Barry emerged, carrying an overnight case. Later he assured the police that at that time his wife, Mabel, was alive and well.

At 9 o'clock I was conning a letter I'd collected on my way up when my doorbell rang. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Jones," said Barry tall, pale, worried as a hen. "But have you heard any sounds during the past hour or so?" These old houses are like sound boxes, you can hear everything.

I told him no, and what was wrong? Well, it seemed he couldn't open the door of his flat, the lock seemed to have been tampered with, and though he'd rung several times there was no answer.

"It's so mysterious," he went on in agitated tones. "There was

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It is hard to believe that there are people who have never heard of the rather flamboyant Arthur Crook, lawyer and detective, at whose entry into a case both friend and foe have been known to blanch. Anthony Gilbert, author of AFTER THE VERDICT, A CASE FOR MR. CROOK, A QUESTION OF MURDER, etc., here tells about the careless Mr. Jones.

First U.S. publication. Originally published in the London *Evening Standard* for June 2, 1964, as HE FOUND OUT TOO LATE JUST HOW GOOD AN ARTIST MABEL WAS.

this telephone call at 6.30 . . ."

"That's right," I said. "I heard it."

"Someone asked me to go at once to Mouseley Green Hospital where my brother was dangerously ill. I know the call came from Mouseley Green, because it's one of the few remaining exchanges where you have to get the number through an operator, but when I got there they'd never heard of Syd. And now I can't get in. I wish you'd come down with me."

"You can't imagine someone broke in and murdered Mrs. Barry," I joked. Though I could think of a number of more improbable things. Mabel Barry was a tough, smart cookie, as inquisitive as a cow. She operated behind half-closed doors, and drawn window curtains.

After I found her tampering with my mail I made a point of collecting it as soon as it arrived. She had a job as part-time receptionist at a hotel, so you never knew when she might be around and when the flat was empty.

He was right about the lock; I forced an entry through a window. Mrs. Barry hadn't gone out, she was in the back room, sprawled on the couch her head lolling at an unnatural angle, her face an unnatural colour. The drawer of a bureau had been forced and papers were scattered.

"It doesn't make sense," pleaded Barry—he seemed in a daze—" all she kept there were letters and accounts."

But when the police arrived and started ferreting they found most of the letters worth their weight in gold-dust. Her job at a cosmopolitan hotel had given Mrs. B more than adequate scope to employ her talents. And the accounts consisted mainly of a bank book whose contents were proof that Mabel had had a very good sense of values.

Barry denied all knowledge of his wife's side-line activities, but the police, who've heard 'em all, know that when a wife dies suddenly and violently, the obvious suspect is the husband.

If I hadn't been able to confirm Barry's story of the phone-call things might have been even worse for him. They were bad enough as it was.

Since X could be presumed to have removed any document incriminating him there was no clue to his identity, and nothing to show that the busted drawer wasn't part of a phoney set-up.

No one could be traced to show that Mabel Barry was alive after 6.45, the time when her husband insisted he'd left the premises. They couldn't trace the call which had obviously been made from a call-box, and it turned out that Barry was the sole legatee.

Murder's been done for a lot

less than she'd got stashed away, and though he continued to swear he knew nothing about it, you didn't have to believe him. However, a coroner's jury grudgingly gave him the benefit of the doubt, and he left the court to be regarded as another chap who'd got away with murder.

After Mabel's funeral he came to see me, to tell me he was leaving London at once, going back to Norfolk to live by a river and watch birds.

"Nice work if you can get it," I said. And he answered smoothly he thought he could.

"There's my wife's savings and I'm almost due for the pension. And with a little help from you . . ."

"From *me?*"

"One good turn deserves another. I understand you get a heavy sentence for perjury. Suppose I were to tell the police, Mr. Jones, that I *know* you can't have heard that 'phone ring from your flat, because you weren't at home that evening—not by 6.30, that is—what would they do?"

"Ask for proof," I told him.

He smiled. "Ever since you've discovered my late wife's skill with a steam kettle—and what an artist that woman was! I bet you didn't know she'd opened your letter till you found a copy of the original inside, said original going to join her collection in the bureau drawer—ever since then you've always dashed down to get your mail before she could say Knife! But when I left the house at 6.45 that Tuesday evening there was a letter for you in your box, which proves you weren't back by 6.45, or you'd have collected it. And you weren't back because you were in Mouseley Green making that call (a local box would have given you away").

"You call that proof?" I cried. "I could have been at the pictures, drinking with a friend . . ."

"You're forgetting the letter," he said, "the one Mabel collected from your box about four months ago, the one signed Cynthia. The police would have been very interested in that letter, only when they examined the drawer it wasn't there.

"They were never happy about Colonel Heath's death, suicide seemed so improbable. Much more likely that Cynthia Heath and an unknown lover had plotted to get him out of the way.

"It must have been a shock to learn that all the lovely lolly for which you'd got rid of the old man went to good causes if she re-married. Tell me, do you think she knew about the will and simply wanted a sucker to rid herself of a tiresome elderly husband?"

"You must be mad," I said. "My name was never mentioned. And seeing there is no letter . . ."

He chuckled. "I wouldn't be too certain of that. Still, it's beside the point because you're going to bring my income up to subsistence level, aren't you? You won't find me grasping, I'm too grateful for that. I'd never have dared.

"But, before we start discussing terms, let me give you one piece of advice. If you should contemplate a third murder, do your homework more thoroughly this time. If you'd checked at Mouseley Green *before* you made that call, you'd have realised I'd know it was a phoney from the start, because Syd had taken off for Majorca that morning.

"Pity! That was one of the few things Mabel didn't know."

He laughed. How he laughed. "The letter killeth," he quoted. "It was that that put me on to you from the start."

"Stop that," I shouted.

But he wouldn't.

So I had to make him. . . .

POSTSCRIPT TO TARTARY

Underlining Marshal Yanovsky's prophetic warning in George Fielding Eliot's SURVIVAL IN TARTARY, alarming signs are multiplying of the growing influence of the KGB in Soviet internal affairs.

The KGB appears to be more and more asserting its claim and right to conduct its own affairs unhampered by the limitations upon them introduced by former Premier Khrushchev. There has been the Brooke trial, and a number of other incidents. Administrative exile because they have been adjudged to be "parasites", and confinement in what for the record are described as mental homes, have been among the methods used to deal with recalcitrant writers whose views of the Establishment have been rather obvious. And now there is the case of Siniavsky and Daniel, allegedly identified as "Tertz" and "Arzhak", whose writings have been appearing abroad.

It is doubted that this heralds a return to Stalinist days but there seems to be some reason to believe that Premier Kosygin, reminded by the KGB of services rendered in the fall of 1964, finds it convenient to keep that organization—and the Party—quiet, by letting them loose on what he apparently regards as an unimportant element of Soviet life. Kosygin, planning for the future, intent only on transforming the Soviet industrial potential to its ultimate, obviously ignores the possibility that if left too much to their devices, Shelepin and his protegés in the KGB can conceivably write another chapter in Soviet history.

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

SPIRITS, STARS AND SPELLS, by L. Sprague de Camp and Catherine C. de Camp (Canaveral Press, New York, $5.95), dealing as it does with "the profits and perils of magic", has to do with Man's long search for answers Faith-by-rote-alone cannot give him. The result (the authors' views being what they are), is a procession of charlatans and self-taught metaphysicians, alchemists and "magicians", healers and mediums and witches and confessed familiars of witches who, over the centuries and into these days, have undeniably exploited this search for answers said to be known only to the initiated few. For this reason, this is a book which should interest many of you.

There is however a tendency to forget that this is only half the story and that this search is a part of our own times. This hunger to believe—this readiness to believe which has been and will be exploited so often—has obscured the possibility that there might after all be something to all this . . . Armed in our individual cultural (or acultural?) virtue, we are as a rule inclined to doubt that this can be so, and

The writer, editor of RULERS OF MEN, an SF anthology just published by Pyramid Books, and THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, an anthology of spy stories just published by Award Books, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-52, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the Mystery Writers 1963 Critic's Edgar.

knownothingism, that hardy Victorian perennial would seem to back up this certainty.

This book is unquestionably for such believers in that which can be touched, or felt or tested. It is not for those heretics who suspect that "there *are* more things in heaven or on earth. . . ."

By way of contrast, there is Donald E. Westlake's thoroughly delightful THE BUSY BODY (Random House, $3,95). I do not ordinarily comment on books which are not sent to this column for review, but I can't resist doing so in this case. The story of the troubles of Aloysius Eugene Engel as he discovers that being Nick Rovito's right-hand man has its drawbacks, should be read by all of you, including those few among you who've known the sort of store Engel's father, in his time, ran in Washington Heights. Do read this. And chuckle. . . .

Robert L. Fish's BRAZILIAN SLEIGH RIDE (Simon and Schuster, $3.50), is a departure from the norm (assuming that word can be used in connection with the life and times of Captain José Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liaison officer between Interpol and the Brazilian police), in that Captain Da Silva and CIA (and Interpol) man Wilson, nominally Security Officer at the American Embassy in Rio, find themselves on opposite sides in this case. Wilson finds it impossible to believe that the James Durwell Martin whom he had once known could suddenly have become an international criminal. Da Silva only knows that Martin has done a number of things—or is alleged to have done a number of things—which entitle him to his, Da Silva's personal and professional attention. . . . The pace is fast and furious, and the solution is satisfactory from everybody's standpoint. As is natural, with one of Bob Fish's Da Silva novels. Recommended.

Corinth Publications, of 5839 Mission Gorge Road, San Diego, Calif. 92120, have been reprinting a number of the Phantom novels which first appeared in the Thirties. The titles of some of these Phantom Suspense thrillers, THE VAMPIRE MURDERS, THE DANCING DOLL MURDERS, THE DAGGERS OF KALI, MURDER TRAIL, etc., give some idea of the pace of these adventures of Richard Curtis Van Loan whom none knew was "the Man of a Thousand Faces", that "grim Nemesis of crime whose very name sent a ripple of terror into the core of the underworld—the Phantom Detective."

YELLOW SANDS OF DEATH (Corinth, 60 cents),

Phantom Detective Book No. 9, is interesting because of the nature of the challenge to Van Loan's talents. Sin Lui had been the Robin Hood of San Francisco's Chinatown, "undoubtedly the most beloved Chinese in the United States". Sin Lui had died, and been cremated, *two weeks before he had been "recognized"* as the leader of the armed robbery of a Van Ness Avenue jewelry store. This appeared to be the beginning of a crime wave which, the men who enlisted the Phantom's aid fully recognized could endanger the civil liberties if not the lives of San Francisco's Chinese.

Many of the characters in the story are stereotypes. And not even good ones. This is to be expected. But, despite all this, YELLOW SHADOWS OF DEATH is unquestionably one of the more interesting of these revived Phantom novels.

Bill Knox' DEVILWEED (Doubleday, $3.50), starts with the robbery of the floating branch of the Central Bank of Scotland and, in so doing, introduces us to an unusual and extremely interesting law enforcement agency—the Fishery Protection Service. Chief Officer Webb Carrick of the *Marlin,* whose black-covered warrant card identifies him as an Assistant Superintendent of Fisheries, has the job of enforcing the regulations which govern Britain's multi-million-pound fishing industry, which doesn't particularly endear him, or those working with him, to the people of the Hebrides "where a Fishery Officer rated second only to tax collectors in terms of unpopularity." DEVILWEED, which I hope will be followed by other novels about Webb Carrick and the Fishery Protection Service, has not only to do with the bank robbery but, if I may put it that way, with an even more serious crime. Do read this. Recommended.

The murder of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister of Nigeria, will in time come to be recognized as a tragedy affecting both us and the peoples of Nigeria. Sir Abubakar was without a doubt one of the great statesmen of today's Africa. While not as well known in this country as are more flamboyant (and less independent) personalities, he was in his lifetime a force for progress and for good —the good of the peoples of his country.

The death of Prime Minister Shastri of India, at Tashkent, was likewise a tragedy which should concern us as much as the peoples of India. India's loss will be proven to have been our loss.

The day after Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had died, representatives and employees of the Indian Government met in New York at a New India House, at a brief memorial service described in the January 22, 1966, issue of the *New Yorker*. The spirit of the interdenominational service, in which Muslims and Sikhs and Christians all participated, is perhaps best brought out by the verses from the Bhagavad Gita, recited by Consul Lakhan Mehrotra. "The Sanskrit phrases", to quote the author of the unsigned article, "rose and fell in a melancholy cadence:

As a man sheds his old clothes and puts on new, so does the soul leave the old body and enter a new abode. The soul cannot be destroyed, either by the elements or by the sword. It is imperishable."

Remember this . . .

