

**2 *saint* Stories by LESLIE CHARTERIS**

**THE**

***saint***  
**MAGAZINE**

**JAN.**

**3/- U.K.**

**K**

**Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS**



**SEND A MAN  
from INTREX**

An Exciting New  
COUNTER-SPY Story by  
**MICHAEL AVALLONE**  
Creator of THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

**BLACK ORCHIDS**

A Thrilling NERO WOLFE Novel  
by **REX STOUT**

**Also**

**WENZELL BROWN**

**EDWARD D. HOCH**

**DEAN R. S. ULLERY**

**AND OTHERS**



Because some mixed-up young man in Texas fatally potted sixteen random and total strangers who had the misfortune to come into his sights, America is once again being battered with a resurgence of the perennial agitation to abrogate or circumvent the second amendment to the Constitution, which stipulates that "the right of the citizens to keep and to bear arms shall not be infringed".

The same clamor arose not so long ago when another maniac assassinated President Kennedy with a rifle casually ordered from a mailing catalog.

With no more wish than anybody to encourage repetitions of events of this kind, I feel it a duty to lend what-ever little weight I may swing to the opposition to that sort of panic legislation.

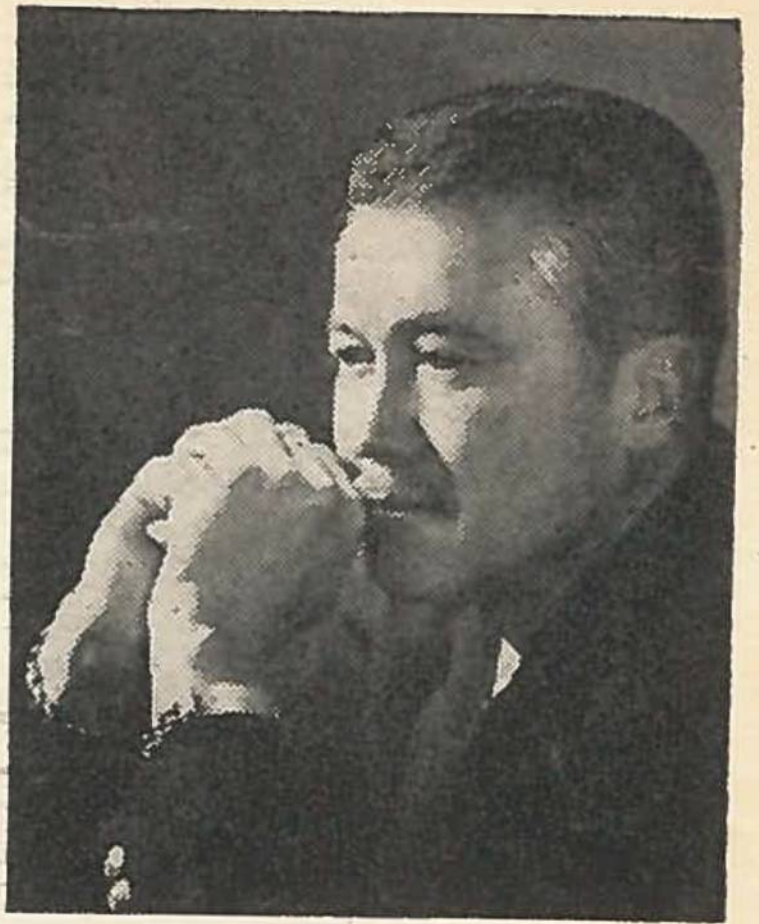
It has been said often enough, but cannot be repeated too often, that governmental control of firearms has never kept them out of the hands of professional or seriously intentioned thugs, but has succeeded only in making them hard for honest people to obtain for their own protection.

The firearms laws of New York are the most stringent in the United States—so rigorous and arbitrary, indeed, that I have a strong suspicion that the Supreme Court might have to declare them unconstitutional if anyone ever fought them doggedly enough to that point—but a New York hoodlum without a rod is as far-fetched to imagine as a beat squawker without a guitar. In fact, during Prohibition (and for all I know, long after) these irons were not even carried illegally, for it was a very small-time larrikin who didn't know a friendly judge who would give him a permit, although the ordinary honest burgesses were not usually so well acquainted.

The regulation of firearms in Britain is still more rigid, requiring the sale of even a .22 rifle to be licensed and registered, while obtaining a pistol permit is about as easy as getting buried in Westminster Abbey. But the new generation of Chicago-style racketeers and robbers seem to have no problem in getting any weapons they need, although the hapless householders who are regularly stuck up and slugged by happy roughnecks are seldom authorized to have anything more lethal than a loaded umbrella with which to defend themselves from assault.

It may sound trite from repetition, but again must be continually remembered, that anyone bent on mayhem, or simply running amuck, has never failed to find some instrument for homicide, from Lizzie Borden's axe to the knife which another rampaging killer used to butcher eight nurses in their dormitory building in one frenzied night only a couple of weeks before that score was topped in Texas.

Anyone inclined to kill can do it with a brick, a nylon stocking, or his bare hands. No law can deprive him of every possible life extinguisher. But he can conceivably be given pause if he knows that his projected victim may be also armed.



*Wm. Chandler*





# 12 Big issues for \$5<sup>50</sup>

**THE *saint***  
MAGAZINE

will bring you the excitement, suspense, thrills and adventure of the best fiction published. . .

In each issue you will find the greatest contemporary authors of detective, mystery and crime fiction, with an added bonus of the finest classics in the field. . .

**Many New, Some Old — But Always The Best**

If you want to be sure of getting each issue. . . just clip the coupon below and mail it with your check or cash — and **THE *saint*** will arrive on time as is issued. . .

**FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY**  
30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

YES I want **THE *saint*** MAGAZINE. Please enter my subscription.

12 issues \$5.50 ☐ 24 issues \$10.00 ☐ 36 issues \$14.00 ☐

Additional postage: Foreign \$1.00 per year.

Please remit by check, money order or cash.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, STATE, ZIP .....

(please print)





# THE *saint* MAGAZINE

JANUARY 1967

Vol. 24, No. 5



*The Export Trade* ..... 4  
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

*The Five Thousand Pound Kiss* ... 13  
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

*Send a Man from Intrex* ..... 28  
by MICHAEL AVALLONE

*Black Orchids* ..... 50  
by REX STOUT

*Tomboy* ..... 124  
by WENZELL BROWN

*What's New in Crime* ..... 135  
by STEFAN SANTESSON

*The Saint Crossword* ..... 138  
A MONTHLY FEATURE

*What's It All About?* ..... 140  
by STEPHEN DENTINGER

*Druid Doom* ..... 143  
by RICHARD S. ULLERY

*Fall of Zoo* ..... 155  
by EDWARD D. HOCH

---

Leslie Charteris  
*Supervising Editor*  
Hans Stefan  
Santesson  
- *Editor*

---

---

THE SAINT MAGAZINE, January 1967. Volume 24, No. 5. Published monthly except February, June and November, by Fiction Publishing Company, 30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York, by arrangement with Saint Magazine, Inc. Single copy price 50c. Subscription in U.S. and Canada, \$5.50 for twelve issues. Subscription in foreign countries, \$6.50 for twelve issues. Names of persons and places are fictitious and any use of the name of an actual person or place is purely coincidental. No responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited submissions. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright 1966 by Fiction Publishing Company.



**ARE YOU "DIGGING YOUR GRAVE WITH YOUR TEETH"?**

**HAVE YOU TRIED TO LOSE WEIGHT - - AND FAILED?**

**ARE YOU AFRAID TO STOP SMOKING?**



Here is the **ONLY** diet that will **HELP YOU REDUCE**, and at the same time permit you to:

- *Eat all the meat and fat (steaks, chops, eggs, cheese, butter) you want;*
- *Drink as many cocktails and highballs as usual;*
- *Quit, or cut down on smoking;*
- *Stop counting calories.*

This is the revolutionary new **LOW CARBOHYDRATE** diet you've been reading about in the newspapers and magazines, hearing about on radio and T V. Thousands of people have tried it, and discovered that dieting can be simple, getting slim can be fun. **YOU CAN DO IT, TOO!**

**75c At All Newsstands, Book, Drug and Chain Stores.**

**OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS, INC., Dept. SD 167**  
**30 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 10017.**

I am enclosing \$..... Please send me the copies listed below of **EAT, DRINK and BE SLIM!**:

☐ 1 copy 85c, ☐ 3 copies \$2.00, ☐ 6 copies \$3.50, ☐ 12 copies \$6.00

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State..... Zip Code.....



*the  
export  
trade*

**by Leslie Charteris**

It is a notable fact, which might be made the subject of a profound philosophical discourse by anyone with time to spare for these recreations, that the characteristics which go to make a successful buccaneer are almost the same as those required by the detective whose job it is to catch him.

That he must be a man of infinite wit and resource goes without saying; but there are other and more uncommon essentials. He must have an unlimited memory not only for faces and names, but also for every odd and out-of-the-way fact that comes to his knowledge. Out of a molehill of coincidence he must be able to build up a mountain of inductive speculation that would make Sherlock Holmes feel dizzy. He must be a man of infinite human sympathy, with an unstinted gift for forming weird and wonderful friendships. He must, in fact, be equally like the talented his-

---

*Veteran readers of the Saint Saga are used to having characters reappear in different stories. This month we are trying the interesting experiment of reprinting two such stories in the same issue, because they really seem to belong together.*

---

*L.C.*



torian whose job it is to chronicle his exploits—with the outstanding difference that instead of being free to ponder the problems which arise in the course of his vocation for sixty hours, his decisions will probably have to be formed in sixty seconds.

Simon Templar fulfilled at least one of these qualifications to the *n*th degree. He had queer friends dotted about in every outlandish corner of the globe, and if many of them lived in unromantic-sounding parts of London, it was not his fault. Strangely enough, there were not many of them who knew that the debonair young man with the lean, tanned face and gay blue eyes who drifted in and out of their lives at irregular intervals was the notorious law-breaker known to everyone as the Saint. Certainly old Charlie Milton did not know.

The Saint, being in the region of the Tottenham Court Road one afternoon with half an hour to dispose of, dropped into Charlie's attic work-room and listened to a new angle of the industrial depression.

"There's not much doing in my line these days," said Charlie, wiping his steel-rimmed spectacles. "When

nobody's going in for real expensive jewellery, it stands to reason they don't need any dummies. Look at this thing—the first big bit of work I've had for weeks."

He produced a glittering rope of diamonds, set in a cunning chain of antique silver and ending in a wonderfully elaborate heart-shaped pendant. The sight of it should have made any honest buccaneer's mouth water, but it so happened that Simon Templar knew better. For that was the secret of Charlie Milton's employment.

Up there, in his dingy little shop, he laboured with marvellously delicate craftsmanship over the imitations which had made his name known to every jeweller in London. Sometimes there were a hundred thousand pounds' worth of precious stones littered over his bench, and he worked under the watchful eye of a detective detailed to guard them. Whenever a piece of jewellery was considered too valuable to be displayed by its owner on ordinary occasions, it was sent to Charlie Milton for him to make one of his amazingly exact facsimiles; and there was many a wealthy dowager who brazenly paraded Charlie's handiwork at minor social functions, while



the priceless originals were safely stored in a safe deposit.

"The Kellman necklace," Charlie explained, tossing it carelessly back into a drawer. "Lord Palfrey ordered it from me a month ago, and I was just finishing it when he went bankrupt. I had twenty-five pounds advance when I took it on, and I expect that's all I shall see for my trouble. The necklace is being sold with the rest of his things, and how do I know whether the people who buy it will want my copy?"

It was not an unusual kind of conversation to find its place in the Saint's varied experience, and he never foresaw the part it was to play in his career. Some days later he happened to notice a newspaper paragraph referring to the sale of Lord Palfrey's house and effects; but he thought nothing more of the matter, for men like Lord Palfrey were not Simon Templar's game.

In the days when some fresh episode of Saintly audacity was one of the most dependable weekly stand-bys of the daily press, the victims of his lawlessness had always been men whose reputations would have emerged considerably dishevelled from such a searching inquiry as they

were habitually at pains to avoid; and although the circumstances of Simon Templar's life had altered a great deal since then, his elastic principles of morality performed their acrobatic contortions within much the same limits.

That those circumstances should have altered at all was not his choice; but there are boundaries which every buccaneer must eventually reach, and Simon Templar had reached them rather rapidly. The manner of his reaching them had been related elsewhere, and there were not a few people in England who remembered that story. For one week of blazing headlines the secret of the Saint's real identity had been published up and down the country for all to read; and although there were many to whom the memory had grown dim, and who could still describe him only by the nickname which he had made famous, there were many others who had not forgotten. The change had its disadvantages, for one of the organisations which would never forget had its headquarters at Scotland Yard; but there were occasional compensations in the strange commissions which sometimes came the Saint's way.



One of these arrived on a day in June, brought by a sombrely-dressed man who called at the flat on Piccadilly, where Simon Templar had taken up his temporary abode—the Saint was continually changing his address, and this palatial apartment, with tall windows overlooking the Green Park, was his latest fancy. The visitor was an elderly white-haired gentleman with the understanding eyes and air of tremendous discretion which one associates in imagination with the classical type of family solicitor, and it was a solicitor that he immediately confessed himself to be.

"To put it as briefly as possible, Mr. Templar," he said, "I am authorised to ask if you would undertake to deliver a sealed package to an address in Paris which will be given you. All your expenses will be paid, of course; and you will be offered a fee of one hundred pounds."

Simon lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"It sounds easy enough," he remarked. "Wouldn't it be cheaper to send it by post?"

"That package, Mr. Templar—the contents of which I am not allowed to disclose—is insured for five thousand

pounds," said the solicitor impressively. "But I fear that four times that sum would not compensate for the loss of an article which is the only thing of its kind in the world. The ordinary detective agencies have already been considered, but our client feels that they are scarcely competent to deal with such an important task. We have been warned that an attempt may be made to steal the package, and it is our client's wish that we should endeavour to secure the services of your own—ah—singular experience."

The Saint thought it over. He knew that the trade in illicit drugs does not go on to any appreciable extent from England to the Continent, but rather in the reverse direction; and apart from such a possibility as that the commission seemed straightforward enough.

"Your faith in my reformed character is almost touching," said the Saint at length; and the solicitor smiled faintly. "We are relying on the popular estimate of your sporting instincts."

"When do you want me to go?"

The solicitor placed the tips of his fingers together with a discreet modicum of satisfaction.



"I take it that you are prepared to accept our offer?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't. A pal of mine who came over the other day told me there was a darn good show at the Folies Bergère, and since you're only young once—"

"Doubtless you will be permitted to include the entertainment in your bill of expenses," said the solicitor dryly. "If the notice is not too short, we should be very pleased if you were free to visit the—ah—Folies Bergère to-morrow night."

"Suits me," murmured the Saint laconically.

The solicitor rose.

"You will travel by air, of course," he said. "I shall return later this evening to deliver the package into your keeping, after which you will be solely responsible. If I might give you a hint, Mr. Templar," he added, as the Saint shepherded him to the door, "you will take particular pains to conceal it while you are traveling. It has been suggested to us that the French police are not incorruptible."

He repeated his warning when he came back at six o'clock and left Simon with a brown-paper packet about four inches square and two inches deep, in which the out-

lines of a stout cardboard box could be felt. Simon weighed the package several times in his hand—it was neither particularly light nor particularly heavy, and he puzzled over its possible contents for some time. The address to which it was to be delivered was typed on a plain sheet of paper; Simon committed it to memory, and burnt it.

Curiosity was the Saint's weakness. It was that same insatiable curiosity which had made his fortune, for he was incapable of looking for long at anything that struck him as being the least bit peculiar without succumbing to the temptation to probe deeper into its peculiarities. It never entered his head to betray the confidence that had been placed in him, so far as the safety of the package was concerned; but the mystery of its contents was one which he considered had a definite bearing on whatever risks he had agreed to take. He fought off his curiosity until he got up the next morning, and then it got the better of him. He opened the packet after his early breakfast, carefully removing the seals intact with a hot palette-knife, and was very glad that he had done so.

When he drove down to Croydon aerodrome later the



package had been just as carefully refastened, and no one would have known that it had been opened. He carried it inside a book, from which he had cut the printed part of the pages to leave a square cavity encircled by the margins; and he was prepared for trouble.

He checked in his suit-case and waited around patiently during the dilatory system of preparations which for some extraordinary reason is introduced to negative the theoretical speed of air transport. He was fishing out his cigarette-case for the second time when a dark and strikingly pretty girl, who had been waiting with equal patience, came over and asked him for a light.

Simon produced his lighter, and the girl took a packet of cigarettes from her bag and offered him one.

"Do they always take as long as this?" she asked.

"Always when I'm traveling," said the Saint resignedly. "Another thing I should like to know is why they have to arrange their timetables so that you never have the chance to get a decent lunch. Is it for the benefit of the French restaurants at dinner-time?"

She laughed. "Are we fellow passengers?"

"I don't know. I'm for Paris."

"I'm for Ostend."

The Saint sighed.

"Couldn't you change your mind and come to Paris?"

He had taken one puff from the cigarette. Now he took a second, while she eyed him impudently. The smoke had an unfamiliar, slightly bitter taste to it. Simon drew on the cigarette again thoughtfully, but this time he held the smoke in his mouth and let it trickle out again presently, as if he had inhaled. The expression on his face never altered, although the last thing he had expected had been trouble of that sort.

"Do you think we could take a walk outside?" said the girl. "I'm simply stifling."

"I think it might be a good idea," said the Saint.

He walked out with her into the clear morning sunshine, and they strolled idly along the gravel drive. The rate of exchange had done a great deal to discourage foreign travel that year, and the airport was unusually deserted. A couple of men were climbing out of a car that had drawn up beside the building; but apart from them there was only one other car turning in at the gates



leading from the main road, and a couple of mechanics were fussing round a gigantic Handley-Page that was ticking over on the tarmac.

"Why did you give me a doped cigarette?" asked the Saint with perfect casualness; but as the girl turned and stared at him his eyes leapt to hers with the cold suddenness of bared steel.

"I—I don't understand. Do you mind telling me what you mean?"

Simon dropped the cigarette and trod on it deliberately. "Sister," he said, "if you're thinking of a Simon Templar who was born yesterday, let me tell you it was someone else of the same name. You know, I was playing that cigarette trick before you cut your teeth."

The girl's hand went to her mouth; then it went up in a kind of wave. For a moment the Saint was perplexed; and then he started to turn. She was looking at something over his shoulder, but his head had not revolved far enough to see what it was before the solid weight of a sandbag slugged viciously into the back of his neck. He had one instant of feeling his limbs sagging powerlessly under him, while the book he carried dropped from his hand and sprawled open to

the ground; and then everything went dark.

He came back to earth in a small barely-furnished office overlooking the landing-field, and in the face that was bending over him he recognised the round pink countenance of Chief Inspector Teal, of Scotland Yard.

"Were you the author of that clout?" he demanded, rubbing the base of his skull tenderly. "I didn't think you could be so rough."

"I didn't do it," said the detective shortly. "But we've got the man who did—if you want to charge him. I thought you'd have known Kate Allfield, Saint."

Simon looked at him.

"What—not 'the Mug'? I have heard of her, but this is the first time we've met. And she nearly made me smoke a sleepy cigarette!" He grimaced. "What was the idea?"

"That's what we're waiting for you to tell us," said Teal grimly. "We drove in just as they knocked you out. We know what they were after all right—the Deacon's gang beat them to the necklace, but that wouldn't make the Green Cross bunch give up. What I want to know is when you started working with the Deacon."

"This is right over my



head," said the Saint, just as bluntly. "Who is this Deacon, and who the hell are the Green Cross bunch?"

Teal faced him calmly.

"The Green Cross bunch are the ones that slugged you. The Deacon is the head of the gang that got away with the Palfrey jewels yesterday. He came to see you twice yesterday afternoon—we got the wire that he was planning a big job and we were keeping him under observation, but the jewels weren't missed till this morning. Now I'll hear what you've got to say; but before you begin I'd better warn you—"

"Wait a minute." Simon took out his cigarette-case and helped himself to a smoke. "With an unfortunate reputation like mine, I expect it'll take me some time to drive it into your head that I don't know a thing about the Deacon. He came to me yesterday and said he was a solicitor—he wanted me to look after a valuable sealed packet that he was sending over to Paris, and I took on the job. That's all. He wouldn't even tell me what was in it."

"Oh, yes?" The detective was dangerously polite. "Then I suppose it'd give you the surprise of your life if

I told you that that package you were carrying contained a diamond necklace valued at about eight thousand pounds?"

"It would," said the Saint. Teal turned.

There was a plain-clothes man standing guard by the door, and on the table in the middle of the room was a litter of brown paper and tissue in the midst of which gleamed a small heap of coruscating stones and shining metal. Teal put a hand to the heap of jewels and lifted it up into a streamer of iridescent fire.

"This is it," he said.

"May I have a look at it?" said the Saint.

He took the necklace from Teal's hand and studied it closely under the light. Then he handed it back with a brief grin.

"If you could get eighty pounds for it you'd be lucky," he said. "It's a very good imitation, but I'm afraid the stones are only jargoons."

The detective's eyes went wide. Then he snatched the necklace away and examined it himself.

He turned around again slowly.

"I'll begin to believe you were telling the truth for once, Templar," he said, and



his manner had changed so much that the effect would have been comical without the back-handed apology. "What do you make of it?"

"I think we've both been had," said the Saint. "After what you've told me, I should think the Deacon knew you were watching him, and knew he'd have to get the jewels out of the country in a hurry. He could probably fence most of them quickly, but no one would touch that necklace—it's too well known. He had the rather artistic idea of trying to get me to do the job—"

"Then why should he give you a fake?"

Simon shrugged.

"Maybe that Deacon is smoother than any of us thought. My God, Teal—think of it! Suppose even all this was just a blind—for you to know he'd been to see me—for you to get after me as soon as the jewels were missed—hear I'd left for Paris—chase me to Croydon—and all the time the real necklace is slipping out by another route—"

"God damn!" said Chief Inspector Teal, and launched himself at the telephone with surprising speed for such a portly and lethargic man.

The plain-clothes man at the door stood aside almost

respectfully for the Saint to pass.

Simon fitted his hat on rakishly and sauntered out with his old elegance. Out in the waiting-room an attendant was shouting, "All Ostend and Brussels passengers, please!"—and outside on the tarmac a roaring aeroplane was warming up its engines. Simon Templar suddenly changed his mind about his destination.

"I will give you thirty thousand guilders for the necklace," said Van Roeper, the little man in Amsterdam to whom the Saint went with his booty.

"I'll take fifty thousand," said the Saint; he got it.

He fulfilled another of the qualifications of a successful buccaneer, for he never forgot a face. He had had a vague idea from the first that he had seen the Deacon somewhere before, but it had not been until that morning, when he woke up, that he had been able to place the amiable solicitor who had been so anxious to enlist his dubious services; he felt that fortune was very kind to him.

Old Charlie Milton, who had been dragged away from his breakfast to sell him the facsimile for eighty pounds, felt much the same.



*the  
five  
thousand  
pound  
kiss*

**by Leslie Charteris**

It has been said that Simon Templar was a philanderer; but the criticism was not entirely just. A pretty face, or the turn of a slim ankle, appealed to him no more—and not a bit less—than they do to the next man. Perhaps he was more honest about it.

It is true that sometimes, in a particularly buccaneering mood, as he swung down a broad highway leading to infinite adventure, he would sing one of his own inimitable songs against the pompous dreariness of civilisation as he saw it, with a chorus:

*But if red blood runs thin  
with years,*

*By God! if I must die,  
I'll kiss red lips and drink  
red wine*

*And let the rest go by,  
My son,*

*And let the rest go by!*

But there was a gesture in that, to be taken with or without salt as the audience pleased; and a fat lot the Saint cared. He was moderate in nothing that he said

---

*A sequel to THE EXPORT TRADE.*

Copyright 1933 by Leslie Charteris



or did. That insurgent vitality which made him an outlaw first and last and in everything rebelled perhaps too fiercely against all moderation; and if at the same time it made him, to those who knew him best, the one glamorous and romantic figure of his day, that was the judgment which he himself would have asked for.

These chronicles are concerned mainly with episodes in which he provided himself with the bare necessities of life by cunning and strategy rather than daring; but even in those times there were occasions when his career hung on the thread of a lightning decision. That happened in the affair of Mrs. Dempster-Craven's pink diamond; and if the Saint philandered then, he would have told you that he had no regrets.

"The idea that such a woman should have a jool that keeps me awake at nights," he complained. "I've seen her twice, and she is a Hag."

This was at dinner one night. Peter Quentin was there; and so was Patricia Holm, who, when all was said and done, was the lady who held the Saint's reckless heart and knew best how to understand all his misdeeds. The subject of the "Star of Mandalay" had cropped up

casually in the course of conversation; and it was worth mentioning that neither of Simon Templar's guests bothered to raise any philosophical argument against his somewhat heterodox doctrine against the rights of Hags. But it was left for Peter Quentin to put his foot in it.

Peter read behind the wistfulness of the Saint's words, and said: "Don't be an idiot, Simon. You don't need the money, and you couldn't pinch the Star of Mandalay. The woman's got a private detective following her around wherever she goes—"

"Couldn't I pinch it, Peter?" said the Saint, very softly.

Patricia saw the light in his eyes, and clutched Peter's wrist.

"You ass!" she gasped. "Now you've done it. He'd be fool enough to try—"

"Why 'try'?" asked the Saint, looking round mildly. "That sounds very much like an aspersion on my genius, which I shall naturally have to—"

"I didn't mean it like that," protested the girl frantically. "I mean that after all, when we don't need the money— You said you were thinking of running over to Paris for a week—"

"We can go via Amster-



dam, and sell the Star of Mandalay *en route*," said the Saint calmly. "You lie in your teeth, my sweetheart. You meant that the Star of Mandalay was too much of a problem for me and I'd only get in a mess if I tried for it. Well, as a matter of fact, I've been thinking of having a dart at it for some time."

Peter Quentin drank deeply of the Chambertin to steady his nerves.

"You haven't been thinking anything of the sort," he said. "I'll withdraw everything I said. You were just taking on a dare."

Simon ordered himself a second slice of melon, and leaned back with his most seraphic and exasperating smile.

"Have I," he inquired blandly, "ever told you my celebrated story about a bob-tailed ptarmigan named Alphonse, who lived in sin with a couple of duck-billed platypi in the tundras of Siberia? Alphonse, who suffered from asthma and was a believer in Christian Science..."

He completed his narrative at great length, refusing to be interrupted; and they knew that the die was cast. When once Simon Templar had made up his mind it was impossible to argue with him.

If he didn't proceed blandly to talk you down with one of his most fatuous and irrelevant anecdotes, he would listen politely to everything you had to say, agree with you thoroughly, and carry on exactly as he had announced his intentions from the beginning; which wasn't helpful. And he had made up his mind, on one of his mad impulses, that the Star of Mandalay was due for a change of ownership. It was not a very large stone, but it was reputed to be flawless; and it was valued at ten thousand pounds. Simon reckoned that it would be worth five thousand pounds to him in Van Roep-er's little shop in Amsterdam, and five thousand pounds was a sum of money that he could find a home for at any time.

But he said nothing about that to Mrs. Dempster-Craven when he saw her for the third time and spoke to her for the first. He was extremely polite and apologetic. He had good reason to be, for the rakish Hironde which he was driving had collided with Mrs. Dempster-Craven's Rolls Royce in Hyde Park, and the glossy symmetry of the Rolls Royce's real elevation had been considerably impaired.



"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "Your chauffeur pulled up rather suddenly, and my hand-brake cable broke when I tried to stop."

His hand-brake cable had certainly divided itself in the middle, and the frayed ends had been produced for the chauffeur's inspection; but no one was to know that Simon had filed it through before he started out.

"That is not my fault," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven coldly. She was going to pay a call on the wife of a minor baronet, and she was pardonably annoyed at the damage to her impressive car. "Bagshawe, will you please find me a taxi."

"The car'll take you there all right, ma'am," said the chauffeur incautiously.

Mrs. Dempster-Craven froze him through her lorgnettes.

"How," she required to know, "can I possibly call on Lady Wiltham in a car that looks as if I had picked it up at a second-hand sale? Kindly call me a taxi immediately, and don't argue."

"Yes, ma'am," said the abashed chauffeur, and departed on his errand.

"I really don't know how to apologise," said the Saint humbly.

"Then don't try," said Mrs.

Dempster-Craven discouragingly.

The inevitable small crowd had collected, and a policeman was advancing ponderously towards it from the distance. Mrs. Dempster-Craven liked to be stared at as she crossed the pavement to Drury Lane Theatre on a first night, but not when she was sitting in a battered car in Hyde Park. But the Saint was not so self-conscious.

"I'm afraid I can't offer you a lift at the moment; but if my other car would be of any use to you for the reception tonight—"

"What reception?" asked Mrs. Dempster-Craven haughtily, having overcome the temptation to retort that she had three other Rolls Royces no less magnificent than the one she was sitting in.

"Prince Marco d'Ombria's," answered the Saint easily. "I heard you say that you were going to call on Lady Wiltham, and I had an idea that I'd heard Marco mention her name. I thought perhaps—"

"I am not going to the reception," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven; but it was noticeable that her tone was not quite so freezing. "I have a previous engagement to dine with Lord and Lady Brendon."



Simon chalked up the point without batting an eyelid. He had not engineered the encounter without making inquiries about his victim, and it had not taken him long to learn that Mrs. Dempster-Craven's one ambition was to win for herself and her late husband's millions an acknowledged position among the Very Best People. That carelessly-dropped reference to a Prince, even an Italian Prince, by his first name, had gone over like a truck-load of honey. And it was a notable fact that if Mrs. Dempster-Craven had pursued her own inquiries into the reference, she would have found that the name of Simon Templar was not only recognised but hailed effusively; for there had once been a spot of bother involving a full million pounds belonging to the Bank of Italy which had made the Saint for ever *persona grata* at the Legation.

The chauffeur returned with a taxi, and Mrs. Dempster-Craven's fifteen stone of flesh were assisted ceremoniously out of the Rolls. Having had a brief interval to consider pros and cons, she deigned to thank the Saint for his share in the operation with a smile that disclosed a superb set of expensive teeth.

"I hope your car isn't seriously damaged," she remarked graciously; and the Saint smiled in his most elegant manner.

"It doesn't matter a bit. I was just buzzing down to Hurlingham for a spot of tennis, but I can easily take a taxi." He took out his wallet and handed her a card. "As soon as you know what the damage'll cost to put right, I do hope you'll send me in the bill."

"I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven. "The whole thing was undoubtedly Bagshawe's fault."

With which startling *volte-face*, and another display of her expensive denture, she ascended regally into the cab; and Simon Templar went triumphantly back to Patricia.

"It went off perfectly, Pat! You could see the whole line sizzling down her throat till she choked on the rod. The damage to the Hirondelet will cost about fifteen quid to put right, but we'll charge that up to expenses. And the rest of it's only a matter of time."

The time was even shorter than he had expected; for Mrs. Dempster Craven was not prepared to wait any longer than was necessary to see her social ambitions ful-



filled, and the highest peak she had attained at that date was a week-end at the house of a younger son of a second viscount.

Three days later Simon's postbag included a scented mauve envelope, and he knew before he opened it that it was the one he had been waiting for.

*118, Berkeley Square,  
Mayfair, W.I.*

*My dear Mr. Templar,*

*I'm sure you must have thought me rather abrupt after our accident in Hyde Park on Tuesday, but these little upsets seem so much worse at the time than they really are. Do try and forgive my rudeness.*

*I am having a little party here on Tuesday next. Lord and Lady Palfrey are coming, and the Hon. Celia Mallard, and lots of other people whom I expect you'll know. I'd take it as a great favour if you could manage to look in, any time after 9:30, just to let me know you weren't offended.*

*I do hope you got to Hurlingham all right.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Gertrude Dempster-Craven.*

"Who said my technique had ever failed me?" Simon demanded of Peter Quentin at lunch-time that day.

"I didn't," said Peter, "as

I've told you all along. Thank God you won't be going to prison on Thursday, anyway—if it's only a little party she's invited you to I don't suppose you'll even see the Star of Mandalay."

Simon grinned.

"Little party be blowed," he said. "Gertrude has never thrown a little party in her life. When she talks about a 'little' party she means there'll only be two orchestras and not more than a hundred couples. And if she doesn't put on the Star of Mandalay for Lady Palfrey's benefit I am a bob-tailed ptarmigan and my name is Alphonse."

Nevertheless, when he suggested that Peter Quentin should come with him there was not much argument.

"How can you get me in?" Peter demurred. "I wasn't invited, and I don't know any princes."

"You've got an uncle who's a lord or something, haven't you?"

"I've got an uncle who's the Bishop of Johannesburg; but what does Mrs. Dempster-Craven care about South African bishops?"

"Call him Lord Johannesburg," said the Saint. "She won't look him up in Debrett while you're there. I'll say we were dining together and I



couldn't shake you off."

At that point it all looked almost tediously straightforward, a commonplace exploit with nothing but the size of the prize to make it memorable. And when Simon arrived in Berkeley Square on the date of his invitation it seemed easier still; for Mrs. Dempster-Craven, as he had expected, was proudly sporting the Star of Mandalay on her swelling bosom, set in the centre of a pattern of square-cut sapphires in a platinum pendant that looked more like an illuminated sky-sign than anything else. True, there was a large-footed man in badly fitting dress clothes who trailed her around like a devoted dachshund; but private detectives of any grade the Saint felt competent to deal with. Professionals likewise, given a fair warning—although he was anticipating no professional surveillance that night. But he had not been in the house twenty minutes before he found himself confronting a dark slender girl with merry brown eyes whose face appeared before him like the Nemesis of one of his most innocent flirtations—even then he did not guess what Fate had in store for him.

At his side he heard the voice of Mrs. Dempster-Crav-

en cooing like a contralto dove:

"This is Miss Rosamund Armitage—a cousin of the Duke of Trayall." And then, as she saw their eyes fixed on each other,..."But have you met before?"

"Yes—we have met," said the Saint, recovering himself easily. "Wasn't it that day when you were just off to Ostend?"

"I think so," said the girl gravely.

A plaintive baronet in search of an introduction accosted Mrs. Dempster-Craven from the other side, and Simon took the girl in his arms as the second orchestra muted its saxophones for a waltz.

"This is a very happy reunion, Kate," he murmured. "I must congratulate you."

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"When we last met—in that famous little argument about the Kellman necklace—you weren't so closely related to the Duke of Trayall."

They made a circuit of the floor—she danced perfectly, as he would have expected—and then she said, bluntly: "What are you doing here, Saint?"

"Treading the light fantastic—drinking free cham-



pagne—and watching little monkeys scrambling up the social ladder,” he answered airily. “And you?”

“I’m here for exactly the same reason as you are—my old age pension.”

“I can’t imagine you getting old, Kate.”

“Let’s sit out somewhere,” she said suddenly.

They left the ballroom and went in search of a secluded corner of the conservatory, where there were arm-chairs and sheltering palm trees providing discreet alcoves for romantic couples. Simon noticed that the girl was quite sure of her way around, and said so.

“Of course I’ve been here before,” she said. “I expect you have, too.”

“On the contrary—this is my first visit. I never take two bites at a cherry.”

“Not even a ten thousand pound one?”

“Not even that.”

She produced a packet of cigarettes from her bag and offered him one. Simon smiled, and shook his head.

“There are funny things about your cigarettes that don’t make me laugh out loud, Kate,” he said cheerfully. “Have one of mine instead.”

“Look here,” she said. “Let’s put our cards on the

table. You’re after that pendant, and so am I. Everything on our side is planned out, and you’ve just told me this is your first visit. You can’t possibly get in front of us this time. You took the Kellman necklace away under our noses, but you couldn’t do it again. Why not retire gracefully?”

He gazed at her thoughtfully for a few seconds; and she touched his hand.

“Won’t you do that—and save trouble?”

“You know, Kate,” said the Saint, “You’re a lovely child. Would you mind very much if I kissed you?”

“I could make it worth a hundred pounds to you—for nothing—if you gave us a clear field.”

Simon wrinkled his nose.

“Are there forty-nine of you?” he drawled. “It seems a very small share-out to me.”

“I might be able to make it two hundred. They wouldn’t agree to any more.”

The Saint blew smoke-rings towards the ceiling.

“If you could make it two thousand I don’t think you’d be able to buy me off, darling. Being bought off is so dull. So what’s the alternative? Am I slugged with another sandbag and locked up in the pantry?”



Suddenly he found that she was gripping his arm, looking straight into his face.

"I'm not thinking about your health, Saint," she said quietly. "I want that pendant. I want it more than I'd expect you to believe. I've never asked any other man a favour in my life. I know that in our racket men don't do women favours—without getting paid for it. But you're supposed to be different, aren't you?"

"This is a new act, Kate," murmured the Saint interestedly. "Do go on—I want to hear what the climax is."

"Do you think this is an act?"

"I don't want to be actually rude, darling, especially after all the dramatic fervour you put into it, but——"

"You've got every right to think so," she said; and he saw that the merriment was gone from her great brown eyes. "I should think the same way if I were in your place. I'll try to keep the dramatic fervour out of it. Can I tell you—that that pendant means the way out of the racket for me? I'm going straight after this." She was twisting her handkerchief, turning away from him now. "I'm going to get married—on the level. Funny, isn't it?"

He glanced at her doubtfully, with that mocking curve still lingering on his lips. For some reason he refrained from asking whether her other husbands had been informed of this plan: he knew nothing about her private life. But even with the best intentions a modern Robin Hood must get that way; and he did not know why he was silent.

And then, quite clearly, he heard the tread of leisurely feet on the other side of the clump of imported vegetation behind which they were concealed. Instinctively they glanced at one another, listening, and heard a man's fat chuckle beyond the palms.

"I guess this new plan makes it a lot easier than the way we were going to work it."

Simon saw the girl half rising from the settee. In a flash he had flung one arm round her, pinning her down, and clapped his other hand over her mouth.

"Maybe it'll save a little trouble, anyway," spoke the second man. There came the scratch of a match, and then: "What are you doing about the girl?"

"I don't know.... She's a pretty little piece, but she's getting too serious. I'll have to ditch her in Paris."



"She'll be sore."

"Well, she ought to know how to take the breaks. I had to keep her going to get us in here, but it ain't my fault if she wants to make it a permanency."

"What about her share?"

"Aw, I might send her a coupla hundred, just for conscience money. She ain't a bad kid. Too sentimental, that's all."

A short pause, and then the second man again:

"Well, that's your business. It's just a quarter after eleven. Guess I better see Watkins and make sure he's ready to fix those lights."

The leisured feet receded again; and Simon released the girl slowly. He saw that she was as white as a sheet, and there were strange tears in her eyes. He lighted a cigarette methodically. It was a tough life for women—always had been. They had to know how to take the breaks.

"Did you hear?" she asked, and he looked at her again.

"I couldn't very well help it. I'm sorry, kid.... That was your prospective husband, I suppose?"

She nodded.

"Anyway, you'll know it wasn't an act."

There was nothing he could say. She stood up, and he

walked beside her back to the ball-room. She left him there, with a smile that never trembled; and the Saint turned and found Peter Quentin beside him.

"Must you keep all the fun to yourself, old boy?" pleaded Peter forlornly. "I've been treading on the toes of the fattest dowager in the world. Who's your girl friend? She looks a stunner."

"She stunned me once," said the Saint reminiscently. "Or some pals of hers did. She's passing here as Rosamund Armitage; but the police know her best as Kate Allfield, and her nickname is The Mug."

Peter's eyes were following the girl yearningly across the room.

"There ought to be some hideous punishment for bestowing names like that," he declared; and the Saint grinned absentmindedly.

"I know. In a story-book she'd be Isabelle de la Fontaine; but her parents weren't thinking about her career when they christened her. That's real life in our low profession—and so is the nickname."

"Does that mean there's competition in the field?"

"It means just that." Simon's gaze was sweeping systematically over the other



guests; and at that moment he saw the men he was looking for. "You see that dark bird who looks as if he might be a gigolo? Face like a pretty boy, till you see it's just a mask cut in granite.... That's Philip Carney. And the big fellow beside him—just offering the Dempster-Craven a cigarette. That's George Runce. They're two of the slickest jewel thieves in the business. Mostly they work the Riviera—I don't think they've ever been in England before. Kate was talking in the plural all the time, and I wondered who she meant."

Peter's mouth shaped a silent whistle.

"What's going to happen?"

"I don't know definitely; but I should like to prophesy that at any moment the lights will go out——"

And as he spoke, with a promptness that seemed almost uncanny, the three enormous cut-glass chandeliers which illuminated the ball-room simultaneously flicked out as if a magic wand had conjured them out of existence; and the room was plunged into inky blackness.

The buzz of conversation rose louder, mingled with sporadic laughter. After trying valiantly to carry on for

a couple of bars, the orchestra faded out irregularly, and the dancers shuffled to a standstill. Over in one corner, a facetious party started singing, in unison: "Where — was — Moses — when — the — lights — went — out?" ... And then, rising above every other sound, came Mrs. Dempster-Craven's hysterical shriek:

*"Help!"*

There was a momentary silence, broken by a few uncertain titters. And Mrs. Dempster - Craven's voice rang wildly through the room again.

"My pendant! My pendant! Put on the lights!"

Then came the sharp vicious smash of a fist against flesh and bone, a coughing grunt, and the thud of a fall. Peter Quentin felt around him, but the Saint had gone. He started across the room, plunging blindly among the crowd that was heaving helplessly in the darkness. Then one or two matches flared up, and the light grew as other matches and lighters were struck to augment the illumination. And just as suddenly as they had gone out, the great chandeliers lighted up again.

Peter Quentin looked at the scene from the front rank of the circle of guests.



George Runce was lying on the floor, with blood trickling from a cut in his chin; and a couple of yards from him sat Simon Templar, holding his jaw tenderly. Between them lay Mrs. Dempster-Craven's priceless pendant, with the chain broken; and while Peter looked she snatched it up with a sob, and he saw that the Star of Mandalay was missing from its centre.

"My diamond!" she wailed. "It's gone!"

Her private detective came elbowing through from the back of the crowd, pushing Peter aside, and grabbed the Saint's shoulder.

"Come on, you!" he barked. "What happened?"

"There's your man," said the Saint, pointing to the unconscious figure beside him. "As soon as the lights went out, he grabbed the pendant——"

"That's a lie!"

Philip Carney had fallen on his knees beside Runce, and was loosening the man's collar. He turned round and yapped the denial indignant enough; but Peter saw that his face had gone pale.

"I was standing beside Mr. Runce." He pointed to the Saint. "That man snatched the pendant, and Mr. Runce

tried to stop him getting away."

"Why weren't you here, Watkins?" wailed Mrs. Dempster - Craven, shaking the detective wildly by the arm. "Why weren't you watching? I shall never see my diamond again——"

"I'm sorry, madam," said the detective. "I just left the room for one minute to find a glass of water. But I think we've got the man all right." He bent down and hauled the Saint to his feet. "We'd better search this fellow, and one of the footmen can go for the police while we're doing it."

Peter saw that the Saint's face had gone hard as polished teak. In Simon's right hand was the Star of Mandalay, pressed against his jaw as he was holding it. As soon as the lights had gone out he had guessed what was going to happen: he had crossed the floor like a cat, grasped it neatly as Runce tore it out of its setting, and sent the big man flying with one well-directed left. All that he had been prepared for; but there were wheels turning that he had never reckoned with.

He looked the detective in the eyes.

"The less you talk about the police the better," he said



quietly. "I was in the conservatory a few minutes ago, and I happened to hear Mr. Carney say: 'I'd better see Watkins and make sure he's ready to fix those lights.' I didn't think anything of it at the time, but this looks like an explanation."

There was an instant's deadly silence; and then Philip Carney laughed.

"That's one of the cleverest tricks I've ever heard of," he remarked. "But it's a bit libellous, isn't it?"

"Not very," said a girl's clear voice.

Again the murmur of talk was stifled as if a blanket had been dropped in it; and in the hush Kate Allfield came into the front of the crowd. George Runce was rising on his elbows, and his jaw dropped as he heard her voice. She gave him one contemptuous glance, and faced Mrs. Dempster-Craven with her head erect.

"It's perfectly true," she said. "I was with Mr. Templar in the conservatory, and I heard it as well."

Carney's face had gone grey.

"The girl's raving," he said; but his voice was a little shaky. "I haven't been in the conservatory this evening."

"Neither have I," said

Runce, wiping the frozen incredulity off his features with an effort. "I'll tell you what it is——"

But he did not tell them what it was, for at that point a fresh authoritative voice interrupted the debate with a curt "Make way please," and the crowd opened to let through the burly figure of a detective-sergeant in plain clothes. Simon looked round, and saw that he had posted a constable at the door as he came in. The sergeant scanned the faces of the group, and addressed Mrs. Dempster-Craven.

"What's the trouble, madam?"

"My pendant——"

She was helped out by a chorus of bystanders whose information, taken in the mass, was somewhat confusing. The sergeant sorted it out phlegmatically; and at the end he shrugged.

"Since these gentlemen are all accusing each other, I take it you don't wish to make any particular charges?"

"I cannot accuse my guests of being thieves," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven imperially. "I only want my diamond."

The sergeant nodded. He had spent twelve years in C Division, and had learned



that Berkeley Square is a region where even policemen have to be tactful.

"In that case," he said, "I think it would help us if the gentlemen agreed to be searched."

The Saint straightened up.

It had been a good evening; and he had no regrets. The game was worth playing for its own sake, to him: the prizes came welcomely, but they weren't everything. And no one knew better than he that you couldn't win all the time. There were chances that couldn't be reckoned with in advance; and the duplicity of Mr. Watkins was one of those. But for that, he would have played his hand faultlessly, out-bluffed and out-manoevred the Carney-Runce combination in a fair field, and made as clean a job of it as anything else he had done. But that single unexpected factor had turned the scale just enough to bring the bluff to a show-down, as unexpected factors always would. And yet Peter Quentin saw that the Saint was smiling.

"I think that's a good idea," said the Saint.

Between Philip Carney and George Runce flashed one blank glance; but their mouths remained closed.

"Perhaps there's another

room we could go to," said the sergeant, almost genially; and Mrs. Dempster-Craven inclined her head like a queen dismissing a distasteful odour.

"Watkins will show you to the library."

Simon turned on his heel and led the way towards the door, with Mr. Watkins still gripping his arm; but as his path brought him level with Kate Allfield he stopped and smiled down at her.

"I think you're a swell kid," he said.

His voice sounded a trifle strange. And then, before two hundred shocked and startled eyes, including those of Lord and Lady Bredon, the Honourable Celia Mallard, three baronets, and the aspiring Mrs. Dempster-Craven herself, he laid his hands gently on her shoulders and kissed her outrageously on the mouth; and in the silence of appalled aristocracy which followed that performance made his state-ly exit.

"How the devil did you get away with it?" asked Peter Quentin weakly, as they drove away in a taxi an hour later. "I was fairly sweating blood all the time you were being stripped."

The Saint's face showed



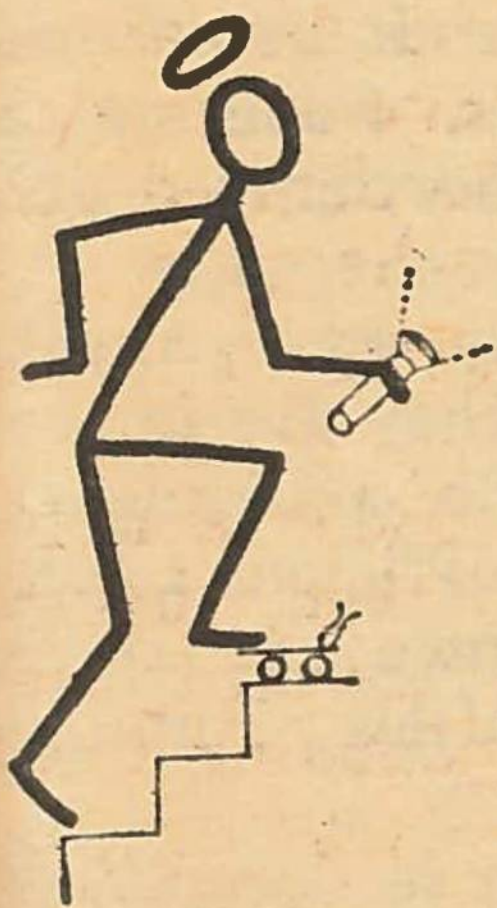
up in the dull glow as he drew at his cigarette.

"It was in my mouth," he said.

"But they made you open your mouth——"

"It was there when I kissed Kate, anyway," said the Saint, and sang to himself all the rest of the way home.

## DIAL 999



Forty year old August Wurl, from Stockdorf, near Munich, who has already equipped many art galleries and factories in Germany and throughout Europe with security alarms, has now perfected a utility radar set which can be installed anywhere by those citizens of the Federal Republic who want to discourage visitors who wish to "inspect" his safe or his art treasures... The radar-equipped silver-green box is small enough to be almost inconspicuous, but powerful enough to cover the normal twelve-fifteen

room house. Larger models have a considerably wider range, and are already in use in many supermarkets.

Wurl has been working for the past fifteen years on complicated apparatus by now used everywhere in Europe, not only by the Uffizi Galleries in Florence and art collections in Munich and Augsburg, but also by banks, jewelers, furriers, department stores and supermarkets.

Wurl has now been permitted by the German postal authorities to use the radar apparatus. "Foreign bodies" (ie., uninvited visitors) are reflected by the radar beams, and if the burglar moves about in the reception area, the alarm is triggered, sirens wail or lights flash. The alarm can also be fed into a miniature computer connected with a telephone. It will dial 999 and notify the police that a burglary is taking place at such-and-such an address, and will they be good enough to come there immediately.

"Professionals" who remember the good old days are said to be most unhappy about all this.....



*send  
a  
man  
from  
intrex*

**by Michael Avallone**

When two agents meet, the sparks don't necessarily fly upward. They can shoot down, around and out. Particularly when both agents are trained killers and each share the mutual love and respect of an organization known as the International Trade Experts. Code name, alphabetic shorthand, INTREX.

Where these two agents met and why they are important is of little consequence. It should be sufficient to say that their names are David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer.

David Seven is deceptively lean, quiet-voiced and quiet-faced. The world knows him as one of the finest young legal minds available for outlandish fees.

Miles Running Bear Farmer is that rarity among statistics: a full-blooded Cherokee Indian who went to college, graduated with honors and leaped to the forefront as an outstanding exponent

---

*Illusions die hard. We like to insist that "it can't happen here"—and, of course, most of the time it doesn't. But just as much as death and violence, including mob violence, have become aspects of our times, so have these skirmishes in the shadows—to which we ourselves may at times be unwitting witnesses—which often determine what happens next in the Cold War. And, if you doubt this, remember Gordon Lonsdale—or Colonel Abel.*

---



of the new approach in his particular sphere of his field—public buildings, municipal centers, auditoriums.

These then are our heroes.

Under the separate covers of Law and Architecture, they work for INTREX. As field agents, scientific assassins and underground tools for the organization which masks its workings and endeavors as a philanthropic, benevolent society, founded by anonymous millionaires, who would gladly pick up the tab for all the deserving poor of the world.

Were you to look INTREX up as a matter of curiosity or business interest, you would find that their Dunn & Bradstreet rating is Triple A; that their offices are located in an immense ware-

house complex on the lower East Side of Manhattan, with a rear development that meets the waterfront of the East River. Many of the members of INTREX are prominently listed in all the Who's Who extant on the professions and sciences. In truth, all of this corporation's members are outstanding professional men in the fields of electronics, medicine, engineering, chemistry, archeology, geology, palaeontology, atomic research, law, logistics, biology, botany, etc. There is no field of human endeavor and knowledge in which the International Trade Experts do not have a leading representative.

David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer were meeting at the corner of For-

---

### Dossier on INTREX

*International Trade Experts* is an organization formed by a group of wealthy philanthropists (anonymous) who make yearly grants to sustain their pet project. The purpose of the organization is simple; it copes with any problem or difficulty that may crop up in world affairs. All allied and disparate hazards of civilization can be dealt with by this body of extremely professional people who number scientists and skilled technicians among their colleagues. The unwritten motto of *International Trade Experts* is clearly stated in the credo: *Men Must Live In Peace*.

Yet...

*International Trade Experts* is in reality INTREX.

That underground army of agents that has become the most highly feared arm of espionage in the world.

Espionage in the name of *Peace*.



ty Second Street and Fifth Avenue, because INTREX always sends a man, sometimes two, when a problem or a difficulty crops up that may threaten the security of the world.

On the morning of July 13th, the old world seemed to be in hot water again.

Seven and Farmer arranged their rendezvous under the guise of a chance meeting.

"Hey, Dave!"

"Miles—"

"You old sonofagun, what are you doing here?"

"I'm out buying. Cathy needs a new handbag—"

"Got time for a cup of coffee?"

"Sure thing, Miles. Wait'll I tell Cathy I ran into you like this—"

Forty Second and Fifth is a Times Square in microcosm. All sorts of people rushing back and forth, heavy traffic; the crowds are eternally on the go. The only aspect of the Square that is missing are the garish movie houses, the book stores and the loitering drifters. Thus, two old friends can meet and the world will hardly pause to take a second look.

Cathy Darrow was David Seven's official secretary down at INTREX. But just as the world was fooled, so

was she. She never would have believed that her dreamboat boss, with his quiet ways and kindly smile, was a cold-blooded executioner type spy just like the ones she saw in the movies. The same sort of bad guessing would apply to Miles Running Bear Farmer.

The Mayflower Coffee Shop was half-filled. The time was not yet noon and the crowds hurrying in for lunch were still an hour away.