As I wrote in the March 1966 *SMM*, I was in London and Stockholm in October, last year. In London, in addition to conferences with Mr. Charteris and the British publishers of *The Saint Magazine*, and seeing agents and others with whom I had been in touch over the years, I saw a good deal of *Saint* authors Judith Merrill, Harry Harrison, John Brunner, Samuel Selvon, John Creasey and W. O. G. Lofts. As I have been saying far and wide since my return—inbetween repeated illnesses, my years having finally caught up with me—I liked London very, very much.

William Haggard's THE HARD SELL (Washburn, $3.75) marks the return of a mellower Colonel Charles Russell "of the Security Executive", more fallible, more ironic, and unquestionably more human. To what extent this is due to his being preoccupied, throughout the novel, with problems of industrial rather than political espionage—in Italy and not in England—may be debatable, but the result is Haggard at his best. You will like the people with whom Colonel Russell has to cope—the communist Count Renato Dagrappi—the harried Mario Donnini, the Commissario of Police—and, last but not least, Russell's hostess at the via Vanda. Do read this.

Detective Sergeant Burton March of the Crystal City (Florida) Police Department, is on his way to the Isle de Trois, in the Grenadines, to rest. He needs a vacation from death, "to forget the pinch of a shoulder holster", and to be among people, for a little while, who do not know him as Detective Sergeant March.

Instead, on the isolated island

in the Carribean, he walks straight into violence and death, in Ellery Queen's decidedly effective Pocket Books original, THE KILLER TOUCH (P.B., 50 cents). The people he meets, Bunny DeVore, specialty dancer, late of Miami Beach, and Rolf Kenner, whose theory is that "cops are instinctive killers who've found a socially accepted way of going about it", provide much of the dynamite—the lethal dynamite—which, together with the ways of the Carribean itself, help to complicate life for him. Thoroughly recommended. Do read this.

James Mayo's LET SLEEPING GIRLS LIE (Morrow, $3.95), is his second Charles Hood novel, Mr. Mayo's very own contribution to the vacuum presumably created by the passing of Ian Fleming. Obviously written with one eye on the films, it is the story of the intrepid Mr. Hood's efforts to save the Misses Tiara and Tickle Evenly, the twin daughters of the Earl of Orme, whose extra-curricular interests cause them to be security problems. Serious ones. There are some amusing moments in the *grand guignol* tradition of this school of writing. And Tiara, in particular, is undoubtedly an interesting Security problem. . . .

But . . .

I seem to have found myself in a minority of one (not unusual . . .) in my lack of enthusiasm for Eva-Lis Wuorio's THE WOMAN WITH THE PORTUGUESE BASKET. Her Z FOR ZABORRA (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50), except at the very end, is a more satisfying excursion into that shadow world which thousands such as Toria Waldeck have known. And know. And have died in. And are dying in.

Z FOR ZABORRA is that rarity in these times, an espionage story with a novel twist, and one in which the background is fully as important as the dramatis personae themselves. Interesting.

Michael Gilbert's THE CRACK IN THE TEACUP (Harper & Row, $4.50), will disturb those gentle souls who are under the impression that local politics in England have none of the cut-throat touches with which we are familiar. At least in some parts. . . .

Anthony Brydon, a young solicitor in Sandling, finds himself increasingly involved in the political affairs of the town, and in so doing, in addition to falling in love, he discovers things about men whom he's known all his life which he had never suspected. . . . The "education of Anthony Brydon", as the novel

might have been subtitled in an earlier generation, is an extremely effective example of the social-documentary trend in the genre to which I have referred in the past. Strongly recommended.

Stanton Forbes' TERROR TOUCHES ME (Doubleday, $3.50) tells the story of Mary Owen's first days in Ireland as the wife of Eamon Doyle of Doylescourt. Several people die in this latter-day Gothic as Mary, seemingly surrounded by death and the threat of death, is understandably uncertain about the future.

Elizabeth Linington's DATE WITH DEATH (Harper & Row, $3.95) is her third novel about Sergeant Ivor Maddox and Detectives D'Arcy and Rodriguez of the Hollywood Police. Once more—here is a first rate procedural novel, dealing with the problems faced by these men day after day, week after week. Do read this.

Insurance investigator John Piper this time searches for the connection between the strangely similar deaths of three people who couldn't possibly have known each other—or shared the same enemy.

Or enemies.

Harry Carmichael's POST MORTEM (Doubleday, $3.50) underlines the danger, in this computerized civilization of ours, of arriving at such a pat conclusion. There was a connection—a very slight one, but still a connection. Establishing this demands the sort of detective work we've come to expect of John Piper.

Peter Nichols, obviously inspired by what happened in the Eichmann case, poses the possibility, in PATCHWORK OF DEATH (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95), of still another organization, likewise set up in order that the guilty should not escape, identifying an apparently typical English shopkeeper as one of the men they want.

At which he runs—straight into the fire. . . . It so happens that Charles Stephenson does have a past, and he thinks this is what has now caught up with him. An interesting idea.

H. Baldwin Taylor's THE TRIUMVIRATE (Doubleday, $3.50), has to do with what happens to some extremely unpleasant—and credible—people in a Connecticut town, who decide to remake their own little world.

Violently.

And do so.

murder at the curtain

by A. Frederick Haas

In the middle of the play, unforeseen and unexpected, a shrill cry sliced through the speeches of the actors. Then a figure appeared at the window over the stage. It was a boy, a frightened boy whose blue eyes were wide with terror as he clutched a wig in trembling hands.

"Master Shakespeare! Master Shakespeare! There is a dead man up here. One of the actors. He's been murdered!"

Another moment now and panic would overtake the spectators, transforming the audience into a huge many-legged beast frantically seeking to push its bulk through the playhouse gates.

Only several hours earlier on this bright and sunny day in early October 1595, these same playgoers, gay and expectant, had set out from London for the theatre. There were notices posted all over town announcing, in bold black letters, the performance by William Shakespeare's acting company of a new play entitled *Romeo and Juliet*. So about noon merry groups of

The first instalment of a two-part story about William Shakespeare in a new role — that of a detective! The details of the production of Romeo and Juliet *are correct—this is how it happened. Only three names are fictional —the names of the constable at Shoreditch, and of the actors Burton Williams and Gabriel Stevens. The player who actually appeared was probably Gabriel Spencer, killed three years later in a duel with Ben Jonson.*

Londoners were seen trouping through Bishopsgate, northward up the Shoreditch road, to the Curtain playhouse. Members of the nobility and the well-to-do rode on horseback. The young dandies made a particularly fine display, dressed as they were in rich silks and velvets and mounted on dancing brightly caparisoned steeds. Parties of shopkeepers, clerks and workmen had requisitioned wooden-wheeled horse-drawn carts for the occasion. Closely packed in these jouncing vehicles, they laughed and shouted back and forth as they passed through Shoreditch. However, many made the journey of several miles from London to the playhouse on foot. Fortunately the season had been dry and the dirt road, a morass of mud in rainy and inclement weather, was now firm and pleasant to traverse.

Will Shakespeare was the reigning dramatist of the day and the production of a new play by him was an event not to be missed. His *Richard II,* first performed the previous spring, had been an outstanding success, and everyone was looking forward with keen anticipation to this new drama of *Romeo and Juliet.* So people quickened their pace when they came within sight of the white plastered walls of the Curtain playhouse, where a flag flying festively overhead indicated that a performance was being given this day.

The play was to begin at two o'clock, and no one would be admitted into the theatre until one-thirty. Although it was not an hour past noon, many people were already gathered outside the playhouse, their numbers constantly increasing. Horsemen, riding up, dismounted and turned their steeds over to the boys of an adjoining stable until after the show. Then they stood or strolled about, enjoying the fresh clean air wafted over the fields and discussing various topics of the day. Many of the rougher citizenry, who had come by cart or on foot, seated themselves on the grassy banks of the road and proceeded to eat their lunch. It was good, after the trip from town, to savour the sweet sausages and dark bread which they had brought with them, and a bottle of wine made the meal complete. Youthful apprentices, free for the afternoon from harsh masters and tedious tasks, frisked about in the crowd, playing pranks on each other and on innocent bystanders.

The throng assembling in front of the Curtain playhouse was almost entirely masculine in composition. It was not that the women of England disliked the theatre. On the contrary, Queen Elizabeth and the ladies of the nobility dearly loved plays and

masques. But they satisfied this interest by attending private performances at Court or in the large halls of the great mansions. The public playhouse, with its rough and brawling audience, was not considered a fit place for a gentlewoman. Of course, adventuresome young ladies did go there on occasion. But they went well escorted and made every effort to remain unobtrusive, even wearing masks to conceal their identities.

Sturdy women of the lower class naturally had no such compunctions, and some of these were seen here and there in the crowd. But running a household in Elizabethan days was an endless round of chores from morning until night. Few housewives could go off gallivanting in the middle of the day. Nor, truth to tell, did their husbands encourage them to do so.

Some of the women gathered with the men at the gates of the Curtain were, admittedly, of the type who, having loose morals and an eye to profit, will always be found in the vicinity of any masculine gathering. The Puritans of London particularly stressed the presence of these light ladies in their condemnations of the playhouses as breeders of vice and immorality. But the theatres were really no more offensive in this regard than were the taverns and other public places about town. Ironically enough, the true red-light district was south of London across the London Bridge, where the tenants could boast of the Bishop of Winchester as their landlord. The "geese of Winchester" were notorious.

One-thirty arrived and the bugler appeared on his little landing high up near the top of the Curtain playhouse. The notes of his horn, floating over the heads of the people below, informed them that the theatre gates were now open for business. Everyone shouted and headed for the box-office, with the usual amount of pushing, elbowing, jostling and occasional angry words: Plunking down their pennies they wended their way into the playhouse.

The Curtain, a wood-and-plaster "O," was a puny structure compared to the mammoth temples of dramatic art to be constructed in later years. Built about 1577, it derived its name not from any details of its stage but from the land on which it stood. "Curtina" was a term for a small field enclosed by walls. Coming through its main gate one entered the "pit," an area of hard-packed earth some 45 feet long and 45 feet broad. At the far side was the inner wall of the "tiring house" used by the actors. From this wall the stage jutted some 23 feet into the pit. This

stage, about 35 feet wide at the rear, tapered towards the front and around its edge ran a low wooden railing a foot or so high. Circling the pit, from one side of the tiring-house wall around to the other, ran a gallery of three tiers, whose decks were about twelve feet deep. The top gallery was covered with a thatched roof. The area running down on either side of the stage. between the platform and the lower gallery, formed corridors about five feet wide. At the end of each corridor was a flight of steps leading to doors into the tiring house. Also, midway down each corridor there was a gate leading to the gallery stairs. If one did not wish to stand in the pit during the performance and could afford an extra coin or two, one paid the man at these gates and ascended into the gallery seats.

At the rear of the stage, on either side, were doors from the tiring house through which the actors came and went for their various scenes. Between these exits was a wide opening, with a curtain across it to conceal an enclosure some seven feet deep behind it. The basic purpose of this "inner stage" was to facilitate the use of larger props. If a throne was required for a certain scene, it would be disconcerting to interrupt the play while two sweating stagehands hauled the bulky object on to the stage. Therefore the throne was placed in the enclosure during a previous scene, the operation being hidden from the audience by the closed curtain. At the proper time the curtains would be drawn apart and the seat of kings revealed. Then, the scene concluded, the curtains were closed and the prop removed. Thus the actors achieved their aim of maintaining an uninterrupted flow of action upon the stage. The enclosure could also be used as a centre exit, the actors going through the drawn curtains.

There was a double window in the tiring-house wall, above the inner stage, its opening also covered by a curtain. The chamber behind this window was often referred to as the "music room," since it was customary to place the musicians there when a performance called for dancing or singing on the stage. But the windows were also used by the actors for various scenes.

This then was the Curtain, a playhouse which was now being rapidly filled to its capacity of some twelve hundred people. It was possible to pack three hundred persons in the pit, and today it seemed likely that such a number would be standing there.

Two o'clock arrived and the play began. Dressed in a flowing

robe of dark-red velvet and carrying a scroll, the Prologue stepped forth from the centre curtains. The impressive personage waited a few moments for the spectators to settle down. Then he opened his scroll and, in a loud, sonorous voice, delivered the premise of the play about to be enacted.

"Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean."

Having concluded, Sir Prologue acknowledged the applause of the audience with a dignified bow and departed whence he came. He was scarcely gone when two players entered from the right-hand door of the stage. Both wore broadswords, and the initial "C" of the insignia on their sleeves marked them as being members of the house of Capulet. One of the actors was a tall lank fellow of a sober, indeed of a ludicrously doleful, visage. This would be Richard Cowley. His companion, a short, squat, vigorous-looking man with closely cropped grey hair, had a face whose ugliness was somehow endlessly mirth-provoking. Everyone knew William Kemp, for he was the most famous clown of his time and a favourite of Queen Elizabeth. Kemp's appearance was the signal for loud clapping and cries of "Helloo, Will!" The comedian responded to this reception with a bow and a knowing wink. Then he launched at once into his opening line.

"Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals."
"No, for then we should be colliers, replied Cowley.

Thus, with a barrage of merry puns, the performance was under way. The audience did not hesitate to evince its appreciation and enjoyment at every turn. Here was no group of sedate and stolid spectators, whose sombre faces dared the actors to wring a smile from them. These were lusty, high-spirited people, free for a few hours from the hard work and heavy cares of their day, and they responded without inhibition to the entertainment presented to them. In fact, it was not uncommon for a spectator to become so exhuberant as to seek to jump up upon the stage. The low guard rail was useful in such cases. Seeing a hand placed upon it, an actor would quickly bring his boot down hard on the offender's knuckles, sending the culprit into howls of pain and the audi-

ence into gales of laughter.

Elizabethan playgoers were a lusty raucous crew, and the actors accepted with zest the challenge of playing to such a group of spectators. They prided themselves on their ability to handle and control them through sheer theatrical prowess. Of all the dramatists of the time, Shakespeare was supreme in his understanding of this audience and in his ability, after sending them into roars of laughter at one moment, to then so grip them with the magic of his words that an absorbed silence fell upon pit and gallery. Then, the spell broken, applause would echo and reverberate about the wooden "O."

It was apparent from the start that *Romeo and Juliet* would be one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. Here was action, comedy and romance; the bawdy jest, the tenderness of young love, the stirring clash of swords. What more could anyone ask? The scene wherein the three young blades, Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo, tease Angelica was received in high glee. In the billowing dress of the Nurse, Thomas Pope, a comedian who was fat and forty, sallied forth upon the stage like an overloaded galleon under full sail. Behind him trotted William Kemp, as Peter, waving a huge fan in frantic but ineffective efforts to cool his puffing mistress. When Mercutio plucked at the Nurse's skirts, making a rude remark, Pope slapped away the audacious hand and stood with fat jowls quivering in indignation at this affrontery to his "maidenly virtue." It was a sight to behold.

Romeo and Juliet had been billed as a tragedy, and there were London scholars of the pedantic sort who stood aghast at Shakespeare's practice of inserting high comedy in the middle of a tragic play. "Why," they exclaimed, "the man violates every rule of classical drama set forth by the renowned Seneca. His plays are a desecration of the lofty principles derived from the Roman stage. The kindest thing one can say about the fellow is that he wants art." These worthies praised Samuel Daniel's classic-style *Tragedy of Cleopatra* as the true example of what a drama should be. But Daniel's work was only given a few private performances, and the spectators often found it necessary to politely raise their hands to their mouths to conceal their yawns of boredom.

It was not so with *Romeo and Juliet*. The actors had now passed the midway point of the play and the audience had been brought completely under its spell. They were no longer aware of the theatre in which they stood

or sat. Reality faded and they were back in old Verona where the hot sun beat down from the sharply blue Italian sky, where young lovers wooed and feuds broke out in the streets. The duel between Romeo and Tybalt was as real to them as any that had actually taken place in Hog Lane near Shoreditch. They wept with Juliet over Romeo's banishment and felt Romeo's deep despair at his exile. Now there was a hushed silence as the curtains of the window over the stage were drawn aside and the young couple were seen bidding each other a tender farewell after the all-too-brief wedding night.

"Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day;
It was the nightingale and not the lark
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear."

Juliet's voice was clear and sweet, the youthful purity of its tones as it delivered the sad and lovely lines making one feel a catch in one's throat. The audience knew and had long since forgotten that Juliet was being played by a fourteen-year-old boy. Now Richard Burbage, as Romeo, descended the rope-ladder to the stage below and stood with eyes raised to the window. Gazing upon him a sudden sigh escaped from Juliet's lips.

"Methinks I see thee now thou art below
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb;
Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.
And trust me, love, in my eyes so do you.
Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu."

On this sad note Romeo made his exit at the left of the stage. Juliet, uttering a pitiful little plea to Fortune to send her lover back to her again, drew up the rope-ladder. As she disappeared from the window the Nurse and Lady Capulet entered below at the right.

"Ho, daughter! Are you up?"

It was then that the utterly unexpected had happened. The cry that rang out cut the play asunder and the agitated figure which appeared at the window was certainly not the Juliet of the drama.

"There is a man up here! One of the actors. He's been murdered!"

These wild words surely were not lines written by an author for the entertainment of an audience.

The spectators at the Curtain were momentarily frozen in their places. Then a stirring began, a

restless stirring in which one could already sense a threatening undercurrent of panic.

But two people had moved instantly into action. Richard Burbage immediately sprang back upon the stage and shouted to the boy at the window.

"Goffe, get back and draw the window drapes! We'll be right there!"

As the boy disappeared from sight, Burbage whirled to face the audience.

"Good folk, I pray you, do not be alarmed. There is some error here, but we will straightway clear it up. Stay where you are, I beg you. The play will shortly be resumed."

William Shakespeare had been standing in the left corridor by the stage watching the play when the boy cried out from the window. He darted quickly through the corridor door, bolting it behind him, then crossed to the other corridor and bolted that. This action of preventing the audience from coming backstage was almost automatic. Running now to the stairs, Shakespeare encountered Burbage, who had also hastened there after leaving the stage.

"I'll get myself up and see what's troubling Goffe," said Shakespeare. "Stay here, Dick, and bar these stairs to everyone. And, for God's sake, send Kemp out there to keep that audience in hand!"

Scrambling up the steps to the music room, Shakespeare was met by a frantic Robert Goffe.

"'Tis Mister Williams, sir. He's dead! Stabbed in the back he was!" Perspiration had cracked the make-up on the boy's face and his nervous fingers were twisting Juliet's wig into a state of disintegration.

"Take it easy, lad," said Shakespeare. "Now's not the time to drop the reins and let our mount run away with us. Here now, let me take a look."

Patting the boy's shoulder reassuringly, he went over to examine the body on the floor. It was a grotesque sight. Burton Williams lay on his chest with his head turned sideways and his limbs all akimbo. The wig he had worn for the rôle of Lady Montague was askew on his head and his costume for that rôle, which he had worn over his regular clothes, was partially ripped off him; the handle of a dagger protruded from between the slain actor's shoulder-blades. Shakespeare grimaced and, taking a cloth lying near the body, quickly flicked it over the corpse.

"He is dead, isn't he, sir," said Goffe, trembling between a question and a statement.

"Quite dead, I fear." Going to the stairwell, Shakespeare called down, "Dick! Dick Burbage!"

"What is it, Will?" asked Bur-

bage from below.

"Send one of the gatekeepers to fetch the constable in Shoreditch. Have your man tell the constable to come at once."

"What has happened up there?" inquired Burbage.

"It's Burt Williams. He's dead. Stabbed in the back. Best tell the constable to bring some men with him. There may be trouble here."

Burbage whistled.

"I'll send someone off to Shoreditch right away."

"And, Dick, see that no one else leaves the theatre."

With this last injunction to Burbage, Shakespeare turned back to Goffe. The lad had succeeded, by a valiant effort, to regain some measure of control over himself.

"We'll both remain here, Robbie, until the constable arrives," he said. "Feeling better now?"

"Aye, sir, a little."

"Good boy. Now, tell me what happened here."

"Well, sir," began Goffe, "when Master Burbage and I came up for the farewell scene, I noticed a cloth covering something on the floor. I hadn't seen it when last I came here. . . ."

"When was that?"

"You know, sir. 'Twas for the love scene, in which I lean forth from the window and say: 'Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and . . .' "

"Yes, yes, lad. I know the lines."

"Well, as I said, sir," continued the boy, "I hadn't seen it there before and I . . . well, I wondered what it was and who had left it. But Master Burbage and I, we had to go right into the scene, so I didn't bother with it then. But afterward, when I was about to go down for my entrance below, I looked at it again. Being curious, I kicked the cloth aside with my foot as I passed. And it . . . it was Master Williams."

"Not a pleasant discovery, I grant you," said Shakespeare.

"Indeed not, sir," agreed Goffe heartily.

Shakespeare now walked up and down for a few moments. His hands were clasped behind his back and he endeavoured to relax his neck and shoulder muscles, grown tight from the tension of the last few minutes. Finally he spoke.

"Poor Williams. Who would have reason to kill him this way? Certainly none of the actors."

Young Goffe, his confidence restored by Shakespeare's presence, was anxious to prove helpful.

"It must have been someone who sneaked backstage during the play. He stabbed Master Williams and then ran out again."

The boy's eyes grew large with wonder. "Sir, do you suppose the killer is still sitting out there in the audience, just watching and waiting to see what happens?"

"Nay, lad, I doubt it. Whoever did this thing is surely far away from here by now. Still, 'tis strange."

"What is, sir?"

"Burt Williams made his last appearance as Lady Montague in the duelling scene. On his exit 'twould be proper for him to go to his dressing-booth below and doff his costume. Instead he came directly here. Why should he do that?"

"O sir, I know," said Goffe, whose young mind was now functioning rapidly.

"What, lad?"

"Perhaps, sir, after Master Williams came offstage the killer met him . . . and forced him to come up here. Master Williams tried to get away but the killer pulled him back, tearing his costume. Then he stabbed him."

"Aye. It might have happened that way."

"And then the murderer ran downstairs and out the back door," concluded Goffe, clearly proud of his powers of deduction.

"It could well be," said Shakespeare. "In such case we can but hope that someone below saw a stranger with Williams and recalls what he looked like. But then, my boy, the constable will discover all these things when he questions everyone. There's naught we can do now save wait for him to come."

As he waited with young Goffe in the upper chamber, Shakespeare could hear, through the curtained window, the voice of William Kemp coming from the stage. The seasoned comic was performing valiantly under rather adverse conditions. The response of the audience tended to be ragged because of that underlying restlessness which it was Kemp's task to divert lest it grow into something violent. Kemp wooed the attention of his spectators with every talent he possessed. He sang jigs, he did comic dances, he told jokes and threw good-natured jibes at various individuals in the audience. The comic's most difficult moment came when several people attempted to leave the playhouse and were turned back by the gate-keepers. The resulting argument caused the spectators to crane their necks towards the door. Kemp, however, instantly made these would-be "deserters" the subject of jest and, with a mock display of hurt feelings, appealed to the playgoers to say whether the show was so poor that the actors deserved to be walked out on because of a minor and purely accidental delay. The gambit succeeded and

the audience actually joined the comedian in verbally hustling the offenders back to their seats. Nevertheless, it was a long twenty minutes until the constable of Shoreditch and his deputies rode up to the playhouse.

Constable Summers was a sturdy solid citizen slightly under fifty. By trade he was a butcher and his business was a profitable one. But for the past four years he had been constable of the village of Shoreditch. Generally constables were elected for a term of one year, but Summers was so highly esteemed by the villagers that they returned him to office year after year. Constable Summers was an intelligent and able man. He had to be for the office he held. A constable was more than a policeman. He was the executive official of the village and he kept it going in an orderly fashion. When disputes occurred among the citizens he was called upon to act as referee; when fighting broke out he restored the peace; when complaints were made he investigated and resolved: One day he would be required to apprehend some poor soul who had stolen a shirt from a clothesline to cover his back. The next he would have the task of capturing some vicious rogue who had knifed a man in a tavern brawl: Summers was on duty twenty-four hours a day. His wife and sons ran the butcher business. His was also a dangerous job, because Shoreditch was a rather turbulent place with all sorts of persons passing through its streets on their way to and from London. To aid him in discharging his duties, Summers had several deputies, called "watchmen" because one of their main tasks was to patrol the village streets day and night. But this force was a scant one for the situations it had to cope with. Constable Summers was efficient for the very good reason that the safety of his own life and limbs depended on it.

Stationing two of his men at the front gates of the Curtain, the constable decided that pushing his way through the audience would only cause unnecessary commotion and, therefore, went around to enter the tiring house by the rear door. Here he stationed his third man. After speaking briefly to Richard Burbage, the constable ascended the stairs to the music room. After a curt nod to Shakespeare and Goffe, he proceeded to examine the body with the quick trained eye of a professional. During this study Summers cleared his throat several times. There was really no constriction in his windpipe. This was merely a

trick he had learned to safeguard himself against making instinctive comments he might later have cause to regret.

His examination concluded, Constable Summers again covered the body with the cloth and rose to face the man and boy standing before him.

"You are Master Shakespeare?"

"Aye," replied the Bard, "and this is Robert Goffe, one of our apprentices."

"Who is he?" asked the constable, his thumb indicating the form on the floor.

"Burton Williams," said Shakespeare. "An actor. One of our troope."

"Williams was in the play you were performing today?"