They found a square, cozy brown table just off from the nook of a bar. Just above them, the spaced floorboard of a staircase rose to the next level.

David Seven ordered coffee for them both. The waitress, not so prim or trim, smiled blankly and moved on her errand. Miles Running Bear Farmer took out a pack of cigarettes and placed it on the table near his right hand.

"Thought you gave up smoking," Seven said.

"Swore off there for awhile. I don't know. I need one now and then. I have cut down. Twelve a day."

"That's something," Seven agreed, his cold blue eyes quiet as always. In reality, the cigarette pack was a tape recorder device which would magnetize all that they said



or might overhear. Its range was contained within the perimeter of their seats.

"Shall we talk about The Saint?" Farmer said suddenly, his tone low and unbattering.

"Let's."

Farmer nodded, eyes peeled on the bar a few feet away, where a solitary citizen, not too young, was brooding into a glass of amber beer. The bartender, beefy in the typical cliché way, was running some tap water, rinsing glasses.

"I followed Baroda up from the Chanin Building. He turned at the corner of Forty Second and Fifth. I closed in on him, ready to make the pinch. We were right outside 489—I was sure he had the microfilm on him. But when I grabbed him and took him to Headquarters, he was clean and bare as a new kid whistle."

"Go on."

"Then I remembered the boxes. All kinds of boxes and cartons on the sidewalk fronting 489. They were stacked to one side before the glass doors. When I ducked back, figuring Baroda had somehow planted the microfilm in one of those boxes when he saw me coming. I was too late. The boxes and cartons had disappeared."

"Weren't the boxes sealed and tied up or something?"

"Sure—but you know how it is when people are moving things. Some boxes are overloaded — they bulge — and they have spots where the flaps poke up. Baroda could easily have tucked the microfilm into one of those boxes. It's the only place he could have stashed it."

Seven stirred his coffee. "How can you be sure he didn't ditch the film before he got to 489? He could have dumped it anywhere along the route."

"Not a chance. I saw it pass over to him by his accomplice on the outside of the Chanin. I was five feet behind him all the way up Forty Two Street. Then he turned that corner on Fifth and I jumped him. If he had dropped it in a litter basket or anywhere along the way I would have seen him."

"He saw you. He knew you were tailing him."

"Sure," Farmer smiled. "I was a redskin tracking a pioneer. He saw me all right. But forget that. Sam wants that film back. I'm sure I know where it is."

"Dear lovely Sam." Sam was Miss Samantha Follett, the lovely, intelligent woman who ostensibly was the business manager of the *Interna-*



*tional Trade Experts.* She didn't know that her two top agents referred to her as Sam. They were somehow certain she wouldn't have cared for their flippancy. INTREX was Samantha Follett's reason for living, having lost a husband and daughter to the Chinese Reds in the purge of '59.

"So here's what I got," Farmer stared at Seven over the rim of his cup. The dark brown, finely boned face, was something you'd find on a coin. "I checked back. Those boxes belonged to The Saint Magazine—if you read mysteries, you ought to know. Seems the editor was moving from 489 Fifth to 503 Fifth."

"Hey—that's right next door—"

"Entrance on Forty Second," Farmer concurred. "It's sort of a one man operation. Fellow named Hans Stefan Santesson is editor. He has no secretary. He does everything but sweep out the place. He picks the stories for the issue, proofs them, edits them. Haven't met him yet but the elevator starter at 489 was a fountain of information."

"Definitely not the spy type, I take it?"

"Not at all! Besides, I checked him out. He's clean. He's a top editor, has a rep

that goes back more than twenty years. He's more inclined to fight for civil rights than to take them away."

"Does he own the magazine or is there a publisher?"

Farmer scowled. "An editor own the magazine he works on? Where have you been, dear old David? The American edition is published under an arrangement with Saint Magazines, Inc., and runs an article or a Saint story by Charteris each month. The mag itself is clear. It's just a case of our boy Baroda taking the first out that came his way. He had the film, he had to get rid of it. He saw the boxes and—you can take it from there."

"I take it Baroda wouldn't talk down at Headquarters?"

"A clam," Farmer agreed. "You know Sam won't let us Third Degree these characters. We tried some happy shots on him. The sodium penthatol but—all he did was get silly and make up a lot of nursery rhymes. I guess his bosses were ready for that one."

"Who are his bosses? The Little Foxes again?" Seven was alluding to one of the international spy scene's worst offenders; the Foxes sold anything and everything to the highest bidder, with-



out a social scheme of their own.

"No, but we can guess. Since the microfilm is a picture of the missile sites in Cuba again, it doesn't take much headwork to pick the interested parties."

"Red China, of course."

"Of course. More coffee?"

"No. Let's finish up and call on Hans Stefan Santeson at 503. Maybe we can give him a hand unpacking all those boxes. Poor fellah. If he works as hard as you say he does, he must need ten arms."

Miles Running Bear Farmer nodded and picked up his cigarette pack. It was then that he suddenly felt strange. There was a smell of burnt peanuts on the roof of his soft palate, reaching the passages of his nostrils. He blinked at David Seven, not surprised to see a funny expression in Seven's blue eyes.

"Dave—the coffee—"

"Yeah—I think we've been had—"

They had.

They both started to rise. Abruptly, their movements were sluggish and uncontrolled. David Seven swore under his breath. He tried to reach across the short table to catch Miles Running Bear Farmer. He was too late. The architect toppled, the whites

of his eyes showing. He took his chair with him to the floor.

Seven swayed and then he too, fell heavily, a sensation of spinning, popping noises in his head.

Somewhere in the Mayflower coffee shop, a woman customer cried out in terror.

The solitary drinker at the bar seemed suddenly in favor of leaving the vicinity immediately.

He was halfway to the front glass doors, moving rapidly, before anyone noticed him. Even then, all attention was centered on the table near the bar where two men had suddenly passed out.

The time was eleven forty five.

"Enjoy your sabbatical?" Miss Samantha Follet said coolly.

Cathy Darrow folded her steno pad over, sat down in the chair across from the executive desk, and smiled prettily. The golden fuzz of her head shone like a star in the sunlight pouring in through the windows of Miss Follet's office. It was a beautiful day.

"Yes, thank you. Miami was fun. All I did was swim and sit on the beach all day."

"Wouldn't know that by the look of you. I thought



blondes boiled like lobsters. You look as smooth skinned as ever."

Coming from Miss Follet, that was more than a compliment. It was the mountain coming to Mahomet. Cathy Darrow always likened the female boss of *International Trade Experts* to Joan Crawford. Miss F. was just as smooth, gorgeous and perfectly turned out. The same crisp, every-hair-in-place look. Miss Follet's voice was perfect, too. Level, controlled and utterly *right* for the way she came on.

"You're in the typing pool I take it, Miss Darrow."

"Yes, M'am."

"Good. I jacked you out of David Seven's office because he will be busy for a few days and there is a stack of reports that will need transcribing. In triplicate. Everything in triplicate. Then we'll run it through the three Xerox machines."

"Yes, Miss Follet." The young blonde stared at the older brunette. A mischievous dimple toiled at Cathy Darrow's mouth corner. "Did Mr. Seven miss me?"

Miss Follet's eyebrows arched. A cool smile was her answer.

"Go get yourself some coffee, Miss Darrow. I'll see you

in twenty minutes. I'll be ready then."

Cathy got to her feet, nodded, and left the room. Almost meekly. Her office romance with David Seven, no matter how off-hand she had tried to make it seem, had not escaped the eagle eye of Miss Follet. Fat chance anyone had of hiding anything from her.

Samantha Follet stared at the door when she was gone. Then she revolved quickly in her chair and pressed an orange-hued button that nipped out from a long panel of colored buzzers on the right hand side of her big desk.

A voice sounded in the wide, plushy office, coming from nowhere, apparently.

"Yes, Miss Follett?" a feminine voice said. "*Communications, here.*"

"Any word from Mr. Seven and Mr. Farmer?"

No. Last contact was at ten this morning. From Grand Central Station."

"Call me as soon as they report in. Please tell Mr. Slocum to ready Baroda for me. I'll be up in a minute."

"Will do."

Miss Follett stepped to the rear of her office. Here, wide purple drapes, a pattern of Paisley, closed off the wall. She swept them aside, reveal-



ing a steel door. She stepped into this and within seconds was in another section of the vast warehouse complex. An elevator car carried her up one flight. She left the car, leaving the door open and entered a long gloomy passageway whose steel sides and tiled floor was illuminated by fluorescent lighting under normal circumstances. Miss Follet stopped before a low door whose single opening was a grilled aperture. She opened this door too and stepped inside.

The cell was square, without furnishings of any kind. A short, fattish man with a mop of dark, curly hair stood in the center of the room. His hands were manacled behind him. His clothes were a mere short-sleeved white shirt, plain trousers and a belt. He wore no shoes. He had obviously chosen to pace the floor of the cell, rather than subside to the bare floor and give in to despair. When he saw Miss Follet, his face lit up and he smiled bleakly. He looked Russian but in truth, Paul Baroda was a citizen of the world, despite his Hungarian lineage.

"Ah," he said thickly, his accent slurred. "The Queen Bee herself."

"Have you changed your mind, Mr. Baroda?" Saman-

tha Follet stood but five paces away, arms folded, regarding him in her cool, detached manner.

Baroda wagged his head.

"No, of course not. Pay me a million dollars and you can have the microfilm. Failing that, I'm a sphinx. Rules of the game, my dear."

"I'm glad you talk of rules, Mr. Baroda. That will help you understand why you will get nothing. Why we can't bargain. I'm afraid you leave me an uncomfortable alternative."

Baroda scowled at her. "What, then? More needles and pins? More drugs? You know how they have failed. I was well prepared for my assignment. I was instructed to memorize nonsense should you once again put me under, as the saying goes. Don't be a fool, Miss Follet. Pay the money—I give you the film."

"How can you do that when you don't have it on your person?"

"But I know where it is. You see—what you Americans call the big difference."

"Quite so." Miss Follet smiled. A beautiful smile. "At 503 Fifth Avenue, in the office of the Editor of the Saint Magazine."

Baroda blanched. His small eyes were a dead giveaway. He shook his head. "If you



say so—but you are wrong—I know of no such place—you bluff—”

“No, I do not. So you see I do know where the micro-film is and there is no further need for keeping you alive.”

Baroda blinked. His tongue stalled in his mouth; the little eyes widened. These sort of things just didn't happen—when one fell into the hands of the Americans—

But they did.

Miss Follet produced a small, nickle-plated automatic from somewhere about her person and leveled it at Paul Baroda.

“I'm sorry, Mr. Baroda,” she said softly, a curious glint in her darkish eyes. “I'm truly sorry.”

Her finger tightened on the trigger and Paul Baroda screamed.

Like a woman.

“Closed,” David Seven said. “How do you like those apples?”

Miles Running Bear Farmer squinted at the glass door on the fourth floor of the building numbered 503. The time was now verging on one o'clock. David Seven wasn't making jokes. The elevator man had just told them that Santesson was up in Massa-

chusetts, speaking at some college there.

“Saved by the bell, Dave. If we can't get in, then our friend who doped the coffee couldn't either.” Farmer tried the door, his strong hands grappling with the knob. “Stuck. Good and stuck. Door feels like it hasn't been opened in years.”

Seven stared down the corridor. Other offices and other doors indicated forms of life and activity going on all about them. Seven rubbed his jaw, thoughtfully.

“Time,” he said. “Let's put our heads together.”

“Right here in public? We'd look silly.”

“Then let's think out loud a little.”

“Check.”

“Okay.” Seven looked towards the elevator around the bend. It was creaking upward, past their floor. His manner was off-hand but Farmer wasn't fooled. The old legal mind was flying like ninety.

“We followed your hunch. Baroda dropped the micro-film where you said. He can't come for it himself because he's currently under lock and key. So you call me, I meet you and we stop for coffee and making plans. We are overheard.”

“Or seen,” Farmer sighed.



"We aren't exactly non-descript. I may have my skin painted white like the rest of you good Americans."

"Shut up. Our coffee is doped — not poisoned — for which I give thanks—by who and why?"

"Am I permitted to guess?"

"Be my guest." The light easy bantering exchange concealed a multitude of doubts and fears, and had the unusual nature of making both agents better performers. Their *rapport* and the results it had achieved, was the envy of all the two-man teams of INTREX.

Farmer held up two fingers. "The waitress could be in on it. But I scratch her. After all, she was working there. Nobody could know we were going to the Mayflower for java. So—I pick the lonely beer drinker at the bar. He could have done it a lot of ways. When the waitress comes to us, she had to pass him. It's either him or someone in the kitchen but I scratch that idea too. No, we were shadowed into the Mayflower."

"I go along with that. Now the *why* of it."

"Too easy. Our man wanted to beat us here. He did. We were out better than forty five minutes and spent

twenty more explaining to that cop why we passed out. So I say he came, saw this sign and couldn't get in. Not in broad daylight anyway. I say he's making some plans for later. Or else he took a wax impression and went and had himself a key made."

Seven smiled. "Is that what you'd do?"

"Uh huh."

"You win. So would I. What do you suggest we do now?"

"One of us should keep this door in sight. The other should go call Sam. Just in case our man gets anxious and won't wait until tonight. Leastways, I think I was right about one thing."

"Like what?"

"Like Baroda finding a new use for boxes on the sidewalk. Great drop for hot microfilm, huh?"

"Peachy," Seven agreed. "Okay. You stay put. I'll go talk to Sam. You know how I love to hear her dulcet tones."

"I sure do. And Cathy Darrow's and all the living dolls in the universe. Why don't you get married, Dave, and get out of this business? You're too much of a lover to be a good spy."

"Thanks, Tonto. I'll put in a good word for you too, someday."



Miles Running Bear Farmer laughed and took up a position in the hallway. David Seven took the elevator down to the street level and hunted up a telephone.

Miles had the right idea.

It was time to send up some smoke signals.

Whatever happened, all joking to one side, the microfilm had to be recovered. It was a damn important strip of film. Explosive enough to give the Chinese Reds a big march on missiles.

Lucky break about the magazine guy taking off like that. Thanks to this, their boo-boo in the coffee shop, would not cost INTREX a thing. You weren't granted too many reprieves in the espionage racket. So you had to take what came.

With a jaundiced eye, of course.

He found a phone booth in the open air, one of two side by side on the very corner of Fifth and Forty Second. The weather was bright and warm.

Maybe they could wrap the case up early and he could still wangle a dinner date for himself with Cathy Darrow. The beautiful blonde was back from her Miami vacation and he hadn't even had a chance to say hello yet.

Miss Follet had returned

to her desk. The sunlight slanting into the wide office made the fashionable sequins beaded on her shirtwaist glitter like diamonds. She had long since dismissed Cathy Darrow, sending the girl off with a literal ton of material to transcribe.

The telephone on the desk rang about two o'clock. She picked it up and cradled it to her immaculate ear. Miss Follet always wore her silver-tinted hair in a stylish coiffure that augmented her career woman appearance.

"Yes?"

"Outside call, Miss Follet. Mr. Seven."

She frowned. "I'll take the call."

In a moment, David Seven's breezy tone filled the wire.

"Miss Follet?"

"Why aren't you using your transmitter device, Mr. Seven? Is something wrong?"

"Ah, you have me there. Fact is, I was caught without my devices this morning when Mr. Farmer called me. No matter. I've scrambled this phone box with a screamer so it's okay." The 'screamer' was a coin-sized blob of metal which would make their conversation unintelligible should anyone cut in on the call. "I wanted to



make a report on the Baroda business."

"Go ahead. But first—please give me today's password."

He restrained a chuckle, knowing how she felt about his own speaking voice. It was easy to mimic, she was fond of reminding him, so she had set up a daily set of odd words to keep the enemy baffled. And him—on his toes.

"*Supercallafragilisticexpialadocious*. No more like that, please."

"Never mind. Go on."

He told her all that had happened, skipping the coffee routine in the Mayflower. That could keep until later. No sense in worrying her, not that she ever let her hair down. But he knew how fond she was also of her subordinates. As well as her fine record.

Miss Follet seemed pleased with his report.

"Stay with it then. Hope you find it."

"How's Baroda?"

Miss Follet smiled to herself, in memory, of a deceit that had worked. One could usually bank on the credulity of the enemy where scruples were concerned.

"Tell Mr. Farmer that his conjecture was correct. The microfilm is on the premises

as he thought. Mr. Baroda finally surrendered the information willingly."

"What—how did you get him to talk?"

"Feminine psychology, Mr. Seven. I made him think I was going to shoot him. In his horror, he told everything."

David Seven chuckled.

"You're a caution."

"You be the same. Is that all?"

"Yes. I'll get back to you. Meanwhile, my very best to Miss Darrow."

"Miss Darrow will be too busy typing all day to receive your best wishes. Keep your mind on your job, Mr. Seven."

"Yes, Miss Follet."

When he hung up, he was laughing, knowing what fun he got out of needling the cool clear-eyed head of INTREX. She would never be a woman to him because she had buried her soft side forever with the man who had been her husband and the girl who had been her daughter. Still, it wasn't right for such a lovely woman to be asexual. It went against the grain, being such a waste of delectable woman power. Now, Cathy Darrow was a different case entirely—

Grimly, he forgot about Cathy and got his mind back



to the business at hand. Sam was right about that, blast her. Good agents, the *live* ones at any rate, always minded the store. That way they never pushed up daisies in some dirty abandoned field.

But he was still chuckling to himself as he stepped out of the elevator on the fourth floor. He rounded the bend—and stopped laughing. His hand streaked for his shoulder holster but he was about ten seconds too late.

The man standing behind Miles Running Bear Farmer had a dark, snout nosed pistol pressed to the temple of Miles' impassive face. It was apparent from the frozen tableau of the encounter that the man with the gun had just put in an appearance.

"Stand still," the man hissed. "The only reason you are alive is that I have suddenly realized that you can help me. After all, there are so many cartons inside." He gestured with a free hand toward the door with the sign on it. "So many boxes and I do not know exactly in which one my colleague placed the microfilm. Don't make a sound. I have a key for the door and in a moment, we will have a quiet little time of it."

"I could yell for help," Seven said softly.

"I don't think so," the man said. His face was dim and not too clear in the gloom of the hall. He moved to the door, drawing Miles with him, a shining, new key jutting from his free hand. He inserted it in the lock.

"Why not?"

"You like your friend too much to do that."

"How right you are," David Seven sighed and raised both his arms, watching the stranger with the gun open the door to Santesson's office.

New York, New York. A wonderful town.

They were being hijacked in broad daylight, with other offices within spitting distance, and not one person was abroad in the hall or needed the men's room. Wasn't that always the way?

It all happened so fast. The three of them, Miles, the stranger and Seven were inside the deserted office within seconds. The door closed on the lock, the stranger pushed Miles Running Bear Farmer forward and wagged the snout-nosed pistol menacingly.

"Good," he growled. "Very good. We shall have the place to ourselves. What fun."

He didn't look like the fun-



loving type. Besides the ominous gun, his eyes were like glass. Black, glittering opaques of cruelty and meanness. The texture of his face was pitted and ugly. Not the sort of face one would like to spend any time with.

His attire was meaningless and drab. A Henry Higgins hat was pulled down over his forehead; the one incongruous note in his appearance. The hat was so amiable and gay; he was so contrastingly opposite that effect.

"Now," said the man with the gun. "Let us see. Where shall we begin?"

It was a good question, and it hung unanswered by either Seven or Miles Running Bear Farmer.

The office, for that was all it was, one large wide room, was a veritable warehouse of boxes, cartons, barrels and packages. All tied with string and gummed with tape.

The owners hadn't done a lick of unwrapping yet.

From floor to ceiling, to either side of the floor space, the ceiling overflowed with cartons and containers in which had been stored all that might make up the editorial and reference inventory of a magazine. Some of the containers were marked

with a shipping pen, denoting what was stored inside. Some were not marked at all. One wouldn't know where to begin unless one was the gentleman who had designated the boxes in the very first place. Six high multi-shelved bookcases lined the walls, suggesting where the books, at least, would eventually wind up.

There was a plain, unvarnished desk by an unshaded window that overlooked Forty Second Street. One could see the offices of the building across the way, with many people moving back and forth.

"I shall put the gun in my pocket," the man said in a dry flat voice. "It will still be covering you. Pray begin."

David Seven stared at him coldly.

"Where would you suggest, friend?"

"Select a carton at random," the man purred, without humor. "One is as good as another."

"Sure," Farmer cracked wise. "Eeenie, meenie, minie moe."

"Which one's Moe?" Seven asked in all seriousness.

"That one," Farmer said, pointing at a particularly bulging carton on the outer edges of the stacked mass.



"Note the pawnbroker's fullness of the box—"

"Stop it," the man rasped, his voice rising in anger. "Begin somewhere and stop this foolishness. It should not be so bad—the item would be at the top of whichever box it is in. Baroda did not have time to dig too deep."

The gun in the pocket poked warningly. Seven shrugged and set his hands on the first carton. Miles Running Bear Farmer selected another one. In no time at all, they were each attacking their job with some industry.

But it wasn't as easy as the gun-bearing man had suggested. The cartons contained magazines, books, file folders and assorted office matériel. They had been packed to the fullest. They were crammed and jammed, bursting as it were. Yet it was as the man had said. Baroda would have had to place the microfilm close to the top of the right carton or box or container.

Ten boxes down, Seven paused to wipe a hand across his sweaty forehead. It was hot work. The office was close, there was no air conditioner and it was a hot July day. Farmer was puffing now, too.

"Don't palm the item

should you find it," the man said. "The sooner it turns up the better for both of you."

"Sure," Seven agreed, "and then you'll thank us and let us waltz on out of here. My foot."

"David," Farmer mocked, "you'll make him angry with us."

"I will? That's nice."

The man with the Henry Higgins hat and the dark pistol suddenly laughed. The sound was guttural and ugly in the golden gloom of the office.

"Continue," he said. "Be as foolish as you like. But find the microfilm. That is all that interests me."

David Seven nodded. "Righto, Governor. How about playing that radio while we're busy? I could do with a spot of music."

There was a tiny portable on the rather empty desk. Miles Running Bear Farmer looked at it as if he was seeing it for the first time. His brown face was almost startled. Then a dawning comprehension lit up his eyes.

"Yeah. The radio. That's a swell idea." Almost gleefully, he ripped open another carton, exploring the top with his big hands.

Seven approached another box. The man with the gun made not a move toward the



radio. Seven shrugged.

"No music to soothe the savage beast?"

"No, my friends. No music. Please continue. Time is running out." The man was emphatic in his denial.

The men of INTREX quietly and with sudden resolution went on with their unpacking. Their captor sat down on one corner of the desk, blocking the radio, his back to the window. He had produced the gun once more. It seemed more menacing then ever.

Time didn't run. It crawled.

The only noises were the unsuccessful efforts of David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer to find the precious microfilm.

Suddenly, rather inexplicably, the radio began to play. It had to be the radio. What else could abruptly emit such a caterwaul of sounds, a jumble of voices and a high-pitched current of static?

There was a garbled, frightening squall of noise. The man on the desk jumped a foot as if his position on the corner of the desk had become a hot seat. He shot to the floor, whirling, his eyes blinking rapidly.

Just as he did so, Seven and Farmer stopped what they were doing and descend-

ed upon him from their vantage points close by. They formed an incredible flying wedge of muscle and co-ordinated movement. Calculated training does have its ultimate purpose.

The man in the Henry Higgins hat squeaked in fear and surprise, the dark gun thrusting upward. His pitted face came apart with fright and anger combined. His eyes popped.

The gun barked, the fast explosions it began to make rushing around the carton-stuffed office like the echoes of a bad argument.

And still the strange and curious radio sound continued to splutter and squawk. A medley of voices. Indistinguishable and parrot.

Like an LP record might sound, played at the wrong speed.

No one would have paid any attention to the taxicab shooting down Fifth Avenue. No one save a person looking for a cab on a hot day. But this one was full up and of no use even to the most frantic New Yorker. A steady, choking stream of traffic flowed South toward Fourteenth Street.

The three men sitting closely in the rear seat



seemed very congenial friends. The man crushed in the middle, a jaunty Henry Higgins hat clamped down over his forehead, was smiling. Flanking him was a quiet-faced handsome man and a solemn, unsmiling Indian sort of a fellow. The Indian's face was classic and proud.

"One word, dear heart," David Seven smiled, "and I'll blow you right out of this cab." For emphasis, he prodded the middle man with the buried nose of his own gun. "Now, tell us your name, please."

"Foreman. Peter Foreman."

"That's nice. Hear that, Miles? This is the Foreman of the operation."

Miles Running Bear Farmer winced but he held a roll of microfilm up to the light, squinted at it, and then restored it to a safe place on his person. "No puns, please. Ask him if he has any friends."

Seven complied. "Do you have any friends, Mr. Foreman?"

"I will tell you nothing," growled Foreman, staring ahead in a surly manner.

"No friends. That's sad. But it makes me happy. I don't like you, Mr. Foreman. I don't like your Mr. Baroda

either. In fact, I dislike all spies."

The taxicab driver's face was a mask of wonder, reflected in the rear-view mirror. But there was no mistaking what he was. The face he bore could only have been achieved in a decade of driving a taxi. Grinding away, making decisions every five seconds, fighting for a place in the crowded New York streets.

"Dave," Miles said warningly. "The driver."

Seven smiled, raising his voice. "Him? We're actors, buddy. Rehearsing for TV. Don't mind us. Just running through our lines."

"It's your cab," the driver said, his eyes wary. But a mild smile played on his face. He was interested, in spite of his native cynicism.

"Now, Mr. Foreman. We have the film, we have you. And your partner. If you cooperate, things will go easier on you. Wow, isn't that a corny line, I ask you."

Peter Foreman colored. "Stop. You have made a fool of me twice over. That business with the tape recorder. But I do not have to listen to this insufferable nonsense, do I? I will say no more." He folded his arms determinedly and scowled ahead.



Miles Running Bear Farmer chuckled.

"Don't feel too bad. It's fooled better men than you. Coming on loud like that, at the wrong speed, it would tend to startle a person." He was too pleased with the efficacy of the stunt to quibble. Fast-thinking Seven had tipped him to it by asking about the radio and he had set the button on the tiny cigarette package tape recorder in his side pocket; the one he had used in the Mayflower. The sounds of his own voice and Seven's, badly scrambled, had unified into a good effect.

"All right, Foreman," Seven said, all the banter gone from his voice. "Here's how it poses. For what you've done, or tried to do, the government would be interested in your spending a great deal of time behind bars. Maybe, with a war on, they could even have you shot. I don't really know. But I'm a lawyer—an experienced one—I can tell you that things would go pretty much better for you if you turn state's evidence."

"You mean government's evidence," Farmer chipped in.

"Is that what I mean? Okay. How about it, Mr. Foreman?"

"No, for the last time,"

Foreman said. "Do your worst. I will say nothing. I have failed."

"You sure have," Seven agreed. "And you won't get another chance. This micro-film business is serious espionage, old boy. You may get life."

He abandoned the subject and settled back against the cushions. He kept the nose of his gun jammed into Peter Foreman's middle. The cab was air-conditioned, fortunately. Outside the windows, struggling, hot and weary human beings, reeled along the sidewalks and pavements. The flood tide of progress.

Miles Running Bear Farmer began to whistle. A tuneless, chanting something that smacked of redskins dancing around a bonfire, donning war paint and getting ready to make war talk.

"Miles," Seven sighed.

"No ear for good music?"

"It's not that. We're being followed. A Pontiac. License plate from Michigan. See the beautiful blue paint job."

It was true. Behind them, no matter how slow or fast their own cab darted, no where or how it careered, glued onto their very tail was the Pontiac. And Mr. Foreman was smiling the smile of he who sees rescue in the offing.



Seven pondered, thinking fast.

Farmer craned his head. "What'll we do? Can't drive right up to Headquarters with those birds on our backs. After all, what will Sam think of us?"

Seven nodded, reached forward and tapped the cabbie on the shoulder. "Driver, you're being followed."

The cabbie spun his head, belligerency and wonder fighting for control of his face. "Yeah? Where?"

"The Pontiac. Now if you'd like to make an extra five dollar bill and show us exactly how well you know New York and what you can do with this jalopy of yours—why, you'll lose that car, won't you?"

The cabbie frowned, keeping his eye on the throttling traffic that hemmed in his vehicle on all sides.

"Thought you guys said you were actors?"

"Oh, but we are. Good ones, too. Now those people back there in the Pontiac are bad ones. Got it?"

"For five bucks," the cabbie averred, "I could disappear into the ground."

"That's what I want you to do."

"Watch me."

He was good for the word. Suddenly, like a rabbit jump-

ing across the highway, the cab sprang forward, skirted a sedan, nosed ahead of it and rapidly careened in and among an assortment of machines. Almost immediately, the Pontiac was lost from view.

"Still going to the same address?" the cabbie shouted, employing every trick of his trade. The cab whined, roared and droned, meshing gears, slamming on brakes, starting and stopping. Literally hurtling along. A dizzy panorama of New York rushed by the windows.

"Same address," David Seven said.

"Fine work, gentlemen," Miss Samantha Follet said, from the depths of her polished desk. She was especially attractive in white shirt-waist, pearl-buttoned down the front, with long fluffy sleeves tapering to her wrists. Her smooth, beautiful face and hair was, as ever, acutely out of place, when one considered her true occupation. But as a front and a facade, she was eminently in keeping with her environs. "Mr. Foreman has been housed close to Mr. Baroda. And we have the film."

David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer, seated in the rounded ornate



chairs of the office, watched her very carefully. They were never familiar with "Sam" as they were with each other. Somehow, the idea was unthinkable.

"It was my goof," Farmer said. "I lost the film in the first place. It was up to me to get it back."

"Good thing you remembered about those boxes on the sidewalk. A one-in-a-million hunch," Miss Follet smiled. "What about that editorial office?"

"The Saint?" Seven laughed. "When Mr. Santeson gets back from Massachusetts, he's going to think Santa's little helpers were there. We opened a lot of boxes."

"Intrex's little helpers," Farmer disagreed. "I found it in about the tenth one we opened. Right on top of a stack of hard cover books. Smack between a copy of *The Koran* and *The Bride Wore Black* by Cornell Woolrich."

Seven frowned at him. "You really *read* murder mysteries? Tsk, tsk. Up on all the book titles and authors too. I'm surprised at you."

Miss Follet folded her fingers together, making a lovely arch.

"Well, now that Baroda and Foreman are under

wraps, would you like to see the microfilm before we send it along to the Federal Bureau?"

"Sure thing," Seven said. "I'd be very much interested to see what all the shouting was about."

"Shooting you mean," Farmer amended.

"Good. Come along then. We'll go to the projection room upstairs." She rose from her desk. Tall, imperial. A queen. Seven and Farmer sprang erect. They followed Miss Follet to the draped concealment of the rear wall of the office.

Upstairs, the projection room was a cubicle affair set back from the main passageway. Beyond the working environs of the *International Trade Experts*; the regular offices and anterooms, lay this curious honeycomb of chambers and cells wherein the true nature of INTREX was ever working. Wheels of counter-espionage and security smoothly turning.

"Anytime you're ready," Miss Follet said into a tiny phone next to her chair.

The little theatre went dark. Seven and Farmer waited in their seats. A spray of orange light arched over their heads, finding a white screen. The film began to come alive. Frames flickered,



then settled down to normal running speed. The valuable footage that Paul Baroda and Peter Foreman had worked so hard to get unfolded.

It was deadly material. In the wrong hands, it could have shaken the earth. The missile sites, the launching pads, the highly advanced stages of the weapons revealed on the screen was awesome. Neither Seven nor Farmer smoked, caught up in the wonder of the tiny roll of microfilm.

The film closed, no more than five minutes of material, and the cell's light came up. Miss Follet regarded the tips of her fingernails, which like the rest of her, were shapely and even.

"You see," she said slowly. "Real hot stuff. The hottest."

"Amen," Seven said.

"Heap bad medicine," Farmer said in a low voice that wasn't asking anybody to laugh at his analogy.

Further down the hall, not too far away, in their respective prisons, Baroda and Foreman were feverishly plotting an escape. But it seemed hopeless. All their personal possessions, all metal objects and shoelaces and buckles, had been removed from their persons. Two master spies, not mere hirelings, were suddenly faced with the

extraordinary truth that they were in the hands of INTREX. That faceless organization whose reputation had already become a byword on the continent.

INTREX.

How could one fight these damn American capitalists with their millions and billions in oil, steel and diamonds and gold? Their worship of the God Baal and the golden calf had given them the fortunes to squander on the fight against the Isms. All the Isms in the universe.

Baroda and Foreman shuddered.

Money, on the side of the angels, was a most formidable weapon. Stronger and greater than all the sciences in mankind's book of dreams.

"Good day, gentlemen," Miss Follet said, at the door of her office, to David and Miles. "You may return to your duties."

It was a candle-lit dinner for two. The food was good, the wine excellent, the company superlative. David Seven smiled fondly across the crowded tablecloth at Cathy Darrow. The candlelight set up golden lights in her blonde hair.

"Good to see you again, Miss Darrow."

"Likewise, Mr. Seven."



"I was very busy while you were gone. I never realized how much a man can depend on a good secretary."

"Lots of extra-legal work again, David?" Cathy sighed.

He toyed with a breadstick and aimed it at her as if it was a pistol. "You know me—the D'Artagnan of the courtroom. Clients are always getting into trouble."

"I don't mean that. You're a puzzle you know. Bright young lawyer. Working for a big important outfit like International Trade Experts. And yet—I don't know—"

"Go on," he urged.

"Well, you're out of the office more often than you're in it. Forever running off some place. And usually with Miles Farmer. And he's an architect. It just doesn't make sense."

Seven chuckled. "I catch them and Miles builds the jails that hold them. That makes sense, doesn't it?"

"You're being evasive, David. Just as always. Just as you are when I try to tie apron strings around you."

"It's a wise bachelor who knows when to run," Seven said with deep wisdom.

"And Miss Follet," Cathy murmured. "A woman with all she has. Why she ought to be in the movies—or way uptown like Joan Crawford

with Pepsi-Cola."

"Why, Miss Darrow. You shock me. Suppose Sam heard you talking like that? Are you trying to say that we at International are not all we seem to be? Tsk, tsk. That won't do, my girl."

"Don't call her Sam. She'd skin you alive if she ever heard you call her that and you know it."

"Sad but true. All right, Miss Darrow, we are all spies. We work for the government and we are out to keep the bad guys from over-running the world. Okay?"

"David, be serious!"

"I am serious."

"Oh—you. Forget it. I'll mind my own business." She changed the subject, looking at the menu again. "What are you having for dessert? The pineapple pudding is a specialty here—"

"Pineapple pudding sounds scrumptious," he laughed, staring into her eyes across the blaze of the candles. "And you look the same way too."

So, once again, Cathy Darrow's suspicions were allayed and David Seven's cover was preserved.

After all, INTREX needed him even more than Cathy Darrow did.

Dedicated men are not that easy to come by.



# *black orchids*

**by Rex Stout**

Monday at the Flower Show, Tuesday at the Flower Show, Wednesday at the Flower Show. Me, Archie Goodwin. How's that?

I do not deny that flowers are pretty, but a million flowers are not a million times prettier than one flower. Oysters are good to eat, but who wants to eat a car-load?

I didn't particularly resent it when Nero Wolfe sent me up there Monday afternoon and, anyway, I had been expecting it. After all the ballyhoo in the special Flower Show sections of the Sunday papers, it was a cinch that some member of our household would have to go take a look at those orchids, and as Fritz Brenner couldn't be spared from the kitchen that long, and Theodore Horstmann was too busy in the plant rooms on the roof, and Wolfe himself could have got a job in a physics laboratory as an Immovable Object if the detective business

---

*Rex Stout, author of THE DOORBELL RANG and more than thirty-five other novels about Nero Wolfe and Archie (he started writing about them in 1934), has been President of the Author's League since 1951, and one of the leaders in the long fight to reform the copyright law. A founder and member of the Board of Directors of Freedom House, Mr. Stout has long been considered one of this country's most distinguished writers.*

---



ever played out, it looked as if I would be elected. I was.

When Wolfe came down from the plant rooms at six P.M. Monday and entered the office, I reported:

"I saw them. It was impossible to snatch a sample."

He grunted, lowering himself into his chair. "I didn't ask you to."

"Who said you did, but you expected me to. There are three of them in a glass case and the guard has his feet glued."

"What color are they?"

"They're not black."

"Black flowers are never black. What color are they?"

"Well." I considered. "Say you take a piece of coal. Not anthracite. Cannel coal."

"That's black."

"Wait a minute. Spread on it a thin coating of open kettle molasses. That's it."

"Pfui. You haven't the faintest notion what it would look like. Neither have I."

"I'll go buy a piece of coal and we'll try it."

"No. Is the labellum uniform?"

I nodded. "Molasses on coal. The labellum is large, not as large as *aurea*, about like *truffautiana*. Sepals lanceolate. Throat tinged with orange—"

"Any sign of wilting?"

"No."

"Go back tomorrow and look for wilting on the edges of the petals. You know it, the typical wilting after pollination. I want to know if they've been pollinated."

So I went up there again Tuesday after lunch. That evening at six I added a few details to my description and reported no sign of wilting.

I sat at my desk, in front of his against the wall, and aimed a chilly stare at him.

"Will you kindly tell me," I requested, "why the females you see at a flower show are the kind of females who go to a flower show? Ninety per cent of them? Especially their legs? Does it have to be like that? Is it because, never having any flowers sent to them, they have to go there in order to see any? Or is it because—"

"Shut up. I don't know. Go back tomorrow and look for wilting."

I might have known, with his mood getting blacker every hour, all on account of three measly orchid plants, that he was working up to a climax. But I went again Wednesday, and didn't get home until nearly seven o'clock. When I entered the office he was there at his desk with two empty beer bottles on the tray and pouring a third one into the glass.



"Did you get lost?" he inquired politely.

I didn't resent that because I knew he half meant it. He has got to the point where he can't quite understand how a man can drive from 35th Street and Tenth Avenue to 44th and Lexington and back again with nobody to lead the way. I reported no wilting, and sat at my desk and ran through the stuff he had put there, and then swiveled to face him and said:

"I'm thinking of getting married."

His half-open lids didn't move, but his eyes did, and I saw them.

"We might as well be frank," I said. "I've been living in this house with you for over ten years, writing your letters, protecting you from bodily harm, keeping you awake, and wearing out your tires and my shoes. Sooner or later one of my threats to get married will turn out not to be a gag. How are you going to know? How do you know this isn't it?"

He made a noise of derision and picked up his glass.

"Okay," I said. "But you're enough of a psychologist to know what it means when a man is irresistibly impelled to talk about a girl

to someone. Preferably, of course, to someone who is sympathetic. You can imagine what it means when I want to talk about her to *you*. What is uppermost in my mind is that this afternoon I saw her washing her feet."

He put the glass down. "So you went to a movie. In the afternoon. Did it occur—"

"No, sir, not a movie. Flesh and bone and skin. Have you ever been to a flower show?"

Wolfe closed his eyes and sighed.

"Anyway," I went on, "you've seen pictures of the exhibits, so you know that the millionaires and big firms do things up brown. Like Japanese gardens and rock gardens and roses in Picardy. This year Rucker and Dill, the seed and nursery company, have stolen the show. They've got a woodland glade. Bushes and dead leaves and green stuff and a lot of little flowers and junk, and some trees with white flowers, and a little brook with a pool and rocks; and it's inhabited. There's a man and a girl having a picnic. They're there all day from eleven to six thirty and from eight to ten in the evening. They pick flowers. They eat a picnic



lunch. They sit on the grass and read. They play mumblety-peg. At four o'clock the man lies down and covers his face with a newspaper and takes a nap, and the girl takes off her shoes and stockings and dabbles her feet in the pool. That's when they crowd the ropes. Her face and figure are plenty good enough, but her legs are absolutely artistic. Naturally she has to be careful not get her skirt wet, and the stream comes tumbling from the rocks into the pool. Speaking as a painter—"

Wolfe snorted. "Pah! You couldn't paint a—"

"I didn't say painting as a painter, I said speaking as a painter. I know what I like. The arrangement of lines into harmonious composition. It gets me. I like to study—"

"She is too long from the knees down."

I looked at him in amazement.

He wiggled a finger at a newspaper on the desk. "There's a picture of her in the *Post*. Her name is Anne Tracy. She's a stenographer in Rucker and Dill's office. Her favorite dish is blueberry pie with ice cream."

"She is not a stenographer!" I was on my feet. "She's

a secretary! W. G. Dill's!" I found the page in the *Post*. "A damn important job. I admit they look a little long here, but it's a bad picture. Wrong angle. There was a better one in the *Times* yesterday, and an article—"

"I saw it. I read it."

"Then you ought to have an inkling of how I feel." I sat down again. "Men are funny," I said philosophically. "That girl with that face and figure and legs has been going along living with her pop and mom and taking dictation from W. G. Dill, who looks like a frog in spite of being the president of the Atlantic Horticultural Society—he was around there today—and who knew about her or paid any attention to her? But put her in a public spot and have her take off her shoes and stockings and wiggle her toes in a man-made pool on the third floor of Grand Central Palace, and what happens? Billy Rose goes to look at her. Movie scouts have to be chased off the grass of the woodland glade. Photographers engage in combat. Lewis Hewitt takes her out to dinner—"

"Hewitt?" Wolfe opened his eyes and scowled at me. "Lewis Hewitt?"

I knew that the sound of that name would churn his



beer for him. Lewis Hewitt was the millionaire in whose greenhouse, on his Long Island estate, the black orchids had been produced—thereby creating in Wolfe an agony of envy that surpassed any of his previous childish performances.

“Yep,” I said cheerfully. “Lew himself, in his two hundred dollar topcoat and Homburg and gloves made of the belly-skin of a baby gazelle fed on milk and honey, and a walking stick that makes your best Malacca look like a piece of an old fishing pole. I saw her go out with him less than an hour ago, just before I left. And, pinned to her left shoulder was a black orchid! He must have cut it for her himself. She becomes the first female in captivity to wear a black orchid. And only last week she was typing with her lovely fingers, ‘Yours of the ninth received and contents noted.’ ”

I grinned at him. “But Lew will have to get out the spray for the insects. Men are flocking in there who don’t know a stamen from a stigma. The guy having the picnic with her inside the ropes smirks fatuously. His name is Harry Gould and he is one of Dill’s gardeners. A gray-haired geezer that

needs a shave gazes at her as if he was about to say his prayers—I’ve seen him twice. A wholesome young fellow with a serious chin wanders by and pretends he’s not looking at her. His name is Fred Updegraff. Updegraff Nurseries, Erie, Pennsylvania. They’ve got an exhibit not far off. And there’s a lot more, but chiefly there’s me. Your friend Lew is going to have me to contend with. She smiled at me today without meaning to, and I blushed from head to foot. My intentions are honorable but they are not vague. Look at that picture of her and then take a slant at this.” I lifted a heel to the corner of the desk and pulled my trouser leg up to the knee. “In your mind’s eye strip off the shoe and sock and garter and apply your knowledge of cross-pollination. What would be the result—”

“Pfui,” Wolfe said. “Don’t scar the desk. You will return there tomorrow and look for edge-wilt, and you will be here at six o’clock.”

But it didn’t work out that way. At lunch the next day his envy and curiosity finally foamed up to the climax. He put down his coffee cup, assumed the expression of a man prepared to brave all hardship or hazard for the



sake of a Cause, and told me:

"Please bring the sedan around. I'm going up there and look at those confounded freaks myself."

## 2

So Thursday was my fourth day at the Flower Show in a row. It was the biggest mob of the week, and getting Nero Wolfe through and up to the fourth floor where the orchids were was like a destroyer making a way through a mine field for a battleship. We were halted a couple of times by acquaintances who wanted to exchange greetings, and as we passed the Rucker and Dill woodland glade on the third floor Wolfe stopped to look it over. There was a line of spectators three deep all the way around the ropes. Harry and Anne were playing mumblety-peg. When a flash bulb made a flare she didn't flicker an eyelash.

"Look at her teeth when she smiles," I said. "Look at her hair like fine-spun open kettle molasses. She was more self-conscious the first day or two. A year of this would spoil her. Look at the leaves on the peony bushes, turning yellow, pining away because she'll be with them only one more day—"

"They are not peonies. They are azaleas and laurel, and they have a disease."

"Call it a disease if you want to. They're pining—"

He had started off, and I nearly knocked three women down getting around in front of him for interference.

At the orchid benches up on the fourth floor he disregarded everything else—though there was, for one thing, the finest display of *B. thorntoni* I had ever seen—and planted himself in front of the glass case. A card in the corner said, "Unnamed hybrid by Mr. Lewis Hewitt. The only three plants in existence." They certainly were something different, and I had been through all the big establishments several times, not to mention the twenty thousand plants Wolfe had, with hundreds of varieties. I stood to one side and watched Wolfe's face. He mumbled something to himself, and then just stood and looked, with his expanse of face five inches from the glass of the case. His emotions didn't show, but from the twitching of a muscle on his neck I knew he was boiling inside. For a quarter of an hour he didn't budge, not even when women bumped against him trying to get a peek at the orchids, though



ordinarily he hates to have anyone touching him. Then he backed away and I thought he was through.

"It's hot in here," he said, and was taking off his overcoat. I took it to hold for him.

"Ah, Mr. Wolfe," a voice said. "This is indeed a compliment! What do you think of them?"

It was Lewis Hewitt. Wolfe shook hands with him. He had on another hat and topcoat and gloves, but the same walking stick as the day before—a golden-yellow Malacca with reddish-brown mottles. Any good appraiser would have said \$830 as is, on the hoof. He was tall enough to look down at Wolfe with a democratic smile below his aristocratic nose.

"They're interesting," Wolfe said.

Interesting. Ha ha.

"Aren't they marvelous?" Hewitt beamed. "If I had time I'd take one from the case so you could have a good look, but I'm on my way upstairs to judge some roses and I'm already late. Will you be here a little later? Please do. —Hello, Wade. I'm running."

He went. The "Wade" was for a little guy who had come up while he was talk-

ing. As this newcomer exchanged greetings with Wolfe I regarded him with interest, for it was no other than W. G. Dill himself, the employer of my future wife. In many ways he was the exact opposite of Lewis Hewitt, for he looked up at Wolfe instead of down, he wore an old brown suit that needed pressing, and his sharp gray eyes gave the impression that they wouldn't know how to beam.

"You probably don't remember me," he was telling Wolfe. "I was at your house one day with Raymond Plehn —"

"I remember. Certainly, Mr. Dill."

"I just saw Plehn downstairs and he told me you were here. I was going to phone you this afternoon. I wonder if you'd do something for me?"

"That depends—"

"I'll explain. Let's step aside away from this jostling." They moved, and I followed suit. "Do you know anything about the Kurume yellows?"

"I've heard of them." Wolfe was frowning but trying to be courteous. "I've read of them in horticultural journals. A disease fatal to broad-leaved evergreens, thought to be fungus. First



found two years ago on some Kurume azaleas imported from Japan by Lewis Hewitt. You had some later, I believe, and so did Watson in Massachusetts. Then Updegraff lost his entire plantation, several acres, of what he called rhodaleas."

"You do know about them."

"I remember what I read."

"Did you see my exhibit downstairs?"

"I glanced at it as I passed." Wolfe grimaced. "The crowd. I came to see these hybrids. That's a fine group of *Cypripedium pubescens* you have. Very fine. The *Fissipes*—"

"Did you see the laurel and azaleas?"

"Yes. They look sick."

"They are sick. They're dying. The Kurume yellows. The under side of the leaves shows the typical brown spots. Some scoundrel deliberately infected those plants, and I'd give a good deal to know who it was. I intend to know who it was!"

Wolfe looked sympathetic, and he really was sympathetic. Between plant growers a fatal fungus makes a bond. "It's too bad your exhibit was spoiled," he said. "But why a personal devil? Why a deliberate miscreant?"

"It was."

"Have you evidence?"

"No. Evidence is what I want."

"My dear sir. You are a child beating the stick it tripped on. You had that disease once on your place. A nest of spores in a bit of soil—"

Dill shook his head. "The disease was at my Long Island place. These plants came from my place in New Jersey. The soil could not possibly have become contaminated."

"With fungi almost anything is possible. A tool taken from one place to the other, a pair of gloves—"

"I don't believe it." Dill's voice indicated that nothing was going to make him believe it. "With the care we take. I am convinced it was done deliberately and maliciously, to ruin my exhibit. And I'm going to know who it was. I'll pay you a thousand dollars to find out for me."

Wolfe abandoned the ship. Not physically, but mentally. His face went bland and blank. "I don't believe I could undertake it, Mr. Dill."

"Why not? You're a detective, aren't you? Isn't that your business?"

"It is."

"This is a job for a detective, Isn't it?"



"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you wouldn't walk across the continent to take a swim in the Pacific Ocean. The effort and expense are out of porportion to the object sought. You say you have no evidence. Do you suspect anyone in particular?"

"No. But I absolutely intend—"

I butted in. I said to Wolfe, "I've got to go and judge some Brussels sprouts," and I beat it.

I did have a destination in mind, but mostly I wanted to be somewhere else. What with a couple of lucrative cases we had handled since the first of the year, the budget was balanced for months to come, but even so it always gave me the nettles to hear Wolfe turn down a job, and I didn't want to start riding him right there in front of Hewitt's hybrids. To avoid the mob, I opened a door marked "Private" and descended a flight of stairs. This part was not open to the public. On the floor below I made my way through a jungle of packing cases and trees and bushes and spraying equipment and so on, and went along a corridor and turned right with it. This stretch of the corri-

dor extended almost the length of the building, but I knew there was an exit halfway. Along the left wall were cluttered more trees and shrubs and paraphernalia, surplus from the exhibits, and along the right wall, which was the partition between the corridor and the main room, were doors with cards on them, all closed, leading into the exhibits themselves from the back. As I passed the one with a card tacked on it saying "Rucker and Dill," I threw a kiss at it.

Through the door further on I entered the main room. There was even more of a crowd than when Wolfe and I had passed by half an hour earlier. I dodged through the field as far as the rustic scene which had labels on the rope-posts reading "Updegraff Nurseries, Erie, Penna." The exhibits on this side were a series of peninsulas jutting into the main room, with aisles between them extending back to the partition, on which they were based. I skirted the band of spectators taking in the Updegraff arrangement and halted beside a runty specimen who was standing there by the rope scowling at the foliage.

"Hello, Pete," I said.



He nodded and said hello.

I had met Pete day before yesterday. I didn't really like him. In fact I disliked him. His eyes didn't match and that, together with a scar on his nose, made him look unreliable. But he had been hospitable and made me at home around the place.

"Your peonies look nice," I said socially.

Someone tittered on my left and made a remark which probably wasn't intended for my ear but I have good ears. I turned and saw a pair of vintage Helen Hokinsons from Bronxville. I stared and compelled an eye.

"Yes, madam, peonies," I said. "What's a *Cymbidium miranda*? You don't know. I've known that since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. What's a *Phalaenopsis*? Do you know?"

"No, I don't, but I know those are rhododendrons. Peonies! Come, Alice."

I watched them waddle off and turned back to Pete. "Excuse me for chasing your audience, but it's none of her business if I prefer to call them peonies. What were you scowling at? Looking for the Kurume yellows?"

His head jerked around at me. "What about the Kurume yellows?" he demanded.

"Nothing. Just conversa-

tion. I heard Dill saying his woodland glade has got it and I wondered if it was spreading. You don't need to look at me like that. I haven't got it."

His left eye blinked but the off-color one didn't. When did you hear Dill say that?"

"Just a while ago."

"So. What I suspected." He stretched himself as high as he could up on his toes, looking in all directions at the throng. "Did you see my boss?"

"No. I just came—"

Pete darted off. Apparently I had started something. But he went off to the left, towards the front, so I didn't follow him. I turned right, past a rose garden and a couple of other exhibits to Rucker and Dill's.

The crowd was about the same as before; it was only a quarter past three and they wouldn't begin surging against the ropes until four o'clock, when Harry would lie down for a nap and Anne would take off her shoes and stockings, positively never seen before at a flower show in the history of the world. I got behind some dames not tall enough to obstruct the view. Mumbletypeg was over, and Harry was making a slingshot and Anne was knit-



ting. What she was working on didn't look as if it might be something I would be able to use, but anyway what I was interested in was her and not her output, which is a normal and healthy attitude during courtship. She sat there on the grass knitting as if there were no one within miles. Harry was nothing like as good an actor as she was. He didn't look at the spectators' faces, and of course he said nothing, since it was all pantomime and neither of them ever spoke, but by movements and glances he gave it away that he was conscious of the audience every minute.

Naturally I was jealous of him, but aside from that he impressed me as a good deal of a wart. He was about my age and he put something on his hair to make it slick. His hair and eyes were dark and he smirked. Also he was cocky. One reason I had picked Anne was that while they were eating lunch Tuesday Harry had put his hand on her arm and she had pulled away, and it wasn't an invitation to try it again. There had been further indications that she was resolved to keep herself innocent and unsullied for me, though of course she had no way of knowing that it was for me

until I got a chance to speak to her. I admit her letting Hewitt decorate her with orchids and take her to dinner had been a bitter pill to swallow, but after all I had no right to expect her to be too spiritual to eat, with her legs.

All of a sudden Harry jumped to his feet and yelled, "Hey!"

It was the first word I had ever heard him utter.

Everyone, including me, looked in the direction of his stare.

"You, Updegraff!" Harry yelled. "Get out of that!"

It was the wholesome young man with the serious chin who had been identified for me as Pete's boss, Fred Updegraff, by Pete himself. At the right corner where the exhibit ended at the partition, he had straddled the rope, stretched an arm and snipped off a peony twig or maybe laurel with a pruning shears, picked up the twig, and was making off with it.

"I'll report that!" Harry yelled.