"He had several small parts, including that of Lady Montague. That is Lady Montague's costume he is wearing."

"I see," said the constable. "Now as to the dagger that was used. Ever seen it before?"

"Yes, of course," came the reply. "It is one of ours."

"One of yours?" queried Summers, rather surprised.

"It belongs to the company," said Shakespeare. "The 'C' on the hilt stands for the Chamberlain's Men. Our patron is the Lord Chamberlain. We keep a supply of swords and daggers for our plays."

"Strange," said the constable. "I should have thought your weapons would be fake. Made of wood, or with a button on the tip, or something of that sort."

"Nay, they are real enough, though we don't keep them very sharp. Our audience enjoys seeing the actual thing, you know, and the actors are highly experienced swordsmen. On rare occasions someone gets hurt, but it is all part of our business."

"So this dagger belongs to the company. Hmm," mused Summers. "Tell me, where do you keep these weapons?"

"In a chest at the foot of the stairs."

"Locked?"

"No."

"Then anyone could have reached in and taken one. Is there any way of knowing when this particular dagger was removed from the chest?"

"I scarcely think so. It could have been any time."

"Still," remarked Summers, 'twould seem likely that the person who took it was an actor."

"That need not be," protested Shakespeare. "Before our performance today a number of persons came backstage to wish us good fortune. Any one of them could have taken it."

"Can you give me a list of these visitors, Master Shakespeare?" asked the constable.

"I fear 'twould be quite incomplete. Many were not known

to us."

"Pity," said the constable ruefully. "Well, in faith, I see we cannot look for much light in that direction. Suppose we come at it from another side and set the time the deed was done. Williams has scarcely been dead more than an hour or so. The body is still warm. Who found him?"

"I did, sir," piped up Goffe. The lad then related the story of his discovery of the body.

"Well, 'tis quite plain what happened here I think," said Constable Summers after the boy had concluded. "Williams came to this room after appearing on stage. Someone suddenly grasped him from behind, clapping a hand over his mouth so he could not cry out. Williams struggled to escape, tearing his costume, but the attacker drove a knife into his back. The imprint of a hand can be seen in the make-up about the dead man's mouth. Tell me, Master Shakespeare, would Williams come here to change his costume?"

"He surely would not have come here for that. No one dresses up here. All the actors have little stalls downstairs, with hooks on the wall to hang up their costumes. Not much privacy, 'tis true, but there are no women about."

"Was there any reason why Williams should have come here?"

"I know of none," replied the Bard.

"Who did have cause to come to the music room?"

"Only Richard Burbage and Goffe here. As the lad told you, he had to come here for the love scene. But Williams was alive at that time, for thereafter he appeared on the stage as Lady Montague. Later Dick Burbage and Goffe came up for the farewell scene, and that is when the body was found."

"Which means," said the constable, "that the music room was empty, or should have been, between the love scene, as you call it, and the farewell scene."

"Aye, that is the substance of it."

"As to Williams' last appearance on the stage . . . when did that take place?" asked Summers.

"In the duelling scene. The fourth . . . aye, the fourth scene before his body was found."

"And how long, would you say, did it take to play those three intervening scenes?"

"Half an hour, at most," answered Shakespeare.

The constable looked thoughtful for a few minutes.

"Can we be sure, Master Shakespeare, that it was Williams who appeared in the duelling scene? Could some substitute have taken his place?"

Shakespeare pondered this carefully.

"I do not see how that is possible, Constable. Lady Montague makes her last appearance in that scene. If Williams did not appear in it why should he put on the costume afterwards? For, as you see, he is wearing it. Then too, we are performing *Romeo and Juliet* with a cast of but twelve men and two boys."

"So few? I thought 'twas a large play."

"Aye, but the Curtain is a small playhouse. If we hire extra actors for minor parts their salaries eat up our profits. Hence, wherever we can, we double smaller rôles."

"I understand," said Summers.

"In the duelling scene," continued Shakespeare, "all fourteen players have a part. So you see, there was no one to replace Williams if he did not appear."

"That being so," said the constable, " 'twould seem certain that Williams was slain between the end of the duelling scene and the start of the farewell scene, a space of about half an hour. 'Tis now our task to discover where all the actors were and what, if anything, they saw during that half-hour."

At this point the head of Richard Burbage appeared above the floor level in the stairwell.

"We must do something, Will," said Burbage urgently.

"What is the trouble?" demanded Constable Summers.

"It is the audience, Constable," answered Burbage. "Kemp can't hold them much longer."

The constable went quickly to the window and drew the curtain aside just enough so that he could peer through at the audience. The stalwart William Kemp was still holding forth on the stage. He was now singing a comic ballad about a washerwoman, and every time the chorus came around he would execute an absurd little dance. There was laughter from the spectators, but far less than would normally have rewarded the comedian's efforts. One could hear a low but persistent rustle as individuals shifted this way and that in their places.

" 'Tis indeed a bad situation," conceded Summers. "Disorder could break out if we seek to keep the audience there much longer. Yet, faith, the man we seek may be sitting amongst them. If we let the flock go our bird flies with them. A vexing problem!"

"If Burt's killer went back into the audience," remarked Shakespeare, "he had to go either through the corridor doors or the front gate."

" 'Twas not by the front gate," said Burbage, who was still

standing in the stairwell. "When I sent a man to fetch you, Constable, I checked with the gatekeepers. They swear that no one has come or gone through the portals since the play began."

"Nor did anyone go into the pit through the corridor doors," added Shakespeare. "I was in the left corridor from the end of the duelling scene until the lad shouted from the window. I am quite certain no one passed through either door."

"Yet, Master Shakespeare," said the constable, "after you heard the boy cry out you came backstage. The killer may have slipped out then."

"But, on coming in I at once bolted both doors."

"And they are still bolted," said Burbage.

"They cannot be fastened from the pit side?" inquired Constable Summers.

Shakespeare shook his head in the negative.

"Then too," added Burbage, "I came back on stage the instant Goffe called out. I saw Will go through the corridor door, but no one else."

The constable rubbed his short grey beard and looked thoughtfully at the two actors.

"Well, gentlemen," he said finally, "if all you say is true then there's little chance our man is in the audience. This evidence is not of the best. But, faith, I really have no choice. I must accept it and let the audience go."

The constable gazed around the music room before he continued.

"If you three will kindly go down to the tiring house below I will join you in a few minutes."

When Shakespeare, Burbage and Goffe reached the lower room they were immediately surrounded by actors who all began to ask questions at once. The solid figure of the deputy standing by the rear door had, by his presence, left none of the troupe in doubt that they were being held by the law for some reason. Shakespeare held up his hand for silence.

"My friends, Burt Williams has been found dead in the music room, and the constable wants to question all of us regarding it. Pray help him all you can to clear this matter up. Else it could bring great harm upon our company. But be patient yet awhile. We must send the audience away."

The actors might still have put more questions to Shakespeare, but they lapsed into silence on seeing the constable come down the stairs. All eyes followed Summers as he went over to his deputy at the door and spoke briefly to him. The deputy nodded and went out the back door.

The constable then turned briskly to the assembled group.

"Remain here, gentlemen. We will be back shortly. Come, Master Shakespeare, let us go on the stage."

As they came out upon the platform, Shakespeare gave William Kemp a nod, indicating that he could leave the stage. The weary comedian, with an expression of relief and a quick sweep of his hand over his perspiring brow, departed through an exit door. A murmur ran through the audience, the spectators wondering what was coming next. Constable Summers stepped forward.

"I am the constable from Shoreditch. There has been an unfortunate accident backstage and the actors will not be able to go on with their play."

Cries of disappointment arose from the audience.

"There is no reason to detain you good folk any longer," continued Summers. "You are free to go. I must ask however that, as you go out, you leave your names with my men stationed at the gates. We may wish to talk to some of you later."

Some spectators obviously did not care much for the constable's last request and they grumbled their resentment. But now Shakespeare had stepped forward.

"Good people, we deeply regret that we cannot finish our play of *Romeo and Juliet*. As you pass the box-office each of you will be given a token that will allow you to come in free and see the full play when we perform it again in a week or so. For now we can but bid you good day and wish you a pleasant journey back to town."

This assurance that they would still get a full return on their money heartened the audience. As they made for the gates there was lively comment and debate among them regarding the happenings of the last few hours. But any danger of panic in the theatre was gone, for which Shakespeare breathed a sigh of relief. As he walked off the stage with Summers, the constable turned to him.

" 'Tis really a futile gesture, you know, taking down their names. Many will give false ones as a matter of course. Still, it gives my men a chance to study them one by one. They will hold anyone who acts suspiciously."

Coming into the tiring house, Shakespeare was met by William Kemp.

" 'Twas no easy task you gave me, performing to that audience," said Kemp. "A devil of a time I had holding their attention, what with their worrying and wondering what was going on."

Shakespeare clapped the squat comic on the shoulder.

"Old friend, you were splendid. We all stand deep in debt to you. Save for you, panic would surely have broken out amongst the spectators."

"Deuce take it, Will," said Kemp, "there was I, trying to calm that audience, and I didn't know what was going on any more than they did. Robbie shouted something about a dead body in the music room. Was it some kind of joke? If so, I see no humour in it. 'Twas as bad as if he had leaned forth and shouted 'Fire.' "

"Aye. Goffe should have taken thought before he did that. But let us not be too harsh with him. 'Twas quite a shock, you know."

"Then there is someone dead up there?"

"Burt Williams. He was stabbed in the back."

Kemp groaned.

"This can only bring trouble down about our ears, Will. You know well the London magistrates are forever carping and complaining about the playhouses, plague take them. When they get wind of this they will raise such a hullabaloo that the Privy Council may slap shutters on the theatre for good."

"Aye, we stand in bad state. Our best hope is that Constable Summers can catch the killer quickly, ere this affair has time to blow into a scandal."

II

The company of actors assembled in the tiring house of the Curtain playhouse sat or stood around uneasily. The jokes and banter, usually heard when they were gathered after a play, was absent now and they talked to one another in subdued tones. Richard Burbage and John Heming were engaged in a low but earnest conversation. Heming, who was a trifle over thirty, still wore the purple cloak of Lord Capulet. A fine character actor, he was also the business manager of the company. The frown clouding Heming's features was indicative of his concern over the present crisis and its possible financial repercussions.

In another corner of the room two youthful heads, a blond one and a dark one, were bent close together. Robert Goffe was telling Willie Eccleston, the boy who played Lady Capulet, all the details of his experience in the music room. Eccleston's dark eyes could not conceal his envy that Goffe, and not he, was the one to have such an adventure.

Constable Summers wasted no time. Taking a stand in the middle of the room, he addressed the troupe of eleven men and two boys in a voice that was firm and authoritative.

"Gentlemen, I doubt not that you all know by now that one of your members, Burton Williams, has been found, fatally stabbed, in the room above."

It was almost instinctive for all eyes to be raised to the ceiling at this point, almost as though the actors expected to see blood dripping through from the floor above.

"Since the crime is murder," continued the constable, "this case is more than a local affair. Hearings and a trial will be conducted by the London courts. It is my job to make a preliminary investigation and arrest anyone who seems to be involved. After I make my report and turn over any prisoner or prisoners to the Lieutenant of the Tower the case is out of my hands. However, what I discover here will, in large measure, determine the course of action taken by the higher authorities. Hence, it is to your own best interest to give me your full assistance."

The players murmured their willingness to do everything they could to help.

"Now, gentlemen," Summers went on, "it may well be that Williams was slain down here or elsewhere in the playhouse, and then his body carried upstairs. If . . ."

"And 'tis for sure that's not the way it happened," interrupted one of the actors.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Constable Summers, facing the one who had spoken.

"Augustine Phillips, at your service, Constable," said the player. The undertone of mockery in his voice echoed the aspect of his thin, lined face and the steely glint in his eyes.

"And what do you know of this, Master Phillips?"

"Why, simply this, that no one carried Burt Williams up the stairs. I saw him go to the music room on his own two feet. And deuced anxious he seemed to be to get there."

"When was this?" inquired the constable sharply.

"At the close of the duelling scene. I was backstage, having already made my exit. You see, Constable, I play Mercutio, a most important part. And Harry, I might say here that it was unnecessary for you to hustle me off in such a fashion. 'Twas most unmannerly and bid fair to ruin my scene."

"And time it was you got off the stage, too," replied Harry Cundell, who had played Benvolio. "You so o'erplayed your part it seemed we would never get on with the performance."

"My dear Cundell, 'tis a noble death scene I have there and deserves the full merit of my skill. But, zounds, I scarce could get my last lines out ere you dumped me back of the curtain."

"We did have need to finish the play ere the sun went down," was Cundell's quick retort.

"And you would ruin it with your haste. Also, Robbie boy, when you come on as my page, pray show more solicitude for your master. You might . . ."