The crowd muttered and ejaculated with indignation, and for a second I thought we might see a lynching as an added attraction for the most dramatic flower show on record, but all that happened was that two women



and a man trotted after Updegraff and started remonstrating with him as he kept going. Believe it or not, Anne never looked up and didn't miss a stroke with her needles. A born actress.

My watch said 3:25. It would be over half an hour before the big scene started, and I didn't dare leave Wolfe alone that long in a strange place, so I regretfully dragged myself away. Retracing my steps, I kept an eye out for Pete, thinking to tell him that his boss had resorted to crime, but he wasn't visible. Taking the corridor again as a short cut, I saw it was inhabited by a sample who didn't strike me as the flower show type, either for back stage or out front. She was standing there not far from the door with the Rucker and Dill card on it, a fancy little trick in a gray coat with Fourteenth Street squirrel on the collar, with a little blue hat and a blue leather handbag under her arm, and as I approached she looked at me with an uneasy eye and a doubtful smile.

I asked her, "You lost, sister?"

"No," she said, and the smile got confident. "I'm waiting for someone."

"Me?"

"Nothing like you."

"That's good. It could have been me a week ago, but now I'm booked."

I went on.

Upstairs I found that Wolfe had stayed put, and W. G. Dill was still with him. Apparently the question of tracking down the gazook who had spoiled Dill's exhibit had been settled one way or the other, for they were arguing about inoculated peat and sterile flasks for germination. I sat down on a vacant spot on a bench. After a while Dill departed and Wolfe went back to the glass case and started peering again, and a few minutes later here came Lewis Hewitt, with his topcoat over his arm. He glanced around as if he was looking for something and asked Wolfe:

"Did I leave my stick here?"

"I haven't seen it. Archie?"

"No, sir."

"Damn it," Hewitt said. "I do leave sticks around, but I wouldn't like to lose that one. Well. Do you want to inspect one of those beauties?"

"Very much. Even without an inspection, I'd like to buy one."

"I imagine you would." Hewitt chuckled. "Plehn offered ten thousand for one the other day." He took a



key from his pocket and leaned over the case. "I'm afraid I'm going to be regarded as a miser, but I can't bear to let one go."

"I'm not a commercial grower," Wolfe said ingratiatingly. "I'm an amateur like you."

"I know," Hewitt conceded, lifting out one of the pots as if it was made of star bubbles and angels' breath, "but, my dear fellow, I simply couldn't part with one."

From there on the scene was painful. Wolfe was so damn sweet to him I had to turn my head away to conceal my feelings. He flattered him and yessed him and smiled at him until I expected any minute to hear him offer to dust off his shoes, and the worst of it was, it was obvious he wasn't getting anywhere and wasn't going to. When Hewitt went on and on with a discourse about ovules and pollen tubes, Wolfe beamed at him as if he was fascinated and, finally, when Hewitt offered to present him with a couple of *C. hassellis*, Wolfe thanked him as if they were just what he asked Santa Claus for, though he had twenty specimens as good or better under his own glass. At a quarter past four I began to

fidget. Not only would I have liked to give Wolfe a kick in the fundament for being such a sap, but also I wanted to conduct him past the woodland glade and prove to him that he was wrong when he said my affianced was too long from the knees down, and the big scene would end at four thirty, when Anne would flip water out of the pool onto her co-picnicker to wake him from his nap. That always got a big laugh.

So I was relieved when they started off. Ordinarily Wolfe would have had me carry the two pots of *C. hassellis*, but he toted them himself, one in each hand, to show Hewitt how precious he thought they were. The big toad-eater. But the worst was yet to come. We went by the back stairs, and, at my suggestion, along the corridor on the floor below, and there on the floor at the base of the door to Rucker and Dill's exhibit, I saw an object I recognized. I halted and told Hewitt:

"There's your cane."

Hewitt stood and looked at it and demanded, "How in the name of heaven did it get there?"

And by gum, Wolfe told me to pick it up for him! I should have resigned on the spot, but I didn't want



to make a scene in front of Hewitt, so I stopped and grabbed it. There was a piece of green string looped on the crook and I brushed it off and extended the crook end toward Hewitt, controlling an impulse to jab him in the ribs. He thanked me democratically and we went on.

"Curious," Hewitt said. "I certainly didn't leave it there. Very odd."

A door ahead of us opened and a man emerged. The door had a card on it, UPDEGRAFF NURSERIES, and the man was the twig-snitcher, Fred Updegraff. At sight of us he stopped, and stood there as we went by. A little farther on, after passing two more doors with exhibitors' cards on them, I swerved to one that wasn't labeled and turned the knob and opened it.

"Where are you going?" Wolfe demanded.

"The water nymph. The pool episode. I thought you might—"

"Bosh. That bedlam—"

"It's really worth seeing," Hewitt declared. "Charming. Perfectly charming. Really delightful. I'll come too."

He headed for the door I was holding open, and Wolfe followed him like an orderly after a colonel, his hands

full of potted plants. It would have been comical if it hadn't been disgusting. I kept in front so as not to have to look at him.

At the glade the audience was five and six deep around the ropes to the point on either side where the bushes were in the way, but all three of us were tall enough to get a good view. Anne was putting on a swell performance, dabbling with her toes and swishing around. Her knees were beautiful. I was proud of her. Harry was stretched out in the usual spot for his nap, his head on a grassy mound alongside the rocks and bushes, with a newspaper over his face. The audience was chattering. Anne kicked water onto a cluster of flowers that hung over the pool, and glistening drops fell from the petals.

"Charming," Hewitt said.

"Delightful," Wolfe said.

"Archie, will you kindly take these plants? Be very careful—"

Pretending not to hear him, I moved off to the right. Partly I thought he needed some ignoring, but also I wanted to get a better look at Harry's right leg and foot. They were twisted into a strange and unnatural position for a man pretending to take a nap. I stretch-



ed tiptoe to get a good look over heads and hats and decided that either his shoe hurt him or he was doing a yogi leg exercise, and went back to Anne just as she took another glance at her wrist watch. She swished once more, swung her feet out of the pool, cast a mischievous eye on her companion, reached into the pool with her cupped hand, and sloshed water over Harry's shirt. The audience screeched with glee.

But Harry didn't take his cue. He was supposed to jerk himself up and blink and look mad, but he didn't move. Anne stared at him in astonishment. Someone called:

"Douse him again!"

I had a quick hunch it wasn't funny, with his leg twisted like that. Pushing through to the front, I got over the rope. As I started across the grass a guard yelled at me, and so did some of the spectators, but I kept going and was bent over Harry when the guard grabbed my arm.

"Hey, you—"

"Shut up." I shook him off and lifted the newspaper enough to see Harry's face, and after one glimpse dropped the paper back over it. As I did that I sniffed. I thought I smelled something,

a faint something that I recognized.

"What is it? What's the matter?" a voice above me asked.

It was the first time I had ever heard Anne's voice, but I didn't reply or look up at her because I was seeing something about the moss which clung to the face of the rocks just back of Harry's head. On account of the shrubs and rocks I couldn't get around to see the top of his head, so I reached a hand to feel of it, and the end of my finger went right into a hole in his skull, away in, and it was like sticking your finger into a warm apple pie. I pulled away and started wiping my finger off on the grass, and realized with a shock that the two white things there were Anne's bare feet. I nearly got blood on them.

### 3

I stood up and told Anne, "Put on your shoes and stocking."

"What—"

"Do as I tell you." I had the guard by the sleeve and stabbed into his sputtings, "Get a cop." By the way his mouth fell open I saw he was too dumb even for something as simple as that with-



out a fireside chat, so I turned to call to Hewitt and there was Fred Updegraff inside the ropes headed for us. His eyes were on Anne, but when I intercepted him and told him to get a cop he about-faced without a word and went. Wolfe's voice barked above the din:

"What the devil are you doing in there?"

I ignored him again and raised my voice to address the multitude: "Ladies and gentlemen. That's all for to-day. Mr. Gould has had an attack. If you're sensible you'll go and look at flowers. If you're morbid or have got the itch you'll stay where you are—outside the ropes—"

A flash bulb flared at the left. Sympathetic murmurs arose, but they seemed to be a hundred percent morbid. At the right a guy with a camera came diving under the rope, but that was something for which arrangements had already been made inside the guard's head and he responded promptly and adequately. I was gratified to see that Anne appeared to have a modicum of wits. She must have seen the color of what I had wiped from my finger, but she was sitting on the grass getting her feet shod, hastily but efficiently.

"Archie!" Wolfe's voice

came in his most menacing tone. I knew what was eating him. He wanted me to get out of there and drive him home, and he thought I was showing off, and he knew I was sore. As he called my name again I turned my back on him to welcome the law. A big flat-foot with no neck shoved through the crowd to the rope and got over it and strode across the grass. I blocked his way at Harry's feet.

"What's wrong with him?" he asked gruffly.

I moved aside and let him pass. He stooped and got a corner of the newspaper and jerked it off.

"Archie!" Wolfe bellowed.

Some of the spectators could see Harry's face and they were reacting. The ropes were bellied in, taut, with the pressure from behind. The guard was charging across the grass at them and Anne was on her feet again and Fred Updegraff was there.

"Hell, he's dead," the cop said.

"You guessed it," I conceded. "Shall I get some help?"

"Go ahead."

I won't say that I already knew things I didn't know, but I already had stirrings



above the ears and, besides, I didn't want Wolfe to bust a lung, so I went that way and found him standing with Hewitt a few paces to the rear of the throng.

"Hold everything," I muttered to him.

"Confound you—"

"I said hold everything." I cantered off to the phone booths at the front of the room, parted with a nickel and dialed a number and got connected with Extension 19, gave my name and asked for Inspector Cramer. His voice came:

"What do you want?"

"Me? Nothing. I'm helping with the chores. Wolfe and I are up at the Flower Show—"

"I'm busy!"

"Okay. Now you're busier. Rucker and Dill's exhibit, third floor, Flower Show. Man murdered. Shot through the top of the head. Lying there on the grass guarded by one bull-necked bull who will never be an inspector. That's all."

"Wait a min—"

"Can't. I'm busy."

I slid out of the booth and dodged through the traffic back across the room. In that short time the mob surrounding the glade had doubled in size. A glance showed me that the cop and the guard

had got reinforcements and Anne and Fred Updegraff were not in sight, and Wolfe and Hewitt had retreated to the other side of the rose garden next door. W. G. Dill was with them. Wolfe glared at me as I approached. He was still hanging onto those measly plants and was speechless with rage.

"...feel a sort of responsibility," Hewitt was saying. "I am Honorary Chairman of the Committee. I don't like to shirk responsibility, but what can I do—just look at them—"

"That policeman," Dill said. "Imbecile. Wouldn't let me in my own exhibit. Broke my shoulder blade. It feels like it." He worked his shoulder up and down, grimacing. "There's the doctor—no—"

"A doctor won't help any. He's dead."

They looked at me. Dill stopped working his shoulder. "Dead? Dead!" He darted off and burrowed into the crowd.

"You said he had an attack," Hewitt regarded me accusingly. "How can he be dead? What did he die of?"

"He ceased breathing."

"Archie," Wolfe said in his most crushing tone. "Stop that. I asked you an hour ago to take these plants.



Take them, and take me home."

"Yes, sir." I took the plants. "But I can't leave yet. I'm looking—"

"Good heavens," Hewitt said. "What a calamity... poor Dill...I must see...excuse me..." He marched off towards the main stair.

At that instant I caught sight of an object I had been halfway expecting to see. I only got a glimpse of the gray coat with its collar of Fourteenth Street squirrel, for she came from the other side and disappeared into the crowd. I put the pots on the floor at the edge of the rose garden and dashed off before Wolfe could say a word. I didn't care how sore it made him because he had it coming to him after his degrading performance with Hewitt, but I admit I glanced back over my shoulder as I went to see if he was throwing something. His face was purple. I'll bet he lost ten pounds that afternoon.

I skirted the throng and went into it on the other side. In a minute I saw her, squirming through to the front. I took it easy working through to her because I didn't want to make myself conspicuous, and, getting right behind her, saw that the blue leather bag was un-

der her right arm. I shifted Wolfe's coat to my own right arm and under its cover got my fingers on the end of the bag and pulled gently. It started coming, and she was so interested in what she was trying to see around the people still in front of her that she didn't notice it even when the bag was out from under her arm and safely under Wolfe's coat. I kept an eye on her as I backed out, apologizing to the flower lovers as I went, and as soon as I was in the clear turned and made for the stairs.

In the men's room on the second floor I spent a nickel to achieve privacy and sat down and opened the bag, which was monogrammed "RL." It inventoried about as usual, handkerchief and compact and purse and so on, but it also had what I was after, her name and address. They were on an envelope addressed to Miss Rose Lasher, 326 Morrow Street, New York City, which checked with the RL on the bag. I copied it in my notebook. The letter inside was from Ellie and explained why she hadn't paid back the two dollars. And another item was more than I had bargained for. It was a clipping from the *Gazette* of a picture



of Harry and Anne playing mumblety-peg. It had cut edges, not torn, and was neatly folded.

I put everything back in, went back to the third floor, worked my way into the crowd, not taking it so easy this time, found her in the front row against the rope, and put my hand on her shoulder. Her head twisted around.

"Will you please—" she began indignantly.

"Okay, sister. It's me. Here's your bag."

"My bag!"

"You dropped it and I risked life and limb to get it. It's yours, isn't it?"

"Sure it's mine!" She grabbed it.

"Say thank you."

She mumbled something and was through with me. I glanced at the scene. The cast had been augmented. The contents of two radio police cars, four of them in uniform, were there in the glade, one of them standing at Harry's feet watching a doctor, who was on his knees applying a stethoscope. W. G. Dill stood at the cop's side, his hands in his pockets, scowling. There was no sign that anyone had got interested in the moss on the rocks. I backed out again without bruising anyone se-

riously and circled around to the rose garden to rejoin Wolfe.

He wasn't there.

He was gone. The two pots were there on the floor, but he wasn't anywhere.

The damn hippopotamus, I thought. He'll get lost. He'll be kidnapped. He'll fall in a hole. He'll catch cold.

I went back down to the men's room on the second floor and yelled his name in front of the private apartments, but no soap. I went up to the fourth, to the orchid benches. No. I went down to the ground floor and out the main exit and to where I had parked the car on 46th Street, but he wasn't in it. It was trying to snow in March gusts. I spat at a snowflake as it sailed by. Our little Nero, I thought, out on such a night and no coat. The big fat flumpus. I'll put salt on his grapefruit. It was a quarter past five.

I stood and applied logic to it. Had he taken a taxi home? Not the way he hated taxis. What, as I had left him standing there, what had been his most burning desires? That was easy. To shoot me, to sit down, and to drink beer. He couldn't shoot me because I wasn't there. Where might he have found a chair?



I went back and paid four bits to get in again, mounted one flight, and made my way across the grain of the traffic to the corner of the room where a door said OFFICE. People were standing around, and one of them plucked at my sleeve as I put my hand on the knob, and I recognized him. It was the gray-haired geezer I had seen on previous days looking at Anne from a distance as if he was saying his prayers. He looked worried under an old felt hat, and his fingers on my sleeve were trembling.

"Please," he said, "if you're going in there will you please give this to Miss Anne Tracy?"

"Is she in there?"

"Yes, she went in—I saw her go in—"

I took the folded piece of paper and said I'd see that Miss Tracy got it, opened the door and entered, and was in an anteroom containing a tired-looking woman at a desk. I smiled at her irresistibly to keep her quiet, unfolded the piece of paper, and read what it said.

*Dear daughter,*

*I hope there is no serious trouble. I am outside here. If there is anything I can do let me know.*

*Your father.*

It was written with a pen-

cil on cheap white paper. I folded it up again, thinking that one of the first jobs to tackle would be to buy my father-in-law a new hat.

"Do you want something?" the woman at the desk asked in a sad and skeptical tone. I told her I had an important message for Miss Anne Tracy, and she opened her mouth and then decided not to use it any more and motioned to one of three doors. I opened it and passed through, and the first thing I saw was Nero Wolfe sitting in a chair almost big enough for him, with a tray on a table beside him holding four beer bottles, and a glass in his hand.

You can't beat logic.

On another chair right in front of him, facing him, was Anne. Propped against a desk at the left was Lewis Hewitt. A man I didn't know was at another desk writing something, and another one was standing by a window with Fred Updegraff.

Wolfe saw me enter. I saw him see me. But he went on talking to Anne without dropping a stitch:

"...a matter of nerves, yes, but primarily it depends on oxygenation of the blood. The most remarkable case of self-control I ever saw was in Albania in 1915, displayed by



a donkey, I mean a four-legged donkey, which toppled over a cliff—”

I was standing by him. “Excuse me,” I said icily. “For you, Miss Tracy.” I extended the paper.

She looked up at me, looked at the paper, took it, unfolded it, and read it.

“Oh,” she said. She glanced around and looked up at me again. “Where is he?”

“Outside.”

“But I...” Her brow wrinkled. “Would you tell him... no... I’ll go....”

She got up and started for the door. I went to open it for her, saw that Hewitt had the same intention, quickened my step, beat him to the knob, and swung it open. Anne was walking through, and then she wasn’t. A man barging through from the other side ran smack into her and nearly knocked her over, and I grabbed her arm to help her get her balance. I beat Hewitt to that too.

“Pardon me,” the intruder said. His eyes swept the room and everything in it and went back to Anne. “Are you Anne Tracy?”

“She is Miss Anne Tracy,” Hewitt said, “and that is scarcely the way—”

Anne was sidling by to get to the door. The man put an arm out to stop her.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to see my father.”

“Where is he?”

Another arm got in on it. Fred Updegraff arrived and his hand came out and contacted the intruder’s ribs and gave a healthy shove.

“Learn some manners,” he said gruffly. “What business is—”

“Permit me,” I interposed. “This is Inspector Cramer of the Homicide Squad.” I indicated another man on the door sill. “And Sergeant Purley Stebbins.”

“Even so,” Lewis Hewitt said in a tone of displeasure. “It is scarcely necessary to restrain Miss Tracy by force. She merely wishes to speak with her father. I am Lewis Hewitt, Inspector. May I ask—”

“Where is your father?”

“Just outside the door,” I said.

“Go with her, Purley. All right, Miss Tracy. Come back in here, please.”

Purley went out at her heels. That cleared the doorway for another man to enter, W. G. Dill. His lips were in a thinner line than ever, and without looking at anybody or saying anything he crossed to a chair by the rear wall and sat down.



"Hello, Wolfe," Cramer said.

"How do you do, Inspector." With only two grunts, one under par, Wolfe got to his feet and moved forward. "Come, Archie. We'll only be in the way."

"No," Cramer said meaningly.

"No?" Wolfe halted. "No what?"

"Goodwin won't be in the way. On the contrary. At least until I get through with him."

"He's going to drive me home."

"Not now he isn't."

"May I ask what this is all about?" Hewitt was still displeased. "This surveillance of Miss Tracy? This attitude—"

"Certainly, Mr. Hewitt. Sit down." Cramer waved at chairs, of which there were plenty. "Everybody sit down. This is going to be—ah, Miss Tracy, did you find your father? Good. Pull that chair around for Miss Tracy, Purley. Sit down, Goodwin."

I attended to the chair for Anne myself, then turned to face the Inspector.

"No, thanks. I'm nervous."

"You are," Cramer growled. "The day you're nervous I'll shave with a butter knife. How did you know that man had been shot in the top of

the head when you called me on the phone?"

Some of them made noises, but Anne didn't. Her head jerked up and her nostrils tightened, but that was all. I admired her more all the time. Hewitt exclaimed, "Shot!" and Fred Updegraff demanded, "What man?"

"Harry Gould," I told him. I grinned at Cramer. "As you see, I didn't blab around. I saved it for you—"

"How did you know?"

"Good heavens," Hewitt said blankly. He rose half out of his chair and then dropped back again.

"It was nothing to write home about," I said. "I looked at his face and he looked dead. I smelled cordite. I saw a jagged hole in the moss at the back of his head, and the moss was puffed out. I couldn't see the top of his head from where I was, but I felt for it, and my finger went in a hole. By the way, don't build a theory from some blood on the grass about where his knees were. I wiped my finger there."

I saw Anne gulp.

"Confound you," Wolfe said angrily, "I might have known."

"Why did you go to him in the first place?" Cramer demanded. "You climbed the



ropes and ran to him. Why did you do that?"

"Because he didn't move when Miss Tracy threw water on him, and because I had already noticed that his leg and foot were twisted in an unnatural position."

"Why did you notice that?"

"Ah," I said, "now you've got me. I give up. I'm trapped. Why does anybody notice anything?"

"Especially a nervous man like you," he said sarcastically. "What were you doing there? Why did you come here?"

"I brought Mr. Wolfe."

"Did he come here on a case?"

"You know damn well he didn't. He never goes anywhere on a case. He came to look at flowers."

"Why were you there at that particular exhibit?"

"For the same reason that other people were. To watch Miss Tracy dabble her feet in the pool."

"Did you know Miss Tracy? Or Gould?"

"No."

"Did you, Wolfe?"

"No," Wolfe said.

Cramer resumed with me. "And smelling the cordite and seeing the hole in the moss and feeling the one in his head, how did you figure

someone had shot him? By lying hidden in the bushes and aiming through a crack in the rocks?"

"Now have a heart, Inspector." I grinned at him. "If you're not careful you'll trap me again. At the moment I didn't do much figuring, but that was over an hour ago and you know what my brain is when it gets started. Gould took his nap at the same hour each day, and he put his head in exactly the same spot—"

"How do you know that?"

"Mr. Wolfe has been sending me here to look at orchids. That's a matter I'd rather not dwell on. The pile of rocks was only eight or nine inches from his head. Place a gun among the rocks at the right height, wedge it in, aimed the right way, and replace the moss. The rocks and the moss would muffle the report so that no one would notice it in that big noisy room—or what if they did notice it? Fasten a string to the trigger—make it green string so it won't be seen among the foliage. At the proper time, which will be anywhere between four and four thirty, pull the string."

"Pull the string how? From where?"

"Oh, suit yourself." I waved a hand. "Hide in the



bushes and after you've pulled it sneak out the door at the back of the exhibit that leads to the corridor. Or if the string's long enough, run it through the crack at the bottom of the door and then you can pull it from the corridor, which would be safer. Or if you want to be fancy, tie the string to the doorknob and it will be pulled by whoever opens the door from the corridor side. Or if you want to be still fancier, run the string around the trunk of a bush and have its end a loop dangling into the pool, and take off your shoes and stockings and swish your feet around in the pool, and catch the loop with your toes and give it a jerk, and who would ever suspect—"

"That's a lie!"

That blurted insult came from Fred Updegraff. He confronted me, and his chin was not only serious, it was bigoted, and anyone might have thought I was a caterpillar eating his best peony.

"Nonsense!" came another blurt, from W. G. Dill, who didn't leave his chair.

"It seems to me—" Lewis Hewitt began sarcastically.

"Pooh," I said. "You cavaliers. I wouldn't harm a hair of her head. Don't you suppose the Inspector had

thought of that? I know how his mind works—"

"Can it," Cramer growled. "The way your mind works." His eyes were narrowed at me. "We'll discuss that a little later, when I'm through with Miss Tracy. The gun was wedged among the rocks and covered with the moss, and the string was tied to the trigger, and the string was green, so you're quite a guesser—"

"How long was the string?"

"Long enough to reach. What else do you know?"

I shook my head. "If you can't tell guessing from logic—"

"What else do you know?"

"Nothing at present."

"We'll see." Cramer looked around. "If there's a room where I can go with Miss Tracy—"

The man who had been writing at a desk stood up. "Certainly, Inspector. That door there—"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Jim Hawley of the house staff. I don't think there's anyone in there—I'll see—"

But there was an interruption. The door to the ante-room opened, and in came a delegation of four. In front was a dick whom I recognized as a member of the squad,



next came a lady, next my friend Pete with unmatched eyes, and bringing up the rear a cop in uniform. The lady wore a gray coat with a squirrel collar and had a blue leather bag under her arm, but I didn't presume on old acquaintance by speaking to her.

## 4

Cramer took in the influx with a glance and asked, "What have you got, Murphy?"

"Yes, sir." The dick stood with his shoulders straight. He was the military type. "At or about half past four o'clock this young woman was seen in the corridor opening the door leading to the Rucker and Dill exhibit."

"Who saw her?"

"I did," Pete spoke up.

"Who are you?"

"I am Pete Arango. I work for Updegraff Nurseries. That's my boss there, Mr. Updegraff. I went through the door at the back of our exhibit, into the corridor, to get some cookies, and I—"

"To get what?"

"Cookies. I eat cookies. In my locker in the corridor."

"Okay. You eat cookies. And saw what?"

"I saw her opening that door. Rucker and Dill. After

all what happened I remembered it and I told a cop—"

"Did she go inside?"

Pete shook his head. "She saw me and she shut the door."

"Did she say anything?"

"No, she didn't have anything to say."

"Did you?"

"No, I went to my locker and got the cookies, and she must have gone away because when I came back she wasn't there. Then when I got back on the floor and saw—"

Cramer turned to the young woman. "What's your name?"

"None of your business!" she snapped.

"Yes, sir," the dick said. "She won't co-operate."

"What do you mean, I won't co-operate?" She was indignant, but I wouldn't have said she looked scared. "I admit I opened the door and looked in, don't I? I got into the corridor by mistake and I was looking for a way out. And why should I have to tell you my name and get my name in the papers—"

"Why didn't you get out the way you got in?"

"Because I got in away around at the other side, and I just thought...hey! Hello there!"

Everyone looked the way she was looking, which re-



sulted in all of us looking at Fred Updegraff. Fred himself turned red and was turning redder, as he met her gaze.

"Well," he said, and seemed to think he had said something.

"It was you," she said, "there with the door open, stooping down there peeking in when you heard me."

"Sure," Fred acknowledged, "sure it was me."

"The Rucker and Dill door?" Cramer demanded.

"Yes."

"Were you looking for a way out too?"

"No."

"What were you looking for?"

"I was—" Fred swallowed it. He looked red and flustered, and then all of a sudden he looked relieved. There was no telling what sort of idea had popped into his head that relieved him and pleased him so much, but he certainly showed it. He spoke louder as if he didn't want anyone to miss it: "I was looking at Miss Tracy!" I've been doing that all week. My name is Fred Updegraff and I'm an exhibitor here. I was looking at Miss Tracy!" It sounded as if he almost thought he was singing it.

Cramer was unimpressed. "I'll have a talk with you

later, Mr. Updegraff." He turned to the sergeant. "Purley, you stay here with Mr. Updegraff and Goodwin and this young woman and this man Pete. Murphy, come with me and Miss Tracy. The rest of you can go if you want—"

"Just a minute." Hewitt, who hadn't sat down again, moved a step. "I am Lewis Hewitt."

"So I understand," Cramer grunted.

"And I have responsibilities here as the Honorary Chairman of the Committee. Without any wish to interfere with the performance of your duties, I feel that Miss Tracy, who is only a young girl, should properly be protected from any undue annoyance or unpleasantness—"

"Allow me, Hewitt," W. G. Dill had got up and walked over. He faced Cramer. "I'm Miss Tracy's employer and I suppose I ought to look after her. If you don't mind I'll go along with her."