"Master Shakespeare," interjected Cundell, "I appeal to you . . .'

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," firmly interposed Constable Summers. "Pray delay this discussion of your play until such time as you are gathered over a beer in some tavern. Right now we have more pressing business."

"We crave your pardon, Constable," said Shakespeare. "Pray go on. You shall not be further interrupted."

"Very well," said the constable. "Now, Master Phillips, you say you saw Williams go to the music room following the duelling scene?"

"That I did, Constable," replied Phillips. "After I made my exit as Mercutio I went to my dressing-booth to procure the boots I wear as Balthazar later in the play. I was seated yonder near the right stage exit polishing the boots at the end of the duelling scene. Williams, dressed as Lady Montague, came off with the others and ran by me to the stairs of the music room. He fair knocked me off my seat he rushed by so fast."

"He went up to the music room alone?" asked the constable.

"Verily and forsooth," was the faintly mocking reply.

"Then he was indeed slain upstairs," remarked the official, choosing to ignore Phillips' tone. "By the way, Master Shakespeare, I am curious. How comes it Williams played Lady Montague? "Twas my understanding that boys acted female parts."

"Not in all cases, Constable. In *Romeo and Juliet,* Juliet and Lady Capulet are long rôles and the boys here play 'em. But when our woman is old or fat or comical it does not suit a lad. Thomas Pope plays the Nurse because 'tis a comic part. Lady Montague is but a short rôle with a few lines. Since 'twould be foolish to call in a boy just for that, we gave her to Williams, with some other minor parts."

"I see," said Constable Summers, who then turned again to Augustine Phillips. "Master Phillips, did you chance to see anyone go up to the music room after Williams went there?"

"My dear sir," retorted Phillips, "I am an actor, not a watchman. I neither noted nor was interested in noting who, if anyone, followed Williams up the stairs."

"Faith," interposed one of the actors, "after the duelling scene Tommy Pope was making such

a hubbub with his costume change one could scarce note what else was going on."

A flush suffused the fleshy face of Pope and he turned to waggle a fat finger under the nose of the speaker.

" 'Tis all right for you to talk, Master Sly! You have two entire scenes in which to change from Tybalt to Paris. After the duelling scene I must needs get out of Lord Montague's costume, dress as the Nurse and be back on the stage in but a few minutes."

"And you were late this afternoon, Master Pope," noted young Goffe. "I had to make up lines and run back and forth to the door until you came."

"I am sorry, Robbie," said Pope. "Willie was to help me dress and he hooked me up all wrong."

" 'Twas not my fault," said William Eccleston plaintively. "You rushed me so, sir, my fingers got all entangled."

"I am not blaming you, lad," rejoined Pope. "Look you, Master Shakespeare, it will not do. You must give Juliet more lines to give me time to make that change." *

"Soothe thyself, O mountain of flesh," said the Bard, a smile playing around his lips. "I will so add to the speech that you will be able to make the change twice over."

"Please, gentlemen," interrupted the constable. "Let us get on with the serious business that brings me here. I still seek to know if anyone saw someone follow Williams up the stairs to the music room."

"Sir," spoke up a handsome young actor in the group.

"Yes," said the constable, "what is your name?"

"Gabriel Stevens, sir. I was by the rear door during most of the time after the duelling scene and I do not recall anyone going up those stairs. That is, not until Master Burbage and Robbie went up."

"Are you sure no one else went up or down?" asked the constable.

"Well, Constable," said Stevens, "I can't say for certain no one did. But I don't recall seeing anyone."

"Yet," observed the constable, "someone may have slipped past you, Master Stevens. You will grant . . ."

Summers did not complete his sentence, because at that moment the deputy who had previously gone out the rear door returned and whispered some-

*In the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* the soliloquy with which Juliet opens Act III Scene 2 is much shorter than in the later version.

thing into his superior's ear. The constable nodded and the deputy again took up his post by the back entrance, Shakespeare, during all this, was frowning in puzzlement. He seemed about to make a remark, but the constable was again speaking to the actors.

"We shall leave the point we were discussing for the present. Instead I would like to find out who went to the music room before Williams. I believe, Goffe, that you were there for a scene early in the play."

"Aye, sir," was the lad's prompt reply. "I'm Juliet and I stand by the window and say:

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love
And I'll no longer . . ."

It seemed as if the boy was about to go through the entire scene, playing all the parts. Indeed, he doubtless could have gone through the whole play, for his bright young mind invariably memorized not only his own part but those of everyone else. But the performance in this instance was cut short by a polite but firm cough from Summers.

"Very good, Robert. Now, think carefully, my boy. Are you sure no one else was up in the music room when you were there for that scene?"

"Oh I am, sir," replied Goffe.

"Very sure?"

"Well there are some scraps of lumber and cloth and some old pieces of furniture up there, but nothing a man could really hide behind. I am certain there was no one there, sir."

"Very good, lad. You have been a great help," said the constable. Goffe returned to his place and, being both human and a boy, he could not forego glancing at William Eccleston with an air of superiority.

Summers had now turned to Richard Burbage.

"Master Burbage, Robert Goffe stated that when he went upstairs with you for the farewell scene he at once noticed something on the floor covered by a cloth. Didn't you note it too?"

"I fear I was too much concerned about something else at the time," answered Burbage.

"What was that?"

"In the scene you are speaking of I have to descend from the window to the stage by a rope ladder. I was worried that the ladder may not have been securely fastened to the window, and I went at once to check it. After all, I would not relish playing Romeo with a broken leg."

"I daresay you wouldn't," was the constable's dry comment. "I

think 'twould be best if I had a list of the scenes we have been discussing, so I can keep things straight in my mind as to their order. Will you assist me, Master Shakespeare?"

"Willingly," said Shakespeare, and with his help, Constable Summers quickly listed the scenes:

1. Love scene. Juliet at the window.
2. Scene with Romeo and the Friar.
3. Jesting scene with Nurse.
4. Juliet and Nurse scene.
5. Marriage scene.
6. Duelling scene. Williams appears as Lady Montague.
7. Juliet learns of Romeo's banishment.
8. Romeo laments his exile.
9. Scene of marriage arrangement with Paris.
10. Farewell scene. Romeo and Juliet at window.*

"Now," said Summers, "it appears that Williams was slain between scenes seven and ten on our list. It would be reasonable to suppose that the murderer was waiting for him, having gone to the music room between scenes one and six. Hence, we are interested in finding who went up there during that period."

"Constable," said Gabriel Stevens hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"I . . . I guess I was up in the music room during that time."

"What were you doing up there, Gabriel?" interjected Shakespeare.

The young man seemed very embarrassed and looked down at the toe of his boot.

"It didn't have anything to do with . . . with what we're talking about," he murmured.

"Still," said the constable, "you had best tell us about it."

"Well, it . . . it was a girl!" blurted out Stevens.

"What the blazes!" sputtered Summers. "Are you trying to tell us you had a girl up there?"

"Of course not," said Stevens reproachfully. "I . . . that is . . . this girl said she was coming to see our performance today and . . . well, I went upstairs to see if she was in the audience. I wanted to look for her through the curtains of the window."

"But Gabriel," remarked Shakespeare, "if she was a refined young lady . . ."

"She *is* a refined young lady," was the hot retort.

"In that case," continued Shakespeare, "she would have been sitting back in the shadow of the galleries in order not to

*Designation of these scenes as Act II, Scenes 2 through 6, and Act III, Scenes 1 through 5, was not known to Shakespeare, being a device of later editors.

attract attention. How did you hope to be able to find her?"

Stevens was now trembling slightly, but he managed to say, "We arranged a signal. She . . . she was to wear a rose in her hat."

At this some of the actors began to guffaw and Stevens looked at them in hot rage.

"That will be enough of that," said the constable firmly to the smirkers. "Now, Master Stevens. This girl. Did you see her?"

Gabriel's affirmative nod was rather sheepish.

"Well, we can easily check your story," said the constable. "If you'll give me her name. . . ."

At this the young man stiffened and clenched his fists.

"No! No. I can't do that! Her father doesn't approve of actors . . . he's a rigid old . . . if he finds out. . . . No, Constable, I won't tell you her name! I'd as soon go to jail!"

"Here, here," said the constable. "Take it easy, my young friend. Very well, I will not press you for her name, at least not for the present. What is more important is the time you were up in that room. Do you remember?"

"It was soon after Goffe came down following the love scene," said Gabriel, regaining some of his composure. "I knew the music room wouldn't be used for the next few scenes. So I dashed up there to . . . to have a look. But I was only there a few minutes."

"See anybody up there?" asked Summers.

"No, no one. No one had any reason to be there."

"You evidently found a reason," said the constable drily.

"Oh," said Gabriel. "Yes, I . . . I see what you mean. But there was no one. I saw no one."

"By the way, Master Stevens," said Summers, "what rôles do you play in *Romeo and Juliet?*"

Gabriel seemed somewhat uncomfortable.

"Not very large ones, I'm afraid. I'm Abraham in the beginning of the play and a serving man in the banquet scene. Then there are several other small parts."

"Don't fret yourself," said Shakespeare kindly. "You are a fine actor and you'll soon be playing lead rôles, never fear."

"Yes, Constable," spoke up another actor. "Gabriel is taking over my share in the company at the end of the season."

"Who are you, sir?" asked the Constable. Summers put the question with some respect because the speaker cut a very impressive figure, being large but well-formed, and carried himself with dignity.

"George Bryane, Constable."

"You say you are leaving the company?"

"Aye, after we finish the London season next spring, before the company goes on tour."

"Might I ask why?"

"Indeed, I have this chance to form my own company. In the beginning, of course, we will play the provinces mainly. But later we will doubtless be able to get the Cross Keys Inn in London."

"You did, however, appear in today's play, did you not, Master Bryane?"

"Yes indeed. Constable. I play the Prologue and Friar Laurence."

"And the Prince's train," added Shakespeare, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Train?" asked the puzzled Summers.

"Why, yes," replied Shakespeare. "You see, Constable, the Prince should have a retinue, but we have only a small cast. Hence George plays an accompanying nobleman and is a one-man entourage all by himself. We are sorry that you are leaving us, George."

" 'Tis certain I shall miss the Chamberlain's," replied Bryane.

"Please, gentlemen," said the constable. "Let us go on. I still have some more questions to ask."

"Of course, Constable," said Bryane.

"Master Stevens has told us he went to the music room shortly after the love scene," stated Summers. "Now, did any of you see him go up there?"

"I saw him come down," commented John Heming.

"You, sir?" inquired the constable.

"John Heming, Constable. Aye. I saw him come down the stairs."

"Do you remember when that was, in relation to the play?"

"Hmm," pondered Heming. "I guess 'twas during the jesting scene, or thereabouts. Daresay I wasn't paying much mind to the play at the time. A seam in my costume split during the banquet scene and I was busy repairing it. These costumes are a fearful expense. Two whole pounds I paid for this cloak, look you, and it falls apart on my back in the middle of the play. Mark my word, Madame Le Maine shall hear about it in hte morning. Calls herself a seamstress! Fie! But then she is a Frenchwoman, and the French were ever like that, all show and no substance. No substance at all."

"Still," interposed Summers firmly, determined to bring Heming back to the question at hand, "you say you saw Master Stevens come down from the music room during the jesting scene."

"Yes, yes," said Heming, his mind still clearly on the outrageous costs and poor quality of his cloak. "I believe it was

the jesting scene."

"Constable," remarked George Bryane, "Gabriel was certainly down here when the marriage scene began. I was about to go on for that scene when he came over and told me my cowl was awry. He helped me straighten it."

" 'Tis true," said William Kemp. "I was waiting backstage to go on as Peter in the duelling scene. As I stood there I saw Gabriel and George Bryane together at the left stage door. Dick Burbage was with them."

"Aye," agreed Burbage, "Gabriel came over to us."

"Well now," said Constable Summers, "let us stop for a moment and see where we stand. Goffe, you went to the upper room for the love scene and came down again. You saw no one in the music room."

"This is right, sir," said the boy.

"Then Stevens went up to . . . ahem . . . spy out his lady-love and returned. Still no one else in the music room."

"Aye, Constable," said Gabriel. "It was empty."

"Yet, at the end of the duelling scene, when Williams went to that room someone was waiting for him, someone with a dagger taken from the weapon chest at the foot of the stairs. Now . . ."

"Then," interjected a slow lugubrious voice, "for certain it must have been the man I saw."

The startled constable turned sharply.

"Who said that?"

"Why, 'twas I, of course," said the tall lank fellow with the long sad face.

"And who are you?" came the sharp demand.

"Just a lone, lorn citizen, your honour, who means no harm to anyone."

Constable Summers frowned and Shakespeare broke in quickly.

"That is Richard Cowley," said the Bard.