I was keeping tabs on Anne, knowing that the best time to get the lowdown on a woman is when she's under stress. I thought she was doing fine. After four straight days in a glaring spotlight as the star attraction of a flower show, with



such by-products as having her picture taken with Billy Rose and dining out with Lewis Hewitt, here she was kerplunk in the mire with murder-mud ready to splatter all over her, and so far she had done nothing to forfeit my respect, even when I had explained how you could pull a trigger with your toes. But at this juncture she wasn't so hot. She might have spoken up with something suitable about being armored in her virtue and not needing to be looked after by any sourpuss employer or millionaire orchid fancier, but all she did was deadpan W. G. Dill without opening her trap. I began to suspect she either had depths I hadn't plumbed or was a bit limited in the mental area—but don't get me wrong, I was still faithful. Even as a deadpan, the sight of her face—for the mental side of life you can go to the library.

She went off with Cramer. Cramer informed both Hewitt and Dill that it wasn't necessary for them to protect her against annoyance, and took her and Murphy through the door that had been indicated to an inner room. But not without another brief delay.

"Mr. Cramer! If you please?"

It was Nero Wolfe speaking. I concealed a grin. Of course he was going to request, or demand, depending on which he thought would work best, that I be allowed to drive him home. I hoped Cramer would say yes. Then, after we got in the sedan and he started raving, I would let him rave, and when he was through I would stick my little dagger in his ribs and give it a twist. It wasn't often I had a chance like that.

Cramer had turned. "What do you want?"

"I want," Wolfe said, "to finish a discussion I was having with Mr. Hewitt about orchids."

"Go ahead—"

"And not in a menagerie. In decent privacy. We can find a room somewhere."

"Go ahead. I said the rest of you could go—"

"And Mr. Goodwin must be present to take notes. He will be available when you want him. You can't legally detain him, anyhow, unless you are prepared—"

Cramer snorted in exasperation. "Oh, for God's sake. Discuss orchids. All I want is Goodwin when I want him."

He crossed the sill with the other two, and the door was closed behind them. I glared at Wolfe without any at-



tempt to cover it, and Purley Stebbins gazed at him suspiciously. Neither of us was making any impression on Wolfe, who had got up from his chair and was speaking to Lewis Hewitt in an undertone. Hewitt, frowning, nodded without enthusiasm, and moved toward the door to the anteroom with Wolfe at his heels.

"Come, Archie," Wolfe said.

Purley blocked me. "Where you going?"

"The other end of the anteroom," Hewitt said. "A room there."

Purley hated it. He did hate it. Me detained and going through doors like that. He didn't even smile when I playfully stuck a thumb in his ribs as I went by.

The room at the other end of the anteroom wasn't much more than a cubbyhole, with one window, a couple of small wooden tables, and four wooden chairs. The sad woman in the anteroom came in and turned on the light and went out again and closed the door. Wolfe scowled at the skimpy chairs and darted a glance at me, but I ignored it because I was in no mood to lug in the comfortable seat he had left in the other room. He compressed his lips and sat down, taking care to

center himself on what seat there was.

"Sit down, Mr. Hewitt," he invited.

Hewitt stood. "This is an odd performance." He looked at me and back at Wolfe. "What you can possibly have to say to me so confidential as to require—"

"I have," Wolfe said brusquely. "I assure you."

"About orchids? That seems hardly—"

"Not orchids. Murder. I know who shot that man."

Hewitt's eyes opened wide. "You know who shot him?"

"I do."

"But my dear Mr. Wolfe." Hewitt was displeased but courteous. "That is scarcely a matter to discuss confidentially with me. The proper authorities—"

"I prefer to discuss it with you first. I suggest that we keep our voices as low as possible. It's quite possible that a policeman has his ear at the door—"

"Bosh! This melodramatic—"

"Please, Mr. Hewitt. Don't sneer at melodrama; that's only a point of view. I wish to give you a fresh point of view on the death of Harry Gould. The shot was fired by my assistant, Mr. Goodwin. —Please let me finish. First



to establish the fact. Archie?"

I had sat down. The fat bum had taken my dagger away from me. I looked at him and said bitterly, "What if I let you down?"

"You won't. Anyway, you can't. I saw the piece of string you brushed off of it. And I wish to say that your performance this afternoon has been satisfactory. Completely satisfactory throughout. Was there a tug when you picked it up? That's the only detail I lack."

"What the devil is all this?" Hewitt demanded without courtesy. "If you actually—"

"Please, Mr. Hewitt. And keep your voice down. I'll state the situation as briefly as possible. Should I report it to Mr. Cramer—"

"There was a tug," I said. "A little jerk. I didn't especially notice it at the time because I was sore as hell."

Wolfe nodded. "I know you were. My report to Mr. Cramer would be this: that Lewis Hewitt said he had lost his cane. A little later, in the corridor on the third floor, we saw the cane lying on the floor with its crook against the crack under the door leading to the Rucker and Dill exhibit. That was at twenty minutes past four.

Mr. Goodwin picked up the cane, and as he did so felt a tug. He calls it a little jerk, but he is exceptionally strong and was in a savage emotional state. Looped on the crook of the cane was a piece of green string which he brushed off before he handed it to its owner."

"I saw no string," Hewitt snapped.

"Maybe not," Wolfe admitted. "People who inherit wealth don't have to bother to see things. But certainly Mr. Goodwin saw it, and so did I, and he felt the tug. The tug was unquestionably the pulling of the trigger and the breaking of the string. That would be my report to Mr. Cramer, since those are the facts."

"I tell you I saw no string!"

"But we did. Keep your voice down, Mr. Hewitt. And Mr. Goodwin touched it. Surely you don't suppose we cooked this up?"

"I don't—" Hewitt looked at the door, and then at me, and then back at Wolfe. "No. I don't suppose you did. But it's inconceivable—" He stopped and stared. "What's that?"

"The piece of string," Wolfe said.

The son of a gun had pulled it out of his vest pock-



et. I got up for a look, and it was it. I said, "Good here," and sat down. Hewitt sat down too. He looked as if he had to do something and that was all he could think of.

"You and Mr. Dill and Mr. Goodwin left me there," Wolfe said. "Standing there alone. He left those plants on the floor—and by the way, I have better hassellis than those, much better, my own growing. At a certain point my head began to work, which was remarkable under the circumstances. I don't say that I foresaw this moment precisely, but I saw enough to impel me to go to the corridor and find this piece of string on the floor and pick it up. It is indubitably the piece that was looped on the crook of your cane. By comparing it with the piece left attached to the trigger, Mr. Cramer can establish our surmise as a certainty. That is, he can if I let him have it. Do you think I should do that?"

"Good heavens," Hewitt muttered. "My stick. Good heavens, do you realize—*my* stick!"

"Exactly," Wolfe agreed. "Don't talk so loud. I do realize. Whoever rigged up that affair made a loop at the end of the string that could be passed under the door. It

may have been an after-thought, ad libbing, suggested by the sight of your cane where you had left it, to pass the loop over the cane and leave it lying there for the first passer-by to pick up. If that hadn't happened before half past four I imagine he would have attended to it himself. I do realize what a story that will be for the newspapers. I doubt if it would lead to any official suspicion that you rigged it up yourself, but the public mind—at least some of it—is even less subtle than Mr. Cramer's."

"Good heavens," Hewitt moaned. "This..." He clenched his fingers, and released them, and clenched them again. "This is horrible."

"Oh, I wouldn't say horrible. Disagreeable."

"Horrible. For me. For a Hewitt. Horrible!"

"Perhaps for a Hewitt," Wolfe conceded. "Then all the more reason why this may interest you. I want those orchid plants. All three of them."

That changed things entirely. The change, showing itself on Hewitt's face, took perhaps two seconds all told. Up to then nothing had been threatened but his peace of mind or maybe his rep-



utation, at most his life and liberty. But this was something else again; this threatened his property. It put stone in his heart and steel in his jaw. He eyed Wolfe with a shrewd and stubborn stare.

"I see," he hissed. "So that's it. To put it plainly, blackmail. Blackmail! No! I won't do it!"

Wolfe sighed. "You won't?"

"No!"

"Very well. Then I won't get the orchids, but I'll be saved a lot of trouble. Archie, get Mr. Cramer in here. Tell him it's urgent. I'll not perch on this confounded milking stool any longer than I have to."

I arose and started for the door, not hastily. I knew it was in the bag because Hewitt hadn't raised his voice. It was only a war of nerves.

"Blackmail," Hewitt said through his teeth.

"Go on, Archie," Wolfe said. I put my hand on the knob.

"Wait a minute," Hewitt said. I turned my head but kept my hand on the knob.

"One of them," Hewitt said. "Select any one."

I went back and sat down.

Wolfe sighed and shook his head. "All three. I won't

haggle. I'm going to have to work for them. You may call it blackmail to relieve your feelings, but what about me? It's possible that this evidence I'm withholding from Mr. Cramer is vital evidence, and I don't intend to shield a murderer. If I withhold it I'll have to find the murderer myself, and enough evidence to convict him without this. And if I fail I'll have to tell Mr. Cramer all about it, which would be deplorable, and shall have to return the plants to you, which would be unthinkable. So I shan't fail."

"Two of them," Hewitt said. "Two plants. To be delivered to you when you have satisfactorily performed your part of the bargain." He may have inherited it, but he certainly knew how to hang onto it.

"No," Wolfe said. "All three, and I take them home with me now. You can trust me. I can't trust you, because if it turns out that you killed the man yourself and I get you for it, I'd never get them."

"Do you—" Hewitt was goggle-eyed. "You have the effrontery—you dare to suggest—"

"Not at all. I suggest nothing. I consider contingencies, and I'd be a fool if I did—"



n't." Wolfe put a hand on the edge of the table for leverage and lifted himself from the milking stool. "I'm going home where there is a chair to sit on, and go to work. If you'll please take Mr. Goodwin upstairs and give him the plants so I can take them with me..."

## 5

Of course I had a card up my sleeve. Wolfe had taken my dagger away and done the twisting himself in Hewitt's ribs instead of his own, but I still had a card.

I had a chance to make arrangements for playing it while Wolfe went around, after we returned to the other room, inviting people to lunch. That was actually what he did. Anyhow he invited W. G. Dill and Fred Updegraff; I heard that much. Apparently he intended to spend the evening thinking it out, and have them all to lunch the next day to announce the result. Hewitt declined my help on the orchid portage from upstairs. It seemed as if he didn't like me. When Wolfe had finished the inviting he calmly opened, without knocking, the door into the room where Cramer had gone

with Anne, and disappeared within.

I approached Purley Stebins, stationed on a chair near the door to the ante-room, and grinned at him reassuringly. He was always upset in the presence of either Wolfe or me, and the two of us together absolutely gave him the fidgets. He gave me a glancing eye and let out a growl.

"Look, Purley," I said cordially, "here's one for the notebook. That lady over there." She was sitting by the far wall with her coat still on and the blue leather bag under her arm. "She's a phony. She's really a Chinese spy. So am I. We were sent to do this job by Hoo Flung Dung. If you don't believe it watch us talk code."

"Go to hell," Purley suggested.

"Yeah? You watch."

I ambled across the room and stood right in front of her so Purley couldn't see her face.

"Hello, dear old friend," I said not too loud.

"You've got a nerve," she said. "Beat it."

"Nerve? Me?"

"Beat it. 'Dear old friend!' I never saw you before."

"Aha!" I smiled down at her. "Not a chance in the



world. If I tell them I saw you in that corridor at half past three waiting for someone, they'll believe me, don't think they won't, and you'll have to start all over again about opening that door at half past four because you got there by mistake and were looking for a way out. Think fast and don't tell me to beat it again or we part forever. And control your face and keep your voice down."

Her fingers were twisting under a fold of the coat. "What do you want?"

"I want to get to know you better. I'll be leaving here in a minute to drive my boss home, but I'll be back before long for a little talk with the Inspector. Then I'll go to the news movie in Grand Central and you'll be there in the back row. Won't you?"

"Yes."

"You're sure."

"Yes."

"You'd better be. If you are, it's all right that you never saw me before. If you put over your song and dance there may be a tail on you when you leave. Don't try to shake him. We'll take care of that when we leave the movie. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Righto. Stick to me and you'll wear black orchids."

I started to go back to Purley to kid him out of any suspicions that might be pecking at the shell, but a door opened and Wolfe emerged, and Cramer stood on the sill and spoke:

"Purley! Goodwin's taking Wolfe home and will be back in half an hour."

"Yeah," Purley said disrespectfully.

"Come, Archie," Wolfe said.

We waited in the ante-room, and in a few minutes there came Lewis Hewitt, followed by a guard balancing the glass case on his upper limbs. The transfer was made to me without ceremony, after Wolfe peered through the glass for a good gloating look, and off we went. When we got to where I had parked the car Wolfe got in the back, always a major operation, and I deposited the case on the floor at his feet. Ten minutes later we arrived at the old house on West 35th Street near the river, and the sigh he heaved as he deposited his weight and volume in a chair that had been made for them was a record for both depth and duration.

"You'd better get back up there," he said. "I regret it and I resent it, but I gave Mr. Cramer my word. Theo-



dore will attend to the plants. Get back for dinner if you can. We're having saucisse minuit."

He was being sweet. "I didn't give Cramer my word," I suggested.

"No." He wiggled a finger at me. "Archie! No shenanigan."

"I'll see. But I need refreshment."

I went to the kitchen and put two bowls of crackers and milk where they belonged, meanwhile chinning with Fritz and getting sniffs of the sausage he was preparing. Eating crackers and milk and smelling saucisse minuit simultaneously is like sitting with your arm around a country lass while watching Hedy Lamarr raise the temperature. I told Fritz to save some for me if I was late getting back, and departed.

It was 7:15 when I entered the big inside room of the offices on the second floor of Grand Central Palace. There were a dozen or more people in there, most of whom were new to me, but including W. G. Dill and Lewis Hewitt. Updegraff wasn't in sight, and neither was Anne Tracy, and neither was the girl friend I had a date with. Her absence made it desirable to get troublesome with-

out delay, but it wasn't necessary because in a couple of minutes the door to the inner room opened and Pete Arango came out, and I got a sign from Purley and went in. Cramer was there with a dick I had never seen and Murphy with a notebook. His unlighted cigar was chewed halfway to the end and he looked unjubilant.

"Now," I said brightly, taking a seat, "what can I do to help?"

"Join a circus," Cramer said. "By God, you'll clown at your own funeral. What have you been hanging around here all week for?"

That was all it amounted to, a bunch of whats and whys and whens and four pages of the notebook filled, and my wit wasted on the homicide squad as usual. As a matter of fact, the wit was below par because I wanted to get out of there for my date, since it appeared that she had had her session and been turned loose. So I kept it fairly succinct and tried to co-operate on details, and we were about running out of material when the door opened and in came an undersized dick with a flat nose. Cramer looked at him and demanded:

"What the hell are you doing back here?"



The dick's mouth opened and shut again. It didn't want to say what it had to say. On the second try it got it out:

"I lost her."

Cramer groaned and looked speechless.

"It wasn't my fault," the dick said, "I swear it wasn't, Inspector. That damn subway. A local rolled in and stopped and she hung back like waiting for an express and then the last second she dived through—"

"Can it," Cramer said. "Choke on it. My God. The wonder to me is that—what does it matter what the wonder to me is? What's that name and address?"

Murphy flipped back through the pages of his notebook and stopped at one. "Ruby Lawson. One fourteen Sullivan Street."

The dick got out his memo book and wrote it down. "I don't think it was deliberate," he said. "I think she just changed her mind. I think she just—"

"You think? You say you think?"

"Yes, Inspector, I—"

"Get out. Take another man, take Dorsey, and go to that address and look into her. Don't pick her up. Keep on her. And for God's sake

don't think. It's repulsive, the idea of you thinking."

The thinker made himself scarce. Naturally I was now itching to be on my way, so I leaned back comfortably and crossed my legs and began, "You know, when I am tailing someone and they go into a subway station, it is my invariable custom—"

"You can go," Cramer snapped. "On out. If I want you, which God forbid, I know where to get you."

"But I think—"

"I said go!"

I got up leisurely and went out leisurely, and on my way through the outer room paused for a friendly word with Purley, but when I got to the stairs outside I stepped on it. It was at least a hundred to one that I had been stood up, but nevertheless I hotfooted it to the Lexington Avenue entrance of Grand Central Station and on to the newsreel theater, parted with money, and entered. She wasn't in the back row, and I didn't waste time inspecting any other rows. Since she had given a phony name and address to Cramer, and had been smart enough to make it one that matched the RL on her bag, I figured she probably wouldn't be letting grass come up between her toes. Out in the lighted



corridor I took a hasty glance at a page in my memo book, considered patronizing the subway and decided no, and headed for 46th Street where I had parked the car.

My high-hatting the subway nearly lost me a trick, for it was slow work at that hour getting around on to Park Avenue, but once headed downtown I made good time.

Number 326 Morrow Street, down at the southern fringe of Greenwich Village, was one of those painted brick fronts that were painted too long ago. There were supposed to be two lights on black iron brackets at the entrance to the vestibule, but only one was working. I parked across the street and moseyed over. Inside the vestibule was the usual row of mailboxes and bell pushes, and the card below one of them had LASHER printed on it. That was okay, but what made it interesting was that on the same card, above LASHER, another name was printed: GOULD. I was leaning over looking at it when the inside door opened and there she was.

It was easy to see that high-hatting the subway had nearly cost me a trick, because she had a traveling bag in her hand and was stoop-

ing to pick up a suitcase with the hand she had used to open the door with.

"Allow me," I said, extending a hand. "That looks heavy."

She gave me one startled glance and dropped the suitcase and sat down on it and started to cry. She didn't cover her face with her hands or anything like that, she just burst.

I waited a minute for a lull. "Look," I said, "you're blocking the way in case anyone wants to come in or go out. Let's take these things—"

"You dirty—" The crying interfered with it. "You lousy—"

"No," I said firmly. "No, sister. You stood me up. You humiliated me." I picked up the traveling bag which she had also dropped. "Let's go."

"He's dead," she said. She wasn't bothering about small things like tears. "He's dead, ain't he? Hasn't anybody got any heart at all? The way I had to sit up there—sit there and pretend—" She stopped and chewed her lip, and all of a sudden she stood up and blazed at me. "Who are you, anyway? How did you know who I was? How did you get here so quick? You're a detective, that's what you are, you're a lousy detective—"



"No." I gripped her arm. "If you mean a city employee, no. My name is Archie Goodwin and I work for Nero Wolfe. My car's outside and I'm taking you up to Wolfe's place for a little conference. He's got one of the biggest hearts in the world, encased in a ton of blubber."

Of course she balked. She even defied me to call a cop, but then she started to cry again, and during that deluge I picked up the bag and suitcase and herded her out and across the street to the car. All the way up to 35th Street she cried and I had to lend her a handkerchief.

With my hands full of luggage, I had her precede me up the stoop and ring the bell for Fritz to let us in. He did so, and helped her off with her coat like a head waiter helping the Duchess of Windsor, one of the nicest things about Fritz being that to him anything in a skirt is a lady.

"Mr. Wolfe is at dinner," he announced.

"I'll bet he is. Take Miss Lasher to the office."

I took the luggage with me to the dining room, set it down against the wall, and approached the table. There he was, floating in clouds of

bliss. He looked from the luggage to me.

"What's that? Those aren't your bags."

"No, sir," I agreed. "They are the property of an object I brought with me named Rose Lasher, who may help you hang onto those orchids. She is bereaved and hungry and I'm hungry. Shall I stay with her in the office—"

"Hungry? Bring her in here. There's plenty."

I went to the office and returned with her. She had stopped crying but sure was forlorn.

"Miss Lasher," I said, "this is Nero Wolfe. He never discusses business at the table, so we'll eat first and go into things later." I held a chair for her.

"I don't want to eat," she said in a thin voice. "I can't eat."

She ate seven sausages, which was nothing against her grief. Fritz's saucisse minute would make Gandhi a gourmet.

## 6

"And now," Wolfe demanded, "what is Miss Lasher here for?"

Dinner was over and we were settled in the office. Wolfe was seated behind his desk, leaning back with his



fingers laced over his sausage mausoleum, his eyes half closed. I was at my desk, and Rose was in a red leather chair facing Wolfe. The set of her lips didn't indicate that the meal had made her one of us.

I recited particulars, briefly but completely.

"Indeed." Wolfe inclined his head a sixteenth of an inch. "Satisfactory, Archie." The head turned. "You must have a lot to tell, Miss Lasher. Tell it, please."

She looked sullen. "Tell what?"

"Start at the end. Where did you hide in that corridor from half past three to half past four and whom and what did you see?"

"I didn't hide. I went out and went back and the second time I saw that man opening that door. Then I went—"

"No. That won't do. You were waiting to intercept Mr. Gould when he came out, and you hid. The police won't like it that you lied to them and gave them a false name and address and were running away. So I may not tell the police if you tell me the truth."

"I wasn't running away. I was merely going to visit a friend."

It was certainly a job to

steam her off the envelope. She stuck for ten minutes in spite of all Wolfe said, and she didn't loosen up until after I brought the luggage from the dining room and went through it. I had to dig the keys out of her handbag, and at one point I thought she was going to start clawing and kicking, but finally she stopped squealing and only sat in the chair and made holes in me with her eyes.

I did it thoroughly and methodically. When I got through, the suitcase was nearly filled with female garments and accessories, mostly intimate, and piled on Wolfe's desk was a miscellaneous collection not so female. Shirts and ties, three photographs of Harry Gould, a bunch of snapshots, a bundle of letters tied with string, the top one addressed to Rose, various other items, among them a large Manila envelope fastened with a clasp.

I opened the envelope and extracted the contents. There were only two things in it and neither of them made my heart jump. One was a garage job-card with grease smears on it. At the top was printed, "Nelson's Garage, Salamanca, New York," and judging from the list of re-



pairs required the car must have had an argument with a mountain. It was dated 4-11-40. The other item was sheets of printed matter. I unfolded them. They had been torn from the *Garden Journal*, which I would have recognized from the page and type without the running head, and the matter was an article entitled "Kurume Yellows in America" by Lewis Hewitt. I lifted the brows and handed it to Wolfe. Then my eye caught something I had missed on the garage job-card, something written in pencil on the reverse side. It was a name, "Pete Arango," and it was written in a small fine hand quite different from the scribbling on the face of the card. There was another sample of a similar small fine hand there in front of me, on the envelope at the top of the bundle addressed to Rose Lasher, and I untied the string and got out the letter and found that it was signed "Harry."

I passed the outfit to Wolfe and he looked it over.

He grunted. "This will interest the police." His eyes went to Rose. "Even more than your—"

"No!" she cried. She was wriggling. "You won't...oh, for God's sake, you mustn't—"

"Where did you hide in that corridor?"

She unloaded. She had hid in the corridor, yes, from the time I saw her there until some time after she had opened the door of the exhibit to look in. She had hid behind the packing cases and shrubs against the rear wall of the corridor. The sound of commotion had alarmed her, and she had sneaked out and gone to the main room and pushed into the crowd around the exhibit and I had returned her bag to her, which she had dropped without knowing it.

What and whom had she seen hiding in the corridor?

Nothing. Maybe a few people, she didn't know who, passing by. Nothing and no one she remembered, except Fred Updegraff.

Of course she was lying. She must have seen Wolfe and Hewitt and me go by and me pick up the stick. The stick was there at the door that she was watching. And she must have seen someone leave the stick there, stoop down to pass the crook through the loop of the string, probably open the door to get hold of the loop which was ready inside, hidden among the foliage. But Wolfe was handicapped. He didn't dare mention the stick.



That was out. But boy, did he want her to mention it, and incidentally mention who had walked in there with it and left it there?

Didn't he? He did. But she wouldn't. She was stuck tight again, and I never saw Wolfe try harder and get nowhere. Finally he pulled the bluff of phoning Cramer, and even that didn't budge her. Then he gave up and rang for Fritz to bring beer.

At that point the phone rang and I answered it, and heard a familiar voice:

"Archie? Saul Panzer. May I speak to Mr. Wolfe?"

Wolfe took it on his phone, and I learned that during my absence he had got hold of Saul and sent him to the Flower Show. After getting a report he told Saul to drop the line he was on and come to the office. He hung up and leaned back and heaved a sigh, and regarded Rose with no sign of esteem.

"That," he said, "was a man I sent to collect facts about Mr. Gould. I'd rather get them from you. I'll allow you until tomorrow to jog your memory about what you saw in that corridor this afternoon, but you'll tell me about him now. We've got all night. How long had you known him?"

"About two years," she said sullenly.

"Are you his wife? His widow?"

She flushed and her lips tightened. "No. He said he wasn't the marrying kind. That's what he said."

"But he lived on Morrow Street with you?"

"No, he didn't. He only came there. He had a room in one of the houses on the Dill place on Long Island. No one ever knew about Morrow Street—I mean no one out there." She suddenly perked forward and her eyes flashed, and I was surprised at her spunk. "And no one's going to know about it! You hear that? Not while I'm alive they're not!"

"Do you have relatives on Long Island? Do your folks live there?"

"None of your business!"

"Perhaps not," Wolfe conceded. "I wouldn't want it to be. When and where did you meet Mr. Gould?"

She shut her mouth.

"Come," Wolfe said sharply. "Don't irritate me beyond reason. The next time I tell Mr. Goodwin to get Mr. Cramer on the phone it won't be a bluff."

She swallowed. "I was clerking in a store at Richdale and he—I met him there. That was nearly two



years ago, when he was working at Hewitt's."

"Do you mean Lewis Hewitt's?"

"Yes, the Hewitt estate."

"Indeed. What did he do there?"

"He was a gardener and he did some chauffeuring. Then he got fired. He always said he quit, but he got fired."

"When was that?"

"Over a year ago. Winter before last, it was. He was a good greenhouse man, and it wasn't long before he got another job at Dill's. That's about two miles the other side of Richdale. He went to live there in one of the houses."

"Did you live there with him?"

"Me?" She looked shocked and indignant. "I certainly didn't! I was living at home!"

"I beg your pardon. How long have you been living at the place on Morrow Street?"

She shut her mouth.

"Come, Miss Lasher. Even the janitor could tell me that."

"Look here," she said. "Harry Gould was no good. He never was any good. I knew that all the time. But the trouble is you get started, that's what makes the trouble, you get started and

then you keep it up—even if I knew he was no good there was something about him. He always said he wasn't the marrying kind, but when he took me to that place on Morrow Street one day—that was last June, June last year—and said he had rented it, that looked like he wanted a home and maybe to get married after a while, so I quit my job and went there to live. That's how long I've been living there, nine months. At first I was scared, and then I wasn't. There wasn't much money, but there was enough, and then I got scared again on account of the money. I didn't know where he got it."

The seam had ripped and the beans were tumbling out, and Wolfe sat back and let them come.

"He came there one night—he came four or five nights a week—that was one night in December not long before Christmas—and he had over a thousand dollars. He wouldn't let me count it, but it must have been, it might have been two or three thousand. He bought me a watch, and that was all right, but all the money did to me, it scared me. And he began to act different and he didn't come so often. And then about a month ago he



told me he was going to get married."

Her lips went tight and after a moment she swallowed.

"Not to you," Wolfe said.

"Oh, no." She made a noise. "Me? Not so you could notice it. But he wouldn't tell me her name. And he kept having money. He didn't show it to me any more, but several times at night I looked in his pockets and he had a bankbook with over three thousand dollars in it and he always had a big roll of bills. Then yesterday I saw a picture of him in the paper, at the Flower Show with that girl. He hadn't said a word to me about it, not a word. And he hadn't been to Morrow Street for nearly a week, and he didn't come last night, so I went there today to see, and there he was in there with her. When I saw him in there with her I wanted to kill him, I tell you that straight, I wanted to kill him!"

"But you didn't," Wolfe murmured.

Her face worked. "I wanted to!"

"But you didn't."

"No," she said, "I didn't."

"But someone did." Wolfe's voice was silky. "He was murdered. And naturally you are in sympathy with the

effort to find the murderer. Naturally you intend to help —"

"I do not!"

"But my dear Miss Lasher—"

"I'm not your dear Miss Lasher." She leaned to him from the edge of the chair. "I know what I am, I'm a bum, that's what I am and I know it. But I'm not a complete dumbbell, see? Harry's dead, ain't he? Who killed him I don't know, maybe you did, or maybe it was that ten-cent Clark Gable there that thinks he's so slick he can slide uphill. Whoever it was, I don't know and I don't care, all I care about now is one thing, my folks aren't going to know anything about all this, none of it, and if it gets so I can't help it and they find out about it, all they'll have left to do with me is bury me."

She straightened up. "It's my honor," she said. "It's my family's honor."

Whether that came from the movies or wherever it came from, that's exactly what she said. I suspected the movies, considering her cheap crack about me being a ten-cent Clark Gable, which was ridiculous. He simpers, to begin with, and to end with no one can say



I resemble a movie actor, and if they did it would be more apt to be Gary Cooper than Clark Gable.

Anyhow, that's what she said. And apparently she meant it, for although Wolfe went on patiently working at her he didn't get much. She didn't know why Harry had been fired from Hewitt's, or where his sudden wealth had come from, or why he had carefully saved that garage job-card, or why he had been interested in the Kurume yellows, which she had never heard of, and above all she couldn't remember anyone or anything she had seen while she was hiding in the corridor. Wolfe kept at her, and it looked as if she was in for a long hard night.

Around eleven o'clock an interruption arrived in the shape of Saul Panzer. I let him in and he went to the office. With one glance of his sharp gray eyes he added Rose to his internal picture gallery, which meant that she was there for good, and then stood there in his old brown suit—he never wore an overcoat—with his old brown cap in his hand. He looked like a relief veteran, whereas he owned two houses in Brooklyn and was the best head *and* foot detective west of the Atlantic.

"Miss Rose Lasher, Mr. Saul Panzer," Wolfe said. "Archie, get me the atlas."

I shrugged. One of his favorite ways of spending an evening was with the atlas, but with company there? Muttering, "Mine not to reason why," I took it to him, and sat down again while he went on his trip. Pretty soon he closed it and shoved it aside, and addressed Rose:

"Was Mr. Gould ever in Salamanca, New York?"

She said she didn't know.

"Those letters, Archie," Wolfe said.

I got the pile and gave him half and kept half for myself and ran through the envelopes. I was nearly at the bottom when Wolfe emitted a grunt of satisfaction.

"Here's a post card he sent you from Salamanca on December 14th, 1940. A picture of the public library. It says. 'Will be back tomorrow or next day. Love and kisses. Harry.'"

"Then I guess he was there," Rose admitted sullenly.

"Archie, give Saul a hundred dollars." Wolfe handed Saul the post card and the garage job-card. "Go to Salamanca. Take a plane to Buffalo and hire a car. Do you know what Harry Gould looked like?"



"Yes, sir."

"Note the dates—but I don't need to tell you. Go up there and get all you can. Phone me on arrival."

"Yes, sir. If necessary do I pay for it?"

Wolfe grimaced. "Within reason. I want all I can get. Make it two hundred, Archie."

I counted ten twenties into Saul's hand from the stack I got from the safe, and he stuffed it into his pocket and went, as usual, without any foolish questions.

Wolfe resumed with Rose, after ringing for beer. First he spent five minutes trying to get her to remember what Harry had gone to Salamanca for, or anything he had said to her about it, but that was a blank. No savvy Salamanca. Then he returned to former topics, but with a series of flanking movements. He discussed cooking with her. He asked about Harry's abilities and experience as a gardener, his pay, his opinion of Hewitt and Dill, his employers, his drinking habits and other habits.

I was busy getting it down in my notebook, but I certainly wasn't trembling with excitement. I knew that by that method, by the time dawn came Wolfe could accumulate a lot of facts that

she wouldn't know he was getting, and one or two of them might even mean something, but among them would not be the thing we wanted most to know, what and whom she had seen in the corridor. As it stood now we didn't dare to let the cops get hold of her even if we felt like it, for fear Cramer would open her up by methods of his own, and if he learned about the stick episode his brain might leap a barricade and spoil everything. And personally I didn't want to toss her to the lions anyhow, even after that Clark Gable crack.

It was a little after midnight when the doorbell rang again, and I went to answer it and got an unpleasant surprise. There on the stoop was Johnny Keems. I never resented any of the other boys being called in to work on a case, and I didn't actually resent Johnny either, only he gave me a pain in the back of my lap with his smirking around trying to edge in on my job. So I didn't howl with delight at sight of him, and then I nearly did howl, not with delight, when I saw he wasn't alone and what it was that kept him from being alone.

It was Anne Tracy standing behind him. And stand-



ing behind her was Fred Updegraff.

"Greetings," I said, concealing my emotions, and they all entered. And the sap said to her, "This way, Miss Tracy," and started for the office with her!

I stepped around and blocked him. "Some day," I said, "you'll skin your nose. Wait in the front room."

He smiled at me the way he does. I waited until all three of them had gone through the door to the front room and it had closed behind them, and then returned to the office and told Wolfe:

"I didn't know you had called out the army while I was gone. Visitors. The guy who wants my job and is welcome to it at any time, and my future wife, and the wholesome young fellow with the serious chin."

"Ah," Wolfe said. "That's like Johnny. He should have phoned." He grunted. He leaned back. His eyes rested on Rose an instant, then they closed, and his lips pushed out, and in, and out and in.

His eyes opened. "Bring them in here."

"But—" Rose began, starting from her chair.

"It's all right," he assured her.

I wasn't so darned sure it

was all right, but it was him that wanted the black orchids, not me, so I obeyed orders, went to the front room by the connecting doors, and told them to come in. Johnny, who is a gentleman from his skin out, let Anne and Fred pass through ahead of him. She stopped in the middle of the room.

"How do you do," Wolfe said politely. "Forgive me for not rising; I rarely do. May I introduce—Miss Rose Lasher, Miss Anne Tracy. By the way, Miss Lasher has just been telling me that you were engaged to marry Mr. Gould."

"That's a lie," Anne said.

She looked terrible. At no time during the afternoon, when the turmoil had started or when Cramer had announced it was murder or when he had marched her out for examination, had she shown any sign of sag or yellow, but now she looked as if she had taken all she could. At least she did when she entered, and maybe that is why she reacted the way she did to Wolfe's statement and got rough.

"Marry Harry Gould?" she said. "That isn't true!" Her voice trembled with something that sounded like scorn but might have been anything.



Rose was out of her chair and was trembling all over. All right, I thought, Wolfe arranged for it now and he'll get it. She'll scratch Anne's eyes out. I moved a step. But she didn't. She even tried to control her voice.

"You bet it ain't true!" she cried, and that *was* scorn. "Harry wasn't marrying into *your* family! He wasn't marrying any daughter of a thief!"

Anne gawked at her.

Rose spat. "You with your stuckup nose! Why ain't your father in jail where he belongs? And you up there showing your legs like a ten-cent floozie—"

"Archie," Wolfe said sharply. "Take her upstairs."

Rose went on, not even hearing him. I got her suitcase in one hand and gripped her arm with the other and turned her around, and the idea of her nonmarrying Harry marrying another girl, in spite of his being dead, occupied her brain so that she kept right on spitting compliments without even knowing I was propelling her out of the room until we were in the hall. Then she went flat-footed and shut her mouth and glared at me.

"On up two flights," I said. "Or I know how to carry you so you can't bite." I

still had her arm. "Up we go, sister."

She came. I took her into the spare room on the same floor as mine, switched on the lights, and put her suitcase on a chair.

I pointed. "Ten-cent bathroom there. Ten-cent bed there. You won't be needed—"

She sat down on the bed and started to bawl.

I went down to the kitchen and told Fritz, "Lady guest in the south room. She has her own nightie, but would you mind seeing about towels and flowers in her room? I'm busy."

7

Anne slept in my bed that night.

It went like this. When I got back to the office Anne was in my chair with her hands covering her eyes. That was a favorite trick of Johnny's, putting someone else in my chair. He hadn't tried putting himself in it again since the day a couple of years back when I found him there looking at my notebook and sort of lost my temper.

Fred Updegraff was on a chair against the wall and Johnny was standing in front of Wolfe's desk. Evi-



dently Wolfe had made some pointed remarks, for Johnny didn't look at all cocky.

"Yes, sir," he was saying in a hurt tone, "but the Tracys live in humble circumstances and have no phone, so I used my best judgment—"

"You were at the Tracy home? Where is it?"

"In Richdale, Long Island, sir. My instructions were to investigate Anne Tracy. I learned that she lives in Richdale, where the Dill nurseries and offices are. You know she works there—"

"I was aware of that. Be brief."

"Yes, sir. I went out to Richdale and made inquiries. I contacted a young woman—as you know, I am especially effective with young women—"

"Contact is not a verb and I said be brief."

"Yes, sir. The last time you told me that I looked it up in the dictionary and I certainly don't want to contradict you but it says contact is a verb. Transitive or intransitive."

"Contact is not a verb under this roof."

"Yes, sir. I learned that Miss Tracy's father had worked at Dill's for many years, up to about a year ago. He was assistant super-

intendent in charge of broad-leaved evergreens. Dill discovered he was kiting shipments and fired him."

"Kiting shipments?"

"Yes, sir. On shipments to a big estate in Jersey the Cullen place. He would ship two hundred rhododendrons instead of one hundred and collect from Cullen for the extra hundred personally, at half price. It amounted to several thousand dollars."

Anne lifted her head and turned it and made a noise of protest.

"Miss Tracy says it was only sixteen hundred dollars," Johnny said. "I'm telling you what I was told. People exaggerate, and this never was made public, and Tracy wasn't arrested. He stole it to pay a specialist for fixing his son's eyes, something wrong with his son's eyes. He can't get another job. His daughter was Dill's secretary and still is. She gets fifty a week and pays back twenty on what her father stole, so I was told. She refuses to verify those figures."

Wolfe looked at Anne.

"It doesn't matter," Anne said, looking at me. "Does it?"

"I suppose not," Wolfe said, "but if it's wrong, correct it."



"It's wrong. I get twenty dollars a week and I pay back ten."

"Good God," I blurted, "you need a union."

That was probably Freudian. Probably subconsciously I meant she needed a union with me. So I added hastily, "I mean a labor union. Twenty bucks a week!"

Johnny looked annoyed. He's a conservative. "So of course that gave me an in. I went to Miss Tracy's home and explained to her confidentially the hole she was in. That this murder investigation would put the police on to her father's crime, and that she and Dill were compounding a felony, which is against the law, and that the police would have to be fixed or they'd all be in jail, and there was only one man I knew of who could fix it because he was on intimate terms with high police officials, and that was Mr. Nero Wolfe. I said she'd better come and see you immediately, and she came. It was nearly eleven o'clock and there was no train in from Richdale, so we took a taxi."

Johnny shot me a glance, as much as to say, "Try and match that one."

"How far is it to Richdale?" Wolfe demanded.

"From here? Oh, twenty-five miles."

"How much was the taxi fare?"

"Eight dollars and forty cents counting the tip. The bridge—"

"Don't put it on expense. Pay it yourself."

"But—but, sir—Archie always brings people here—"

"Pay it yourself. You are not Archie. Thank God. One Archie is enough. I sent you to get facts, not Miss Tracy—certainly I didn't send you to coerce her with preposterous threats and fables about my relations with the police. Go to the kitchen—no. Go home."

"But, sir—"

"Go home. And for God's sake quit trying to imitate Archie. You'll never make it. Go home."

Johnny went.

Wolfe asked the guests if they would like some beer and they shook their heads. He poured a glass for himself, drank some, wiped his lips, and leaned back.

"Then—" Anne began, but it got caught on the way out. She cleared her throat and swallowed, and tried again. "Then what he said—you said his threat was preposterous. You mean the police won't do that—won't arrest my father?"



"I couldn't say, Miss Tracy. The police are unpredictable. Even so, that is highly improbable." Wolfe's eyes left her. "And you, Mr. Updegraff? By what bold stroke did Mr. Keems bring you along?"

"He didn't bring me." Fred stood up. "I came."

"By pure coincidence? Or automatism?"

Fred moved forward and put a hand on the back of my chair, which Anne was still sitting in. "I'm protecting Miss Tracy."

"Oh. From what?"

"From everything," he said firmly. He appeared to have a tendency to talk too loud, and he looked more serious than ever, and the more serious he looked the younger he looked. At that moment he might even have passed for Anne's younger brother, which was okay, since I had no objection if she wanted to be a sister to him.

"That's quite a job," Wolfe said. "Are you a friend of hers?"

"I'm more than a friend!" Fred declared defiantly. Suddenly he got as red as a peony. "I mean I—she let me take her home."

"You were there when Mr. Keems arrived?"

"Yes. We had just got

there. And I insisted on coming along. It sounded to me like a frame-up. I thought he was lying; I didn't think he was working for you. It didn't sound—I've heard my father talk about you. He met you once—you probably don't remember—"

Wolfe nodded. "At the Atlantic States Exposition. How is he?"

"Oh, he's—not very good." Fred's color was normal again. "He gave up when we lost the plantation of rhodaleas—he just sat down and quit. He had spent his whole life on it, and of course it was an awful wallop financially, too. I suppose you know about it."

"I read of it, yes. The Kurume yellows." Wolfe was sympathetic but casual. "And by the way, someone told me, I forget who, that your father was convinced that his plantation was deliberately infected by Lewis Hewitt, out of pique—or was it Watson or Dill he suspected?"

"He suspected all of them." Fred looked uncomfortable. "Everybody. But that was just—he was hardly responsible, it broke him up so. He had been holding back over thirty varieties, the best ones, for ten years, and was going to start distribution this spring. It was simply



too much for Dad to take."

Wolfe grunted. "It seems to be still on your mind, too. Mr. Goodwin tells me you invaded Rucker and Dill's exhibit this afternoon and made off with an infected twig. As a souvenir?"

"I—" Fred hesitated. "I guess that was dumb. Of course it's still on my mind it darned near ruined us. I wanted to test that twig and see if it was Kurume yellows that had somehow got into the exhibits."

"And investigate the how?"

"I might have. I might have tried to."

"You never traced the infestation of your plantation?"

"No. We hadn't had a thing for two years from any of the people that had had Kurume yellows, except a few *Ilex crenata* as a gift from Hewitt, and they were from nowhere near his infected area and we had them half a mile from the rhodaleas." Fred gestured impatiently. "But that's old prunings. What I was saying, I didn't think you'd pull a trick like that on Miss Tracy." A look came into his eyes. "Now I can take her back home."

The look in his eye took me back to high school days. It was the hand-holding look.

Flutter, my heart, bliss looms and ecstasy, I shall hold her little hand in mine! I looked at Anne with pride. A girl who could enkindle Lewis Hewitt to the extent of a black orchid and a dinner on Tuesday, and on Thursday forment the hand-holding hankering in a pure young peony-grower—a girl with a reach like that was something.

At that moment, I admit, she wasn't so overwhelming. She looked pretty dilapidated. She said to Wolfe, "I have to be at the District Attorney's office at ten in the morning. I said I would. I don't mind them asking me questions about that—what happened there today—but what I'm afraid of now, I'm afraid they'll ask me about my father. If they do, what am I going to say? Am I going to admit—" She stopped and her lip started to tremble and she put her teeth on it.

"You need a lawyer," Fred declared. "I'll get one. I don't know any in New York—"

"I do," Wolfe said. "Sit down, Mr. Updegraff." His eyes moved to Anne. "There's a bed here, Miss Tracy, and you'd better use it. You look tired. I doubt if the police will ask you about your father. If they do, don't an-



swer. Refer them to Mr. Dill. They're much more apt to be inquisitive about your engagement to marry Mr. Gould."

"But I wasn't!"

"Apparently he thought you were."

"But he couldn't. He knew very well I didn't like him! And he—" She stopped.

"He what?"

"I won't say that. He's dead."

"Had he asked you to marry him?"

"Yes, he had."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"But you consented to perform that rustic charade at the Flower Show with him?"

"I didn't know he was going to be in it—not when Mr. Dill asked me to do it, about two months ago, when he first thought of it. It was going to be another man, a young man in the office. Then Mr. Dill told me Harry Gould was going to do it. I didn't like him, but I didn't want to object because I couldn't afford to offend—I mean Mr. Dill had been so kind about my father—not having him arrested and letting me pay it off gradually—"

"Call it kind if you want to," Fred blurted indignant-ly. "My lord, your father had

worked for him for twenty years!"

Wolfe ignored him. "Was Mr. Gould pestering you? About marrying him?"

"Not pestering me, no. I was—" Anne bit her lip. "I just didn't like him."

"Had you known him long?"

"Not very long. I'm in the office and he was outside. I met him, I don't know, maybe three months ago."

"Did your father know him?"

She shook her head. "I don't think they ever met. Father was—had left before Harry came to work there. Harry used to work on the Hewitt estate on the other side of Richdale."

"So I understand. Do you know why he quit?"

"No, I didn't know him then."

"Have you any idea who killed him?"

"No," she said.

I lifted a brow, not ostentatiously. She said it too quick and she shaded it wrong. There was enough change in tempo and tone to make it at least ten to one that she was telling a whopper. That was bad. Up to that everything had been wholesome and straightforward, and all of a sudden without any warning that



big fly plopped in the milk. I cocked an eye at Fred, and of course he hadn't caught it. But Wolfe had. His eyes had gone nearly shut.

He started after her. He kept it polite and friendly, but he went at her from every angle and direction. And for the second time that night he got the can sent back empty by a juvenile female. After a solid hour of it he didn't have even a hint of what it was she was keeping tucked away under her hair, whether it was a suspicion or a fact or a deduction she had made from a set of circumstances. Neither did I. But she was sitting on some kind of lid, and she was smart enough to see that Wolfe knew it and was trying to jostle her off.

It was half past one when Fred Updegraff looked at his watch and stood up again and said it was late and he would take Miss Tracy home.

Wolfe shook his head. "She's exhausted and it's twenty-five miles and there are no trains. She can sleep here. I want to speak to her in the morning before she goes to the District Attorney's office. Archie, will you please see that the north room is in order?"

That meant my room and

my bed. Anne started to protest, but not with much spirit, and I went and got Fritz and took him upstairs with me to help change sheets and towels. As I selected a pajama suit for her from the drawer, tan with brown stripes, and put it on the turned down sheet, I reflected that things were moving pretty fast, considering that it was less than ten hours since she had first spoken to me and we never had actually been introduced. Fritz took my sheets and pillow and a blanket downstairs and I went up one flight to the plant rooms and cut three black orchids, one from each plant, and returned and put them in a vase on the bed table. Hewitt had given her one.

On my way downstairs I stopped at the door to the south room and listened. No sound. I tried the door; it was bolted on the inside. I knocked, not very loud. Rose's voice came:

"Who is it?"

"Clark Gable," I called. "Good night, Ruby."

In the lower hall I met Anne coming out of the office, escorted by Fritz. I suppose it would have been more genteel to take her up myself, but it would have been a temptation to get sentimen-



tal there among my own furniture, so I told her good night and let her go. In the office Wolfe was alone, in his chair with his arms folded and his chin down; evidently Fred had departed. I began taking cushions from the couch and tossing them into a corner, getting ready to fix my bed.

"Two of them," Wolfe growled.

"Two of what?"

"Women. Nannygoats."

"Not Anne. She's more like a doe. More like a gazelle."

"Bah."

"More like a swan." I flipped a sheet over the couch and tucked it in. "I put three black orchids at her bedside. One from each plant."

"I told Theodore to put them in the fumigating room."

"He did. That's where I found them." I spread the blanket. "I thought we might as well get all the pleasure we can out of them before they're returned to Hewitt."

"They're not going to be returned."

"Oh, I expect they are." I hung my coat and vest over a chair and sat down to take off my shoes. "It seems a pity. Two girls up there in bed, and if you knew what they know, or probably what

either one of them knows, you'd have it sewed up. Rose actually saw the murderer set the trap. I don't know what Anne saw or heard, but she sure does. It's a darned shame. With all your finesse..." I got my pants off. "...all your extraordinary gifts..." I removed my shirt. "...all your acknowledged genius, your supreme talent in the art of inquest..."

He got up and stalked from the room without a word. I called a cheery good night after him but heard no reply, and after performing a few bedtime chores such as bolting the front door, I laid me down to sleep.

I overdid it. With the house full of company, I intended to be up and about bright and early, but when something jangled my brain alive and I realized it was the phone ringing, I opened my eyes and glanced at my wrist and saw it was after eight o'clock. It was Saul Panzer on the phone calling from Salamanca. I put him through to Wolfe's room and was told by Wolfe that no record would be required, which was his polite way of telling me to hang up, so I did. A trip to Fritz in the kitchen got me the information that Wolfe already had his breakfast tray, and so



did Anne and Rose. I washed and dressed in a hurry, returned to the kitchen for my morning refreshment of grapefruit, ham and eggs, muffins and coffee, and was finishing my second cup when the doorbell rang. Fritz was upstairs at the moment, so I went for it, and through the glass panel saw it was Inspector Cramer, unattended.

The situation had aspects. Rose might come trotting downstairs any minute, and if she chose the minute that Cramer was in the hall, that would be the last we would see of Rose. But any delay in opening up would make Cramer suspicious. I swung the door open.

"Law and order forever," I said cordially. "Come in."

"Nuts," he said, entering.

So for that incivility I let him hang up his hat and coat himself. By the time he had done that I had the door closed and was on the other side of him. He screwed up his face at me and demanded:

"Where is she?"

I grinned to the best of my ability. "Now wait a minute," I said in a grieved tone. "I've been up less than an hour and my brain's not warmed up. In the first place, how could I know she

was married? In the second—"

He made a noise and moved. I moved, sort of backward. The maneuver ended with me covering the foot of the stairs, which was across the hall from the door to the office, and him pressing forward without actually touching me. There I stopped and he had to.

"I'm going up to see Wolfe," he said as if he meant it. "I am aware that he spends the morning with his goddam posies and refuses to come down before eleven o'clock. So I'm going up. Stand aside."

He moved again and we made contact (noun), but I merely held it. "This," I said, "is pretty damn silly. I didn't have to let you in and you know it, but I did. What do you think this is, the den of the White Slave King? This is Nero Wolfe's home, and there's his office where he receives callers, and for last year his income tax was eleven thousand four hundred and twelve dollars and eighty-three cents and he paid it last week. Do you remember what happened the time Purley took me down and charged me with interfering with an officer in the performance of his duty? Wasn't that a picnic?"



He swung on his heel and tramped into the office. I followed, and shut the door, and stayed between him and it until he had sat down. Then, knowing I could move at least twice as fast as he could, I went to my desk.

"Now," I inquired pleasantly, "where is who?"

He regarded me with a mean eye. "Last night," he said, "one of Wolfe's men took Anne Tracy from her home in Richdale. My man covering the house recognized him and phoned in. I had a man out front when they arrived here. Your man soon left, and so did the Updegraff boy, later, but she hasn't left up to now. Where is she?"

So our little Rose was still safe. I locked my relief in my breast and looked crest-fallen.

"I guess it's your trick, Inspector," I admitted. "Miss Tracy is upstairs in my bed. She spent the night there."

He got red. He's a terrible prude. "See here, Goodwin—"

"No no no no," I said hastily. "Rinse your mind out. I slept here on the couch. And I doubt if she's in my bed at that, because she's probably up and dressed. She has a date at the

D.A.'s office at ten o'clock, and it's nine thirty now."

"Then you admit she's here."

"Admit it? I'm proud of it."

"Where is she, up with Wolfe?"

"I don't know. I got up late. I just finished breakfast."

"Find out. Tell her the appointment at the D.A.'s office is off. I want to see her as soon as I finish with you."

I plugged in the plant room extension and gave it a buzz. In a minute Wolfe's voice was in my ear:

"Archie? It's about time. Get Mr. Hewitt—"

"Hold it," I put in. "Reporting bad luck. Inspector Cramer is sitting here glaring at me. Johnny was spotted last night, and Miss Tracy is not to go to the D.A.'s office because Cramer wants to see her as soon as he gets through with me. He seems to be disgruntled about something."

"Does he know who slept in the south room?"

"I think not. I'm sure not."

"Very well. I'll attend to that. Miss Tracy is here with me. She can go down whenever Mr. Cramer is ready for her. Get Mr. Hewitt on the phone."



"Right out loud?"

"Certainly."

I disconnected and told Cramer, "Miss Tracy is up helping with the orchids and will be available when wanted. Excuse me." I found Hewitt's Long Island number and requested it, and finally got him via two butlers and a secretary, and put him through to Wolfe. Then I swiveled around and crossed my legs and clasped my hands back of my head.

"Okay, Inspector. I'm disengaged for the moment. What shall we talk about?"

"Murder."

"Fine. Any particular murder?"

Cramer took a cigar from his pocket and put it in his mouth and took it out again. He was controlling himself. "I hand it to you," he said. "For barefaced lying I'd play you on the nose. Up there yesterday. You didn't know anyone or anything. But—" He put the cigar back in his mouth. "But you've been hanging around there all week. Every day. And then a man gets murdered and there you are. You and Nero Wolfe."

I nodded sympathetically. "I admit it looks sinister. But as I told you yesterday, Wolfe sent me there to look at orchids."

"There were no orchids in the Rucker and Dill exhibit."

"No, but there was—you know what there was. You've seen her. And I'm only a man after all—"

"All right, clown it. Yesterday afternoon about twenty minutes past four you were seen by young Updegraff, with Wolfe and Lewis Hewitt, in the corridor back of the Rucker and Dill exhibit. What were you doing there?"

"Well." I hesitated. "If I told you I was pulling the string that fired the shot that killed Harry Gould, would you believe me?"

"No."

"Then I won't. We were walking from one place to another place."

"You didn't mention yesterday that you were in that corridor at that time."

"Excuse it. Oversight."