"Master Cowley, is it?" remarked the constable. "Why didn't you speak up before? You say you saw someone go to the music room? When?"

"Prithee, your honour, take it more slowly," drawled Cowley. "It's for certain you'll only confuse me if you throw a host of questions at me all at once."

"Very well, Cowley," said Summers curtly. "Suppose you tell us in your own words what you saw."

"It was this way, your honour. In the play I have the part of Gregory in the first scene. Then I come on as a serving man in the banquet scene and after that . . ."

"Yes, yes," growled the constable, irritated by the slowness of this witness in explaining

things. "You play three or four small parts. I want to know about the man you saw."

"Now, if you'll just give me a chance, your honour, I'll . . ."

"I'm not 'your honour,'" snapped the constable. "I'm not a judge. I'm Constable Summers."

"As I was saying, your . . . er . . . Constable Summers," went on Cowley, refusing to be rushed by anyone in telling his story, "I don't have to be on stage between the banquet scene and the duelling scene. You see that."

"I'll take your word for it."

"Thank you . . . er . . . sir. Now such being the case, as 'twere, I went outside after the banquet scene."

"What do you mean, you went outside?" asked the constable, determined not to let Cowley stray too far from the point.

"Why, out that door," replied the actor, pointing to the rear entrance. "I wasn't up to doing anything wrong . . . er . . . sir. Just wanted to get a bit of air, as they say."

"Very well. And what happened?"

"Why, nothing. I just walked about behind the playhouse and came back in."

Despite noble intentions to hold his temper, Constable Summers could not conceal his exasperation.

"I thought you said you saw a man?"

"Not out there. Oh no. It was when I came back in."

"Fine, fine, Master Cowley. I'm glad we are finally getting around to that."

"Oh, I saw him all right. I had just come in the door when I spied him. Scooted like a rabbit up those stairs, he did, and that's for certain."

"And who was it, Master Cowley?"

"Now as to that I can't say for sure."

"Was it Gabriel Stevens or young Goffe?"

"Oh no," said Cowley after some deliberation. "It couldn't have been them. I'd know Robbie anywhere. And this man was thinner than Gabriel. Thin dark fellow, that's what he was."

"But you don't know who he was?"

"I wish I could help you, er . . . Constable. But he did rush up there so fast . . . Didn't know either why he should be going there. But it wasn't any of my business, you can see that. So I just forgot about it. But now, since we've been talking here, I can see it might have been him as murdered poor Williams. That's why I thought I should tell you about it . . . er . . . sir."

"And we are very grateful that you decided to do so, Master Cowley," said Summers in a brittle tone.

"Well, I do want to help the law do its duty."

"We appreciate that, Master Cowley. Now, this man you saw, you don't know where he came from?"

"Not knowing who he was, I couldn't say where he comes from, you can see that, sir."

Somehow the constable succeeded in remaining calm.

"I mean, Cowley, the man you saw go upstairs, did you see how he got into the tiring house?"

"I can't say for certain. He might have come from anywhere, I guess. I just came from the back and saw him running up the stairs. So you see I . . ."

"Master Cowley," said the constable tightly, "I want you to simply answer my questions yes or no. While you were outside were you watching the rear door of the playhouse?"

"I had no cause to watch the door. I was strolling about and . . ."

"Just yes or no, if you please."

"No, sir. At least not all the time."

"Then someone could have entered the rear door without you seeing him, is that right?"

"Why, I guess so."

"Fine. That will be all, Master Cowley." The constable was clearly happy that the interview was over.

Two men now came through the rear door of the theater carrying a long wicker basket. "Upstairs," said the constable tersely, indicating the stairs. The basket was borne up to the music room as Summers turned again to the actors.

"There are just a few more things I wish to ask you. First, do you know if Burton Williams had any enemies? Did you hear anyone make threats against him? Can you think of anyone who might want to kill him?"

There was a low murmur as the players looked at one another. But apparently they could not supply any answers to these questions. However, George Bryane spoke up in his deep sonorous voice.

"Constable, I don't know who would have reason to go as far as to kill Williams, but I for one am not too surprised that someone did. I confess I didn't like the man. I didn't trust him."

"Any particular reason?" asked the constable.

"No. It wasn't something you could put your finger on. It was just that he struck me as shifty, the type of person who would take advantage of a situation."

"How did the rest of you feel about him?" inquired the constable.

"The truth is," remarked John Heming, "we didn't know too much about him."

"But he was a member of your

company . . ."

"Not exactly," interjected Shakespeare. "You see, Constable, he was a hired man."

"A hired man?"

"Yes, an actor who isn't attached to any theatrical company but performs wherever and whenever he can find an opening. As you see, our permanent company is small. When we were playing London and needed an extra player we would call on him. He was a good actor, but strictly a hired man."

"Then he performed for other companies beside this one?"

"Yes. He was with the Admiral's Men not too long ago. And he acted for other small companies."

"I see," said the constable. "Then you really do not know much of his activities."

"No," said Shakespeare. "We really can't say what he was doing when he wasn't acting with us."

"Hmm," mused the constable. "We will have to make an investigation into that, probably question some of the Admiral's Men. I fear that will take time."

At this point the two men came down again from the music room. The wicker basket was now a heavier burden than when they took it up. Everyone in the room automatically lapsed into a respectful silence until the men disappeared through the rear door. The constable gathered his notes together and put them into a leather pouch.

"Gentlemen," he said to the actors, "my own examination of this affair is ended. I feel I have all the facts I need for my report to the Justice of the Peace. He will decide what further steps should be taken. Meanwhile, this playhouse is closed down and all of you are being held in custody."

There was a groan from the players.

"You must remain here until the Justice issues his decision. But your company will give no performances until this case is over."

William Kemp was the first to voice the consternation of the troupe.

"You can't do this, Constable. Ours is a new company, scarce a year old. Our expenses have been heavy. Close us down now and we'll never get our money back. We will be bankrupt!"

"I am sorry, sir," said the constable, "but there is nothing I can do. If this case is cleared up soon mayhap you will still be able to give some performances this fall."

"Will," exclaimed Kemp to Shakespeare, "this is terrible! Do you think that if we appealed at once to the Lord Chamberlain he would intercede with the

Privy Council to set this closing order aside?"

"A man has been killed and we do not know who did it," replied Shakespeare. "The Lord Chamberlain may well be averse to interfering. . . ." His voice trailed off as he became immersed in thoughts of his own.

"When I get a decision from the Justice I will convey it to you at once," said Constable Summers in conclusion. "For now, gentlemen, I can only bid you good evening."

With that the constable picked up his leather pouch and made his way to the rear door of the playhouse.

(to be continued)

A SPECIALIST'S SPECIALIST

Danny is a burglar who has established something of a record in the annals of Canadian crime.

He doesn't break into homes, or stores, or hotel rooms, or do any of the things others in the trade are likely to do. Nothing so simple.

More than sixty times during the past quarter of a century, often almost when expected, the stocky Irishman, by now in his late sixties, has broken into the monastery of the Dominican Fathers in downtown Ottawa.

And nowheres else.

For this he has spend roughly ten years in jail so far, and is likely to spend still more time there, so long as he is still able to scale the monastery walls. (One time he hid in the confessional in the adjoining St. John the Baptist Church, and then walked into the monastery kitchen, once the church was closed.)

The priest who teaches history in the monastery's seminary remembers Danny from his own student days. Like the police, he and the other Fathers have asked him often why he does it this way, but Danny refuses to explain.

Danny's modus operandi is predictable. He enters the monastery between midnight and two-thirty in the morning. He always heads for the kitchen. He never goes above the first floor. He'll steal groceries (he'd walk off some time with a twenty pound ham, or a chunk of frozen meat, until they put big locks on the freezers), or he'll take a coat from the clothing rack on the first floor. But that's all.

The other night, predictably—he'd been released from the Rideau Industrial Farm recently—one of the Fathers, hearing a noise, went downstairs and found him in the kitchen. When the Court asked him about the coffee bags found in the coat he was wearing, he explained, "I was passing by when I saw a light. The good Father opened the door and invited me in for a cup of coffee."

He's back at the Rideau Industrial Farm. He gets along with the people there. . . .

winter in the morgue

by Jan Cedarholm

FOOTSTEPS sounded in the hall as I put the gritty remains of the heart back into her body, and I shivered slightly. During midwinter the morgue gets very cold. My grandfather, Charles Prism I, gave Hillerton hospital to the town when I was a child, and now the building is old and drafty.

"This is a damn cold weekend for working overtime," said my assistant, Dr. Stern, sticking his head around the door. He came in and stood beside the dissecting table with his arms folded, towering above me. I was suddenly, absurdly reminded of my late father, although Larry Stern is only a young man. My father disapproved when I did not choose to spend my medical career in lucrative private practice. But there was no need for me to compete. I knew I would inherit money, and then I even married money. A salaried position as chief pathologist and town coroner gave me plenty of free time

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We have all known — or known of — men such as Charles Prism III. Whether or not this be welcomed, these men identify themselves with the communities in which they live, and see themselves as the defenders of those ways of life which, perhaps even in their time, have become "traditions." This is not the conservatism of the noveauxriche, *but of yesterday's inherited wealth.* ***H.S.S.***

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to spend at home with my charming wife. It ordinarily did, that is.

"I'm nearly finished," I said. "I'm just replacing the organs."

"Good, because your wife just called. She's afraid it's going to snow again and you won't be able to get home. Why don't you let me finish up? I've nowhere to go on a Sunday morning."

I was amused. He was trying to glance at the body in a casual way but he succeeded only in looking awkward, unable to hide his eagerness. "Larry," I said, "your generosity betrays the fact that you want to be in on the only murder case we've had in Hillerton all year."

"Unless you count the pitchfork old man Hennessey threw into his hired man last August." Larry bent his lanky frame over the table and looked closely at the body. Then he grimaced and said, "Hell of a mess. Maybe I'm just as glad that you're the official coroner. Oh—I forgot. Chief Glover called, too. He's panting for your report."

"Don't the police have anything else to go on?"

"I guess not. No identification. They're still tramping around in the snow looking for the weapon, too. What was it?"

"Obviously an ax," I said, pointing to the short, deep cuts. Larry reached out and touched the dark hair roots of the golden, bloody head.

"Poor thing. Pretty, pregnant, and dead."

Since I had already covered the lower half of the body, I was startled. "How do you know she was pregnant?"

Larry looked a little shamefaced. "While you were out for coffee a while ago, I looked in and saw the uterus when it was exposed. I couldn't see much else."

There was little to see. The chest was smashed in and the face was an unrecognisable pulp. "I hardly think anyone could tell whether or not she had ever been pretty," I commented.

"Oh, I don't know," said Larry. "We might never know about her face, but in spite of the ax and the four months of pregnancy, she didn't have a bad figure. Nice legs, too."

From my one disastrous social experience with Larry, I knew that he was the type to notice legs whether the girl was alive or dead. "No wedding ring or mark on the finger," I said, showing him that I was the more astute observer.

"Yes, and the bleach job looks homemade. I'd guess that she hadn't wanted to get pregnant."

"Her problems are all solved now," I said, closing up the rest of the body.

"Somebody's problems are, I suppose. I wonder if she was

killed because she was pregnant?"

"And trying to get money out of the man?"

"Well, it's been done before," Larry said, and immediately reddened. "I didn't mean . . ."

The scandal about my father-in-law was a year old, but people still talked about it. Howard Brent fed the gossip by continuing to go on spurious business excursions into New York City at every opportunity. He even continued to make fun of me for being what he called a stodgy stay-at-home. He cared nothing for the way he diminished his stature as the town's leading businessman, or for the way he hurt his daughter. If only Manhattan were more than three hours away. If only Agatha Brent had not died when Angela was eighteen. While his wife was alive, Howard had been rebellious but fairly discreet. As a widower, he had done exactly as he pleased.

"It's all right, Larry," I said. "You've no doubt heard about the sordid events that happened before you arrived last summer. The scandal, however, was merely that Howard Brent had to spend a great deal of money to get out of a paternity suit."

"Yes, I know, but those female gossip-mongers who sling food out to me in the hospital cafeteria were reminding each other about it when I went back to see if you were still there. They badgered me with questions about the murdered woman."

"And I suppose you couldn't resist telling them that she was with child?"

Larry looked guilty. "No, Dr. Prism, I didn't tell them—or at least—well, I suppose they guessed from the way I evaded their questions."

I was exasperated. "By now the news is all over Hillerton."

"I'm sorry," Larry said. "I had no idea that scandals about rich men made such permanent dents in a town. I suppose they're all talking about Angela's—about your wife's father in connection with the case."

I straightened up, my back aching. At nearly sixty, I was beginning to notice my back more than usual. "Larry," I said, "you don't know anything about small towns. You've never lived in one before. Hillerton has a good-sized hospital and it services several communities, but the people here still think small."

Larry scowled. "It's no one's damn business what Mr. Brent does on his junkets, or what anyone does, for that matter. Hell, I suppose that now anyone going to New York is suspect no matter how respectable the purpose."

I looked at him sardonically. "When you and I went to that fall convention together, the gos-

sips might have thought that both of us were respectable if you hadn't come home and bragged about getting drunk."

"I didn't exactly brag," Larry said morosely, "I just complained about my hangover. Served me right. I should have stayed sober at the convention, the way you did." His fingers twitched and he studied the spots on the floor. He seemed to be unusually tense. "Why, if people think I go into New York to get drunk the way Mr. Brent goes in to—oh hell!"

"You do look rather hung over even this morning," I said.

He interlaced his fingers and one of the muscles in his jaw flickered with strain. "Dr. Prism, you keep treating me as if I'm—you know I'm not a drinker."

"It's all right, Larry."

"It's' not all right! It was only that one night at the end of the convention." Larry's voice was suddenly hoarse. "It's been on my mind ever since."

"What's been on your mind?"

"Mostly what you must have thought—the way I kept asking you to buy more drinks for the three of us!"

"Three of us?"

"You know. We were talking to a surgeon, or someone who liked surgeons. Something about multiple sclerosis, was it? That seems odd, but it hardly matters. All I remember is that I was obnoxious. Is that where I passed out?"

"I don't know what you did," I said, "I left you there and went to call Angela."

Larry continued to look solemnly at the floor. "Well, I just wanted to apologize again." He coughed and looked at the window. "How is Mrs. Brent feeling today?"

"My dear boy, you ought to know. You just talked to her on the phone."

Flustered, Larry shook his head. "So I did. I must be in a bad way. But I swear I haven't been doing any drinking."

"Forget the convention. You've been under a strain. I hope you took my advice last night and went to bed early with a barbiturate. I really didn't mind finishing up those surgical biopsy slides."

I studied Larry's handsome young face. I knew he'd been precariously close to a nervous breakdown during his residency at Bellevue, after his own father was brought into the morgue, held up and shot while driving his cab at night. As soon as Larry finished his training, he moved to Hillerton and plunged into country living, going camping almost every summer weekend when he was off duty. He still visited his married sister in New York quite regularly.

"Larry," I said, "does Hillerton bore you?"

Larry sighed. "I like working in a place where murders happen only once in a blue moon. I don't find Hillerton boring. It's got some wonderful people in it."

"One of them may be a murderer." The voice was that of Thaddeus Glover, our portly and lethargic chief of police. He pushed open the door and walked in. I have never particularly liked Thaddeus. I could never imagine him being energetic enough to combat crime in a place less sleepy than Hillerton.

"How come, Chief?" asked Larry.

"The snow. She wasn't dumped dead into those woods near the Harkins' farm. She was brought there alive, in a car, and murdered out in the snow."

"Have you found out where the car went after that?" I asked.

"No. The snow's too heavy—kept up all night. But that's why we think the murderer is still in Hillerton. Glover seated himself like a small Humpty Dumpty upon one of the high wooden stools near the table. "He would have had a hell of a time driving on. The small side roads out of the valley were snowed in early, and the sanding crews were out on the north road that's mostly uphill to Spruce Center. Nobody went out that way between nine and midnight last night. Those the probable murder hours, Prism?"

I disliked it when Glover did not use "Doctor" with my name, but at least he didn't call me "Charley the Third", the way he did when we were boys on opposite sides of the tracks. "Well, Thaddeus," I said crisply, "since the woman was not found until this morning, it is difficult to be precise. However, those are the probable hours."

"What about the road that goes south to the Thruway?" asked Larry eagerly.

"Tied up with a three car wreck. The state police remember most of the people who tried to get through from Hillerton. One of them was Billy Harkins."

"The boy who found the body this morning?" asked Larry in surprise.

"Yep," said Glover, and leaned forward to look more closely at the body. "A nasty weapon. I hope we find it."

Larry suddenly looked at the body again, staring at the gashes in the chest. "I've got an idea!" he exclaimed. "I'm going up to my room for a minute—I'll be right back."

Upon opening the door to the hall he collided with Angela and both of them turned scarlet. He mumbled an apology and loped off, while Angela came quickly over to me. I pulled the rubber sheeting up over the rest of the body. Angela had been the wife of a pathologist for six years, but

I knew that her bravery in the morgue was largely an act for my sake.

"Charles," she said, touching my shoulder lightly, "I'm sure it's going to snow again. I came over because my car has better snow tires than yours and I'll take you home. The roads are so treacherous." Even with her hair windblown, she looked beautiful, and I was glad that we had not had children. She could spend so much more time with me. At twenty-eight, she counted on me to be both a good husband and a good father to her. There was nothing I wanted more.

"I love having you to chauffeur me, my dear," I said, and went over to the sink to wash up.

"Chief Glover," said Angela, "why did you question Billy Harkins so much? Everybody in Hillerton thinks you suspect him."

Glover chewed his lip thoughtfully. "Billy says he was trying to get to the next town to see a girl. Maybe. Just wait and see. We'll be questioning a lot of people."

"Our police chief thinks that the murderer is still trapped en route through Hillerton," I remarked.

"Or is somebody who lives here," he said.

There was silence. Nothing can be more silent than a morgue. Somewhere a leaky tap dripped out a small plop of water now and then. A distant door slammed, and then I heard Larry's long stride in the hall again. He pushed in the door slowly and came into the morgue.

"What's your idea, Dr. Stern?" asked Glover. "I need some good ideas."

Larry leaned against the wall, his face still. It was two or three seconds before he spoke. "Sorry, Chief. It was nothing."

"Darling," said Angela to me, "aren't you finished? I'd planned such a good Sunday dinner."

"Mrs. Prism," drawled Glover, "has your father had any trouble lately in New—"

"Chief!" Angela glared at him. "You needn't assume the worst when it's perfectly obvious that the girl must have been with some stranger who was passing through Hillerton."

"Not likely," said Glover. "Just before I came over here I got word that the conductor of the ten p.m. train remembers punching a New York to Hillerton ticket for a good-looking blonde. Nobody else got off at the station. We know she didn't take a taxi, and she certainly didn't walk to those woods. Somebody met her. Somebody from here."

Larry slowly pushed himself away from the wall and came over to the dissecting table. He lifted up the edge of the rubber

sheeting where it covered the head of the body. The yellow hair, streaked with reddish brown splotches, gleamed in the light, and Angela put her hand to her mouth.

"Do you think you might have known her, Mrs. Prism?" asked Glover, rubbing his pudgy nose.

"No! How could anyone know who she is! How can you find out—oh—how awful it is!" Larry covered the head, his face white and set as Angela stared up at him.

Glover answered her. "We'll probably have to wait for the New York police to turn up a likely possibility. It will be just my luck that nobody cares enough about her to turn in a missing person's report, and that her fingerprints won't be on record."

"I heard—" Angela swallowed. "I heard she was pregnant."

"I heard, too," said Glover. "Right, Prism?"

"Four months along," I said, wishing that Angela were home.

"She could have been going to a prenatal clinic," said Larry, "or even had the money for an obstetrician, although I doubt it. But there must be thousands of peroxided women in the prenatal clinics of New York."

"Yes," said Glover, creaking the wooden stool as he shifted his weight. "Can't you find anything unusual about her, Prism? Something that might identify her?"

"Not a thing," I said. "Larry, I'm sure you'll agree with me—you got a look at the body. All I could find was that she'd gone without supper last night, is about thirty years old, and is four months pregnant. There's nothing unusual about her that would help anyone recognise her. Of course, her face has been completely obliterated."

"You autopsied the brain and spinal cord, too," said Larry. "Nothing of interest there, either?"

"No. Look for yourself. I've made slides of nervous tissue sections. They're in the lab." Larry was always subtly questioning my competence, trying to show that he was fresh from his big city training. He cut an impressive figure at times, and was even blond—one would never have suspected that his background was what it was—but of course he was most unsuitable for a town like Hillerton. Angela had felt sorry for him. She had actually wanted to include him in our dinner parties.

"Those chest wounds didn't seem to bleed much," said Glover.

"There were a great many of them," I said. It was colder, now. Outside, a bitter January wind had started up, shaking the old windows. "Angela, I think we

can go now. I'll type up the final autopsy report at home and get it to you by this afternoon, Thaddeus."

"Thanks, Prism. By the way, I hope none of you talks to the reporters. A lot of them have come up from the city, and some of them have even tried to persuade me to let them take newspaper photographs of the corpse."

"I don't approve of that," I said. "We'll move the body into that small storage room over there, and you'd better send a man around at once to guard the morgue."

"Good idea," said Glover. "I'll have them sitting out in the hall in shifts. No one will get in here."

Larry and I pushed the dissecting table into the storage room and I closed the door. "I'm coroner of this town," I said, "and no one at all must touch the body before the inquest."

Larry looked at me solemnly. Then he turned to Angela, who bit her lip. "Mrs. Prism," he said, "wasn't your father in Europe last fall?"

"Yes," said Angela. "He got home at the beginning of November."

"And he'd been gone for three months?"

I was getting very irritated. "What is the point you are trying to make?"

"Only that Mr. Brent couldn't possibly be the father of that woman's child," said Larry, and left the room.

After our delayed Sunday dinner, I typed up the autopsy report and delivered it to the police station. Later, when I had just settled down in my study with a novel, Angela came in and sat on the couch beside me.

"Charles, I keep wondering whether father has been blackmailed since all the trouble he had last year."

"Not likely," I said. I knew her father. He wouldn't have gone along with blackmailers. Scandal didn't worry him.

"He's been complaining lately about not having enough money for his usual trip to Florida."

"Because he probably spent too much in Europe. You know that he always complains. He likes people to think that he's not as rich as he is."

"But I'm worried—about everything."

"Now Darling, surely you don't think your own father is a murderer!"

"No! No, of course not. He couldn't be. But people are cruel in Hillerton. If the police don't find out what really happened to that woman, the talk about father will never end!"

"There's Billy Harkins, remember."

"He's a little boy."

"On the contrary, he's a wild teenager of fifteen who drives a car when he doesn't even have a license."

"But he discovered the body this morning!"

"Perhaps he thought that would give him an air of innocence," I said putting my arm around her. She was stiff with tension, with deep shadows under her eyes. The wind outside had risen to a screeching gale, and at first I did not hear the phone.

It was Glover, who sounded angry. "Prism, the guard at the morgue says he caught your assistant at the door of the storage room. He was evidently trying to get in, and when he saw the guard, he mumbled some sort of excuse and went off. The idiot guard didn't think it was important enough to tell me until he went off duty just now."

"Is it important?"

"Look, Prism, there are only a few people in town who are known to be regular visitors in Manhattan. It seems to me that for once somebody else looks like a much better bet than your rake of a father-in-law."

"Larry was just being curious," I said soothingly. "Let me know if you uncover anything, Thaddeus." I hung up and smiled reassuringly at Angela.

She looked frightened. "Chief Glover doesn't think that Larry —"

"Glover is plucking at straws. The trouble is, Larry is a virtual stranger in town. He comes from New York and we don't really know much about him. After all, it is a little hard to evaluate the character of a man so different from us."

"He's not different!" Angela drew back. "He hasn't had money or an Ivy League education, but he's brilliant, and kind, and —and he's suffered so much!"

"Perhaps that is what I meant, my dear. One just doesn't know how much he has suffered, or what it has done to his mind."

"Larry's mind is perfectly all right! He's the sort of man who sacrifices his own wishes to avoid hurting anyone." Angela got up, walked rapidly to the window, and pulled the drapes over it. The room seemed ominously quiet as the noise of the wind became muffled. I decided that the subject had best be dropped, and I returned to my book.

"Charles! I've got to talk to you!"

"Some other time, my dear." I did not look up as she went out.

Larry Stern was arrested later that night. A blood-stained camping hatchet with Larry's initials carved into the handle was found in the woods, near the

site of the body. Snowdrifts had apparently delayed the discovery. Soon the phone began ringing constantly as reporters tried to question me about Larry. Of course, I did not tell them anything even about his unstable mentality, but I did learn from them that he had been out of the hospital on Saturday night. One of the nurses saw him going to his car at about nine-thirty. He had certainly not taken my advice to go to bed early with a sleeping pill.

By midnight I became worried when Angela did not come home. She had gone out in her car some time after supper without telling me where she was going. I was beginning to be most perturbed when Glover called again. He wanted me to come to the police station at once.

The station is much older than the hospital, but Glover doesn't seem to mind. When I got there he was leaning back in his ancient swivel chair, chewing placidly on a dead cigar butt. On a hard wooden bench along the wall sat my wife, her eyes red from crying. Appalled, I rushed over to her.

"My love," I said, putting my arm around her shoulders, "whatever is the matter?" She put her face in her hands and sobbed, turning away from me.

Glover folded his hands on his paunch and pursed his lips. "It seems that she came down here to give Dr. Stern an alibi," he said casually.

"An alibi?"

"She says he was with her at ten o'clock last night when the New York train got in, and for an hour after that."

I removed my arm from Angela's shoulders and stood up. When she is standing, she is slightly taller than I am, but, sitting down on that bench, she looked like a pathetic child. I said nothing, and finally she wiped her eyes.

"He doesn't believe me, Charles."

"Neither do I, Angela," I said contemptuously. "Perhaps you think you are trying to do a good deed, but you are only hurting yourself, and me."

Angela looked up at me, her face wet and her lips trembling. "Oh Charles! I haven't wanted to hurt you! But now Larry is in such awful danger!"

"Of his own doing, no doubt. It is no real concern of yours, Angela."

"But it is!"

"Now, my dear, everybody knows how much you have been hurt by your father's—er—problems. You are simply trying to help a man who got himself into similar problems. However, he took more drastic measures of coping with them."

Glover coughed and leaned

forward to put his elbows on the desk. "Prism," he said, "I have been trying to make your wife understand that Dr. Stern absolutely denies that he was with her while the murder was taking place."

"But he was with me! I tell you he was!"

"Angela!"

"Larry's trying to save me, and you, from embarrassment!"

"Angela," I said patiently, "I realize that most of the young men in town have been attracted to you, but surely you are not going to tell Glover that you have been having an affair with a man like Stern!" I was shaken. I had guessed long ago that Larry was infatuated with her, but I had never anticipated that it might actually mean something to her.

"Charles!" She looked angrier than I had ever seen her. "Charles, try to understand! I most certainly have not had an affair with Larry, or with anyone. But I have always liked him, from the day he came to Hillerton. I knew he liked me, too, but he never said anything until last night. While you were doing those slides at the hospital, he came to see me. He told me he loves me. He just told me—nothing else. He said he couldn't stand it any more and he's planning to leave Hillerton."

"I'm afraid he won't be going for some time now," said Glover, looking at me and yawning. "Say, I hear he raised cain during that medical convention you took him to, Prism."

Angela stood up and clenched her fists. "No! No! All he did was to get drunk! He was miserably unhappy, having to socialize with my husband, when it's bad enough having to work with him. And Charles, you must have treated him like dirt. I remember how pompous you were when you drove off with him in the Continental, patronizing him as a non-paying passenger and making remarks about how different your car is from a taxi. How could you! A taxi!"

"It is different, Angela. I trust you will remember that."

"By the way, Prism," said Glover, "did you see any girls hanging around Stern in New York? I understand that he was sober and with you in the hotel on all the nights of the convention but the last. That was about four months ago, so I was wondering—"

"I'm sure I don't remember," I said. But I did remember. I could see now the bar where I left him, crying into his drink about the troubles of the peroxided creature we'd found sitting exhausted in the corner. But there was no need to go into all the details if Larry were the chief suspect.

"Well it's getting late," Glover

said. "We'll be checking up on Dr. Stern's connections in New York for the next couple of days, and I hope we'll have something for your inquest. Please take your wife home."

I was glad to go. I hate the musty smell of police stations. However, I slept badly that night. Angela locked herself in her room after we got home. All I could think of was that she had disgraced us.

By the next afternoon I had organized everything for the inquest to be held on Wednesday. Usually, on a Monday, there are at least one or two routine autopsies to be done, but on this Monday the morgue was empty. The body of the murdered woman was still safely in the storage room, and the two remaining dissecting tables were clean, black, and cold. We have a small morgue—nothing like Bellevue's—but it suffices. There were some new surgical specimens to be dissected in the laboratory, and I filed away the slides of neurological tissue from the murder case. I found notes in Larry's handwriting to the effect that the specimens of brain and spinal cord were normal, with no evidence of multiple sclerosis or of any other disease of the nervous system. I wondered what he had made of that.

My work was complete by the middle of the afternoon, but I did not go home. I went into my office and let the quiet seep into me while I thought about the murdered woman, Larry Stern, and, of course, my wife. Angela might feel compassion for Larry now, but after the inquest she would feel it no longer. Like her father, these other men would prove unworthy, and she would need me more than ever. Larry's attachment to her would be a thing to be ridiculed. Strange that I had not realized how much she was responding to it. Nevertheless, it would not have changed past events.

The door to my office makes an eerie noise when it opens, and while I was sitting there, bent over my desk, I heard the rasp of the old hinges. I turned around carefully.

"Hello Prism," said Thaddeus Glover. Stumping across the room, he went around to the other side of the desk and sat down in the straight-backed chair I keep there. "All set for the inquest?"

"Of course," I said.

Glover looked idly around the room, picked up a well-worn copy of my favorite pathology text-book from the desk, and thumbed through it. "Nothing more for the autopsy report?"

"Of course not," I said impatiently. "Has Larry confessed?"

"Did you think he would?"

"No, I suppose I didn't. The boy is probably not normal, Thaddeus. He was mentally disturbed before he came to Hillerton, and if he did murder that woman, he may not even realize what he has done. You should have seen him on the evening of the murder. When I arrived at the hospital he looked like a bundle of shaky nerves."

"No doubt," said Glover, "since, if we're correct, he was going to meet someone responsible for his emotional conflict."

"Thaddeus, you sound like a psychiatrist. Perhaps it would be a good idea, at that, to get a psychiatric examination for Larry before the inquest. There's a —"

"I'll think about it, Prism. By the way, wouldn't you like to have a preview of the theory the police are going to present at the inquest?"

"Of course."

Glover settled back and lit a large black cigar, fanned the first cloud of smoke away with his hand, and grinned. "Sorry. I know you can't stand cigars, but the atmosphere of this place is not to my taste."

"What is your theory?" I asked stiffly.

"Well, Prism, my theory is that the woman was stunned by the blunt end of that hatchet shortly after she got in the car which picked her up at the station. The murderer drove quickly into the woods, pushed her out into the snow, and killed her with sharp blows to the head. Then he sat in his car and thought for a while. He got out again and destroyed her face. After much more thought, he hacked away at her chest."

"We really can't be that sure of the sequence of events."

"But supposing my theory is right? Why do you think the murderer went on hacking long after he had killed her?"

"Surely you have asked Larry," I said. "He must have wanted to destroy her facial features."

"That would be logical."

"And then perhaps he was too upset to realize that the woman was dead, and kept striking her again and again."

Glover squinted crosseyed at the glowing end of his cigar. "You know," he said, "I'm only a layman as far as your business is concerned, and as a cop I've had damn little experience with murder, but it did seem significant to me that there was practically no bleeding from the chest wounds. They must have been done after she was thoroughly dead from having her head bashed in. Only the head wounds bled freely. Anyone could see that."

I waved cigar smoke away from my face. "Very well. The murderer was obviously a maniac who kept on attacking her in a rage."

"I wonder. Suppose that he mutilated the chest for another reason."

"Your theory is stretching thin, Thaddeus."

"Not yet," Glover said laconically, putting his feet up on my oak desk. "Let me put it this way. When we found the body, it could have been a bleached blonde from anywhere. There were no labels in her clothes, no papers in her purse, no scars, moles or other marks visible on what was left of her body, and her face was gone. Her fingerprints weren't on record and—oh, yes—she was pregnant. That about sums her up, eh, Prism?"

"Yes," I said. "What are you getting at in this theory?"

"The murderer couldn't have been too insane with rage. He was awfully careful about destroying her identity. He even wiped his fingerprints off the hatchet."

"But the weapon was left there!"

"As a matter of fact," Glover said thoughtfully, "Stern realized that the murder weapon might be his before it was ever found."

"Oh?"

"When he got his great idea and left us talking in the morgue, he went to his room to look at his camping hatchet. You had said the murder was committed with an ax, but Stern looked at those small, choppy wounds and wondered whether a camping hatchet might not be more the right size. He went to look at his own and found it missing."

"Naturally, he told you this only after he was arrested," I said. "A little late to make himself sound innocent."

"Oh, he talked to me about quite a lot of things after he was arrested. For instance, he told me that when he discovered his hatchet was gone, he wanted badly to examine the body closely."

"Certainly," I said. "He probably wanted to make sure he had obliterated her identity. It's a good thing the guard caught him yesterday when he tried to get into the room where we put the body."

"Prism," said Glover, "I'm afraid that the guard misunderstood the situation. What actually happened was that he caught him on his way out of that room."

The air in my office was heavy with smoke and I went over to the window to open it slightly. There was a greenish sunset beyond the western hill and its pallid light lay cold upon the snow. The wind had died down completely.

"Go on," I said.

"After we all left the morgue yesterday, Dr. Stern went back and got into the storage room before the guard arrived. After an hour, Stern left, hoping he could make the guard think he

had actually been in the main room of the morgue, but the guard heard him and looked in just after Stern closed the storage room door and was standing outside it."

"What is the importance of this?" I asked.

"Just that he redid your autopsy."

I laughed. "I trust that our clever police chief had to force this confession out of him. What incriminating thing was he trying to destroy?"

"He says he wasn't trying to destroy anything. He was just trying to find new evidence."

"Evidence?"

"Of the woman's identity."

I was still standing by the cold window, and I turned around, leaned against the sill, and studied the dumpy little man acting so at home in my office. Glover blinked stupidly at me, cleared his throat, and continued.

"Stern redid your autopsy, looked at those slides of nervous tissue, and finally remembered something. Four months ago in a New York bar, you and he met a blonde who latched onto the two of you when she heard that you were doctors attending the medical convention. She said she preferred surgeons, and explained why. It seems that she needed an important operation. Stern's memory about this was always confused, because through the haze of alcohol he had labelled her ailment multiple sclerosis, a disease which does not require surgery. But after redoing your autopsy, he realized his mistake. The woman had not said she had multiple sclerosis. She told you and Stern that the doctors said she had "M.S.", initials commonly used for multiple sclerosis, but also for a different sort of condition." Glover hauled himself out of the chair and went over to the door. "Come in, Larry, and show your boss what you've got."

The door opened and Larry walked in, followed by Angela. He held up a large specimen bottle containing pulpy fragments of something dark.

"Mitral stenosis," said Larry.

Glover eased himself back onto the chair and grunted. "That's right, Prism. The murdered woman needed an elaborate operation on her badly diseased heart in order to live a completely normal life. Then she got pregnant, and she told the man in question that she needed a hell of a lot of money for special care. From meeting him once, she thought he was the sort of man who would pay up like a lamb to keep his precious name free from scandal, even if he didn't believe the child was definitely his. He would never have allowed anything so public as a paternity suit in court. The trou-

ble was, the woman didn't realize that the man thought he couldn't risk anything at all. He wanted to kill her." Glover paused and relit his cigar. "Larry, suppose you explain the rest."

Larry's face was pale as he put the specimen bottle on the desk. "The shape of the heart had to be destroyed in order to hide the cardiac enlargement. If a doctor saw such an enlarged heart, he would think of the commonest cause in a thirty year old woman—damaged heart valves due to severe childhood rheumatic fever."

"Very interesting, eh, Prism?" said Glover. "When the murderer smashed in her chest, he thought he'd destroyed the heart so completely that no one looking at the body, even after the autopsy, would discover the disease. But there's a lot more to an autopsy than looking."

"Yes," said Larry quietly. "This particular woman's disease was severe enough to require surgery. The mitral valve of her heart was not only thickened and narrowed to form the condition called mitral stenosis, but there was even calcification in the leaflets of the valve. Anyone touching the smashed heart would be able to feel the bits of calcified valve."

"Yet the murderer still felt safe because he knew that no one would be allowed to touch the body. A pregnant woman with very severe mitral stenosis could be easily traced through the special clinic she'd probably be going to, but first there had to be a good autopsy report to make the correct diagnosis."

"Well, Larry," I said, "I see that you did a careful autopsy."

"I had to. I was trying to save myself—and Angela." I felt as if my own heart had suddenly been smashed.

Glover stood up again and stretched. "After Larry did the autopsy yesterday, he called some of his medical friends in New York and put them to work hunting cardiac surgery clinics. This afternoon they came through with the name and address of the murdered woman, and the New York police got right onto it."

"The police found the landlady, Charles." Angela's eyes were sad but remote. "You saw each other when you came out of the woman's room that night. She's going to be at the inquest."

Glover finally ground out his cigar against the side of my metal wastebasket and took out a pair of handcuffs. "We're going to have an outside pathologist go over the body," he said, "but I want to tell you that I reached into the body's chest and took out the gritty remains of that heart myself. Evidence of identity, Charley the Third."

(Continued from other side)

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