"Maybe. What were you saying to Ruby Lawson yesterday?"

"Ruby—?" I frowned. "Oh. Her. You mean after I told Purley she was a Chinese spy. I was trying to date her up. You see, looking at Miss Tracy so much had aroused—"

"I'll bet it had. Did you date her?"

"Yes."

"When is it?"



"Not is it, was it. She didn't keep it."

"That's too bad. What was in the note Miss Tracy's father gave you to take to her?"

"Now, Inspector," I said reprovingly. "I didn't write the note and it wasn't addressed to me."

"Had you met her father before?"

"Never. Didn't know him from Adam."

"Wasn't it peculiar that he entrusted a perfect stranger with an important message to his daughter at a time like that?"

"Not very. He saw me entering the office. People trust me on sight. It's my face, especially my eyes."

"I see. That talk Wolfe had to have with Lewis Hewitt. So important he had to have it then and there, murder or no murder."

Cramer chewed his cigar.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"So important he had to have you to take notes of it."

"Yes, sir."

"I'd like to see the notes you took."

I shook my head regretfully. "Sorry, confidential business. Ask Wolfe."

"I intend to. You won't show me the notes?"

"Certainly not."

"Very well. Now. Last but not least. Why did Wolfe send a man out to Richdale last night to get Anne Tracy?"

"Search me. I wasn't here when he sent him."

"Were you here when she came?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

I grinned at him. "When I was a kid out in Ohio we had a swell comeback for that. If someone said 'Well?' to you, you said, 'Enough wells will make a river.' Wasn't that a stunner?"

"You bet it was. Had Lewis Hewitt engaged Wolfe to arrange for payment to W. G. Dill of the amount Anne Tracy's father had stolen, and get a release?"

I stared at him. "By golly, that's an idea," I said enthusiastically. "That's pretty cute. Hewitt took her to dinner—"

The door opened and Fritz entered. I nodded at him.

"A young man," Fritz said, being discreet.

"Who?" I asked. "Don't mind the Inspector; he already knows everything in the world—"

Fritz didn't get a chance to tell me, because the young man came bouncing in. It was Fred Updegraff. He stopped in the middle of the



room, saw Cramer, said, "Oh," looked at me and demanded:

"Where's Miss Tracy?"

I surveyed him disapprovingly. "That's no way to behave," I told him. "Inspector Cramer is grilling me. Go to the front room and wait your turn—"

"No." Cramer stood up. "Get Miss Tracy down here and I'll take her to the front room. I want to see her before I have a talk with Wolfe, and then we can all go to the D.A.'s office together."

"The hell we can," I remarked.

"The hell we can. Send for her."

I sent Fritz. He used the elevator, since a lady was involved. In the office you could hear it creaking and groaning up, and pretty soon it came down again and jolted to a stop. When Anne entered Fred looked at her the way a blind man looks at the sun. I hoped I wasn't that obvious, and anyway she wasn't very sunny. She tried to greet us with a kind of smile, but with the red-rimmed eyes and the corners of the mouth down it certainly wasn't the face that had stolen the show from a million flowers.

Cramer took her to the

front room and shut the soundproof door behind him. I went to my desk and took advantage of this first chance to open the morning mail. Fred wandered around restlessly, looking at the titles of books on the shelves, and finally sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Am I in the way?" he asked.

"Not at all," I assured him.

"Because if I am I can wait outdoors. Only I got a little chilly. I've been out there since eight o'clock."

I abandoned the mail to swivel around and stare at him in awe.

"Good God," I said, stupefied. "You win." I waved a hand. "You can have her."

"Have her?" He flushed. "What are you talking about? Who do you think you are?"

"Brother," I said, "who I am can be left to the worms that eventually eat me, but I know who I am not. I am not a guy who swims the Hellespont, nor him who—he who flees the turmoil of battle to seek you know what on the silken cushions of Cleopatra's barge. I'm not the type—"

The phone rang and I put the receiver to my ear and



heard Wolfe's voice: "Archie, come up here."

"Right away," I said, and arose and asked Fred, "Which do you want, whisky or hot coffee?"

"Coffee, if it's not—"

"Righto. Come with me."

I turned him over to Fritz in the kitchen and mounted the three flights to the plant rooms. It was a sunny day and some of the mats were drawn, but mostly the glass was clear, especially in the first two rooms, and the glare and blaze of color was dazzling. In the long stretch where the germinating flasks were, of course the glass was painted. Theodore Horstmann was there examining the flasks. I opened the door into the potting room, and after taking one step stopped and sniffed. My nose is good and I knew that odor. One glance at Wolfe there on his special stool, which is more like a throne, showed me that he was alive, so I dived across to the wall and grabbed the valve to turn it. It was shut tight.

"What's the matter?" Wolfe inquired peevishly.

"I smelled ciphogene. I still do."

"I know. Theodore fumigated those plants a little while ago and opened the

door too soon. There's not enough to do any harm."

"Maybe not," I muttered, "but I wouldn't trust that stuff on top of the Empire State Building on a windy day." The door to the fumigating room was standing open and I glanced inside. The benches were empty, as well as I could tell in the half dark. It had no glass. The smell didn't seem any stronger inside. I returned to Wolfe.

"How's Mr. Cramer?" he asked. "Stewing?"

I looked at him suspiciously. His asking that, and the tone of his voice, and the expression on his face—any one would have been enough for me the way I knew him, and the three together made it so obvious that the only question was how he got that way.

I confronted him. "Which one did you crack?" I demanded. "Rose or Anne?"

"Neither," he replied complacently. "I had an hour's talk with Miss Lasher while you were still sleeping, and later some conversation with Miss Tracy. They still clutch their secrets. When Mr. Hewitt—"

"Then where did you lap up all the cream? What are you gloating about?"

"I'm not gloating." He



cocked his massive head on one side and rubbed his nose with a forefinger. "It is true that I have conceived a little experiment."

"Oh, you have. Goody. Before or after Cramer carts us off to the D.A.'s office?"

Wolfe chuckled. "Is that his intention? Then it must be before. Is Miss Tracy with him?"

"Yes. The youthful Updegraff is in the kitchen. He's going to marry Anne provided your experiment doesn't land him in the coop for murder."

"I thought you were affianced to Miss Tracy."

"That's off. If I married her he'd stand around in front of the house and make me nervous. He's started it already."

"Well, that saves us the trouble of sending for him. Keep him. When Mr. Hewitt arrives send him up to me immediately. Go down and get Mr. Dill on the phone and put him through to me. On your way make sure that Miss Lasher is in her room and going to stay there and not have hysterics. Except for Mr. Dill, and Mr. Hewitt when he comes, don't disturb me. I have some details to work out. And by the way, do not mention ciphogene."

His tone and look of smug

self-satisfaction were absolutely insufferable. Not only that, as I well knew, they were a sign of danger for everyone concerned. When he was in that mood God alone could tell what was going to happen.

I went back through the plant rooms to the door to the stairs with my fingers crossed.

## 9

It was nearly an hour later, 11:45, and I was alone in the office, when the door to the front room opened and Anne and Cramer entered. She looked mad and determined, and Cramer didn't appear to be exactly exultant, so I gathered that no great friendship had burst its bud.

"Where's Updegraff?" Cramer asked.

"Upstairs."

"I want to see Wolfe."

I buzzed the house phone, got an answer, held a brief conversation, and told the Inspector:

"He says to come up. Hewitt and Dill are up there."

"I'd rather see him down here."

That irritated me, and anyway I was already jumpy, waiting for Wolfe's experiment to start exploding. "My



God," I said, "you're fussy. On arrival you insist on going upstairs right through me or over me. Now you have to be coaxed. If you want him down here go up and get him."

He turned. "Come, Miss Tracy, please."

She hesitated. I said, "Fred's up there. Let's all go."

I led the way and they followed. I took the elevator because the stairway route went within ten feet of the door to the south room and Rose might pick that moment to sneeze.

I was half expecting to see one of the peony-growers tied up and the other three applying matches to his bare feet, but not at all. We single-filed through twenty thousand orchids in the four plant rooms and entered the potting room, and there they were in the fumigating room, with the lights turned on, chatting away like pals. In the potting room Theodore was sloshing around with a hose, washing old pots.

"Good morning, Mr. Cramer!" Wolfe called. "Come in!"

Theodore was so enthusiastic with the hose that spray was flying around, and we all stepped into the fumigating room. Fred and Dill were

there, seated on the lower tier of a staggered bench, and Wolfe was showing Hewitt a sealed joint in the wall. He was leaning on the handle of an osmundine fork, like a giant shepherd boy resting on his staff, and was expounding with childish enthusiasm:

"...so we can stick them in here and close the door, and do the job with a turn of the valve I showed you in the potting room, and go on with our work outside. Twice a year at the most we do the whole place, and we use ciphogene for that too. It's a tremendous improvement over the old methods. You ought to try it."

Hewitt nodded. "I think I will. I've been tempted to, but I was apprehensive about it, such deadly stuff."

Wolfe shrugged. "Anything you use is dangerous. You can't kill bugs and lice and eggs and spores with incense. And the cost of installation is a small item, unless you include a sealed chamber, which I would certainly advise—"

"Excuse me," Cramer said sarcastically.

Wolfe turned. "Oh, yes, you wanted to speak to me." He sidled around the end of a bench, sat down on a packing box, gradually giving it



his weight, and kept himself upright with nothing to lean against, holding the osmundine fork perpendicular, with the handle-end resting on the floor, like Old King Cole with his scepter. He simpered at the Inspector, if an elephant can simper. "Well, sir?"

Cramer shook his head. "I want you and Goodwin and Miss Tracy. So does the District Attorney. At his office."

"You don't mean that, Mr. Cramer."

"And why the hell—why don't I mean it?"

"Because you know I rarely leave my home. Because you know that citizens are not obliged to regulate their movements by the caprice of the District Attorney or to dart around frantically at your whim. We've had this out before. Have you an order from a court?"

"No."

"Then if you have questions to ask, ask them. Here I am."

"I can get an order from a court. And the D.A. is sore and probably will."

"We've had that out before too. You know what you'll get if you try it." Wolfe shook his head regretfully. "Apparently you'll never learn. Confound you, you can't badger me. No one on earth can badger me except

Mr. Goodwin. Why the devil do you rile me by trying it? It's a pity, because I'm inclined to help you. And I could help you. Do you want me to do you a favor?"

If the man who knew Wolfe best was me, next to me came Inspector Cramer. Over and over again through the years, he tried bluster because it was in his system and had to come out, but usually he knew when to drop it. So after narrowing his eyes at Wolfe without answering, he kicked a packing box a couple of feet to where there was more leg room, sat down and said calmly:

"Yeah, I'd love to have you do me a favor."

"Good. Archie, bring Miss Lasher up here."

I went. On my way downstairs I thought, so here she goes to the wolves. I didn't like it. I wasn't especially fond of her, but my pride was hurt. It wasn't like Wolfe; it wasn't like us at all.

She was standing looking out of a window, biting her nails. The minute she saw me she started on a torrent. She couldn't stand it any longer, cooped up like that, she had to get out of there, she had to use a telephone—

"Okay," I said, "come up



and say good-bye to Wolfe."

"But where am I going—what am I going—"

"Discuss it with him."

I steered her up the one flight and through to the potting room. I had left the door to the fumigating room nearly closed so she couldn't see the assemblage until she was on the threshold, and as I opened it and ushered her in I took a better hold on her arm as a precaution in case she decided to go for Wolfe's eyes as souvenirs. But the reaction was the opposite of what I expected. She saw Cramer and went stiff. She stood stiff three seconds and then turned her head to me and said between her teeth:

"You lousy bastard."

They all stared at her.

Especially Cramer. Finally he spoke not to her but to Wolfe, "This is quite a favor. Where did you get her?"

"Sit down, Miss Lasher," Wolfe said.

"You might as well," I told her. "It's a party."

Her face white and her lips tight, she went and dropped onto a bench. The others were all sitting on benches or packing boxes.

"I told you this morning," Wolfe said, "that unless you told me what you saw in that corridor I would have to

turn you over to the police."

She didn't say anything and didn't look as if she intended to.

"So your name's Lasher," Cramer growled. "You might as well—"

"I think," Wolfe put in, "I can save you some time. Details can be supplied later. Her name is Rose Lasher. Yesterday at the Flower Show she saw Miss Tracy and Mr. Gould in Mr. Dill's exhibit. She wished to discuss an extremely important matter with Miss Tracy, so—"

"With me?" It popped out of Anne. She looked indignant. "There was nothing she could possibly—"

"Please, Miss Tracy." Wolfe was peremptory. "This will go better without interruptions. So, to intercept Miss Tracy on her exit, Miss Lasher found her way to the corridor and hid among the shrubs and packing cases along the rear wall opposite the door labeled 'Rucker and Dill.' That was at or about half past three. She remained concealed there until after half past four, and she was watching that door. Therefore she must have seen whatever went on there during that hour or more."

There were stirrings, and sounds, then silence, except



for the hissing of Theodore's hose in the potting room and the slapping and sloshing of the water against the pots. Wolfe told me to shut the door, and I did so, and then sat on the bench next to W. G. Dill.

"Okay," Cramer said dryly, "details later. What did she see?"

"She prefers not to say. Will you tell us now, Miss Lasher?"

Rose's eyes moved to him and away again, and that was all.

"Sooner or later you will," Wolfe declared. "Mr. Cramer will see to that. He can be—persuasive. In the meantime, I'll tell you what you saw, at least part of it. You saw a man approach that door with a cane in his hand. He was furtive, he kept an eye on the corridor in both directions, and he was in a hurry. You saw him open the door and close it again, and kneel or stoop, doing something with his hands, and when he went away he left the cane there on the floor, its crook against the crack at the bottom of the door. You saw that, didn't you?"

Rose didn't even look at him.

"Very well. I don't know what time that happened, ex-

cept that it was between four and four-twenty. Probably around four o'clock. The next episode I do know. At twenty minutes past four you saw three men come along the corridor. They saw the cane and spoke about it. One of them picked it up, brushed a loop of green string from the crook, and handed it to one of the others. I don't know whether you saw the string or not. I'm certain that you didn't know that it was part of a longer string that had been tied to the trigger of a revolver, and that by picking up the cane the man had fired the revolver and killed Harry Gould. Nor did you know their names, though you do now. Mr. Goodwin picked up the cane and handed it to Mr. Hewitt. The man with them was myself."

Wolfe took something from his vest pocket, with his left hand, because his right was holding the osmundine fork for support. "Here's the piece of string that was looped on the cane. Not that I would expect you to identify it. I may as well say here that the cane was handed to Mr. Hewitt because it was his property."

He handed the string to Cramer.

I was sunk. Ordinarily, in



such circumstances, I would have been watching faces and movements, and hearing what sounds were made or words blurted, but this time he had me. He looked as if he was in his right mind, with all the assured arrogance of Nero Wolfe salting away another one, but either he was cuckoo or I was. He was not only spilling the beans; he was smashing the dish. In any conceivable case it was good-bye orchids. I looked at Hewitt.

And Hewitt should have been half astonished and half sore, and he wasn't. He was pale, and he was trying to pretend he wasn't pale. He was staring at Wolfe, and he licked his lips—the end of his tongue came out and went in, and then came out again.

Uh-uh, I thought. So that's it. But my God, then—

Cramer was looking at the string. W. G. Dill asked, "May I see it?" and held out a hand, and Cramer gave it to him but kept his eyes on it.

"Of course," Wolfe said, "the point is, not who picked the cane up, but who put it there. Miss Lasher, who saw him do it, could tell us but prefers not to. She claims she didn't see him. So we'll have to get at it by indirect-

tion. Here are some facts that may help—but it isn't any too comfortable in here. Shall we move downstairs?"

"No," Hewitt said. "Go ahead and finish."

"Go ahead," Cramer said. He reached for the string and Dill handed it to him and he stuffed it in his pocket.

"I'll make it as brief as possible," Wolfe promised. "Harry Gould had an employer. One day he found a garage job-card in one of his employer's cars—possibly it had slipped under a seat and been forgotten—I don't know. Anyhow he found it and he kept it. I don't know why he kept it. He may have suspected that his employer had been on a trip with a woman, for the card was from a garage in Salamanca, New York, which is quite a distance from Long Island. A man with the blackmailing type of mind is apt to keep things. It is understandable that he kept the card. It is less understandable that his employer had been careless enough to leave it in the car." Wolfe turned his head suddenly and snapped at Hewitt:

"Was it just an oversight, Mr. Hewitt?"

But Hewitt had stuff in him at that. He was no long-



er pale and he wasn't licking his lips. His eyes were steady and so was his voice:

"Finish your story, Mr. Wolfe. I am inclined—but no matter. Finish your story."

"I prefer to use your name instead of clumsy circumlocutions like 'his employer.' It's neater."

"By all means keep it neat. But I warn you that merely because I acknowledged ownership of that cane—"

"Thank you. I appreciate warnings. So I'll say Hewitt hereafter. The time came when Harry Gould's suspicions regarding the card became more definite. Again I don't know why, but my surmise is that he learned about the loss of the most valuable plantation of broad-leaved evergreens in the country—the rhodalea plantation of the Updegraff Nurseries of Erie, Pennsylvania—by an attack of the kurume yellows. He knew that Hewitt was inordinately proud of his own broad-leaved evergreens, and that he was capable of abnormal extremes in horticultural pride and jealousy. He also, being a gardener, knew how easy it would be, with a bag or two of contaminated peat mulch, to infect another plantation if you had access to it. At any rate, his suspicion became definite

enough to cause him to go to Salamanca, which is in the western part of New York near the Pennsylvania border, not far from Erie, and see the proprietor of the Nelson Garage. That was in December. He learned that when Hewitt had gone there with his car months before, damaged in an accident, he had been accompanied not by a woman, but by a man of a certain description, with a cast in his eye. He went to Erie and found the man among the employees of the Updegraff Nurseries. His name was Pete Arango."

Fred Updegraff started up with an ejaculation.

Wolfe showed him a palm. "Please, Mr. Updegraff, don't prolong this." He turned. "And Mr. Hewitt, I'm being fair. I'm not trying to stam-pede you. I admit that much of this detail is surmise, but the main fact will soon be established beyond question. I sent a man to Salamanca last night, partly to learn why Harry Gould had so carefully preserved an old garage job-card, and partly because he had written on the back of it that name Pete Arango, and I knew that Pete Arango was in the employ of the Updegraff Nurseries. My man phoned me this morning to say that he



will be back here at one o'clock, and the proprietor of the Nelson Garage will be with him. He'll tell us whether you were there with Pete Arango. Do you suppose you'll remember him?"

"I'll—" Hewitt swallowed. "Go ahead."

Wolfe nodded. "I imagine you will. I wouldn't be surprised if Gould even got a written confession from Pete Arango that you had bribed him to infect the rhodalea plantation, by threatening to inform Mr. Updegraff that he had been at Salamanca, not far away, in your company. At least he got something that served well enough to put the screws on you. You paid him something around five thousand dollars. Did he turn the confession over to you? I suppose so. And then—may I hazard a guess?"

"I think," Hewitt said evenly, "you've done too much guessing already."

"I'll try one more. Gould saw Pete Arango at the Flower Show, and the temptation was too much for him. He threatened him again, and made him sign another confession, and armed with that made another demand on you. What this time? Ten thousand? Twenty? Or he may even have got delusions

of grandeur and gone to six figures. Anyhow, you saw that it couldn't go on. As long as ink and paper lasted for Pete Arango to write confessions with, you were hooked. So you—by the way, Mr. Updegraff, he's up there at your exhibit, isn't he, and available? Pete Arango? We'll want him when Mr. Nelson arrives."

"You're damn right he's available," Fred said grimly.

"Good."

Wolfe's head pivoted back to Hewitt. He paused, and the silence was heavy on us. He was timing his climax, and just to make it good he decorated it.

"I suppose," he said to Hewitt in a tone of doom, "you are familiar with the tradition of the drama? The three traditional knocks to herald the tragedy?"

He lifted the osmundine fork and brought it down again, thumping the floor with it, once, twice, thrice.

Hewitt gazed at him with a sarcastic smile, and it was a pretty good job with the smile.

"So," Wolfe said, "you were compelled to act, and you did so promptly and effectively. And skillfully, because, for instance, Mr. Cramer has apparently been unable to trace the revolver, and no man in



the world is better at that sort of thing. As Honorary Chairman of the Committee, naturally you had the run of the exhibit floors at any hour of the day; I suppose you chose the morning, before the doors were opened to the public, to arrange that primitive apparatus. I don't pretend to be inside of your mind, so I don't know when or why you decided to use your own cane as the homicide bait for some unsuspecting passer-by. On the theory that—"

The door opened and Theodore Horstmann was on the threshold.

"Phone call for Mr. Hewitt," he said irritably. Theodore resented his work being interrupted by anything whatever. "Pete Arando or something."

Hewitt stood up.

Cramer opened his mouth, but Wolfe beat him to it by saying sharply, "Wait! You'll stay here, Mr. Hewitt! Archie—no, I suppose he would recognize your voice. Yours too, Mr. Cramer. Mr. Dill. You can do it if you pitch your voice low. Lead him on, get him to say as much as you can—"

Hewitt said, "That phone call is for me," and was moving for the door. I got

in front of him. Dill arose, looking uncertain.

"I don't know whether I can—"

"Certainly you can," Wolfe assured him. "Go ahead. The phone is there on the potting bench. Theodore, confound it, let him by and come in here and close the door."

Theodore obeyed orders. When Dill had passed through Theodore pulled the door shut and stood there resenting us. Hewitt sat down again and put his elbows on his knees and covered his face with his hands. Anne had her head turned not to look at him. That made her face Fred Updegraff, who was next to her, and I became aware for the first time that he was holding her hand. Hardly as private as in a taxi, but he had her hand.

"While we're waiting," Wolfe observed, "I may as well finish my speculations about the cane. Mr. Hewitt may have decided to use it on the theory that the fact of its being his cane would divert suspicion away from him instead of toward him. Was that it, Mr. Hewitt? But in that case, why did you submit to my threat to divulge the fact that it was your cane? I believe I can answer that too. Because you



mistrusted my acumen? Because you were afraid my suspicions would be aroused if you failed to conform to the type of the eminent wealthy citizen zealously guarding his reputation from even the breath of scandal? Things like that gather complications as they go along. It's too bad."

Wolfe looked at Hewitt, and shook his head as though regretfully. "But I have no desire to torment you. Theodore, try the door."

"I don't have to," Theodore said, standing with his back to the door. "I heard the bolt. The lower one squeaks."

I stood up. Not that there was anything I intended to do or could do, but I was coming to in a rush and I couldn't stay sitting. Cramer did, but his eyes, on Wolfe, were nothing but narrow slits.

"Try it anyway," Wolfe said quietly.

Theodore turned and lifted the latch and pushed, and turned back again. "It's bolted."

"Indeed," Wolfe said with a tingle in his voice. His head turned. "Well, Miss Lasher, what do you think of it?" His eyes swept the faces. "I ask Miss Lasher because she knew all along that I was lying. She knew it could-

n't have been Mr. Hewitt who put that cane there on the floor of the corridor, because she saw Mr. Dill do it. Mr. Hewitt, let me congratulate you on a superb performance — you can't force it, Mr. Cramer, it's a sturdy door—"

Cramer was at it, lifting the latch, assaulting the panel with his shoulder. He turned, his face purple, blurted, "By God, I might have known—," jumped across and grabbed up a heavy packing-box.

"Archie!" Wolfe called sharply.

In all my long and varied association with Inspector Cramer I had never had an opportunity to perform on him properly. This, at last, was it. I wrapped myself around him like cellophane around a toothbrush and turned on the pressure. For maybe five seconds he wriggled, and just as he stopped Fred Updegraff sprang to his feet and gasped in horror:

"Ciphogene! For God's sake—"

"Stop it!" Wolfe commanded. "I know what I'm doing! There is no occasion for panic. Mr. Cramer, there is an excellent reason why that door must not be opened. If Archie releases you, will you listen to it? No?"



Then, Archie, hold him. This is a fumigating room where we use ciphogene, a gas which will kill a man by asphyxiation in two minutes. The pipe runs from a tank in the potting room and the valve is in there. This morning I closed the outlet of the pipe in this room, and removed the plug from an outlet in the potting room. So if Mr. Dill has opened that valve in the potting room, he is dead, or soon will be. And if you batter a hole in that door I won't answer for the consequences. We might get out quickly enough and we might not."

"You goddam balloon," Cramer sputtered helplessly. It was the first and only time I ever heard him cuss in the presence of ladies.

I unwrapped myself from him and stepped back. He shook himself and barked at Wolfe:

"Are you going to just sit there? Are we going to just sit here? Isn't there—can't you call someone—"

"I'll try," Wolfe said placidly. He lifted the osmundine fork and thumped the floor with it, five times, at regular intervals.

Lewis Hewitt murmured, believe it or not, apparently to Theodore, "I was in the dramatic club at college."

10

"All right, I'll buy you a medal," Inspector Cramer said in utter disgust.

Five hours had passed. It was six thirty that evening, and the three of us were in the office. I was at my desk, Cramer was in the red leather chair, and Wolfe was seated behind his own desk, leaning back with his fingertips touching on top of his digestive domain. He looked a little creasy around the eyes, which were almost open.

Cramer went on sputtering: "Dill was a murderer, and he's dead, and you killed him. You maneuvered him into the potting room with a fake phone call, and he took the bait and bolted the door to the fumigating room and opened the valve. And then why didn't he walk out and go on home? How did you know he wouldn't do that?"

"Pfui," Wolfe said lazily. He grunted. "Without waiting four minutes to make sure the ciphogene had worked? And leaving the door bolted, and the valve open? Mr. Dill was a fool, but not that big a fool. After a few minutes he would have closed the valve and opened the door, held his nose long enough to take a look at us and make sure



we were finished, and departed, leaving the door closed but not bolted to give it the appearance of an accident. And probably leaving the valve a bit loose so it would leak a little." Wolfe grunted again. "No. That wasn't where the thin ice was. It was next thing to a certainty that Mr. Dill wouldn't decamp without having a look inside at us."

"You were sure of that."

"I was."

"You admit it."

"I do."

"Then you murdered him."

"My dear sir." Wolfe wiggled a finger in exasperation. "If you are privately branding me to relieve your feelings, I don't mind. If you are speaking officially, you are talking gibberish. I could be utterly candid even to a jury, regarding my preparations. I could admit that I plugged the outlet in the fumigating room, and opened the one in the potting room, so that it would be the latter, and not the former, that would be filled with ciphogene if Mr. Dill bolted that door and opened that valve. I could admit that I arranged with Mr. Hewitt to play his part, appealing to him in the interest of justice. He is a public-spirited man. And I discovered his weakness; he

has always wanted to be an actor. He even gave me permission to mention his cane, and to recite that wild tale about him—which of course was true, though not true about him, but about Mr. Dill.

"I could admit that I arranged with Theodore also to play his part. He works for me and obeyed orders. I could admit that I had Fritz stationed in the room below, and my three thumps on the floor were a signal to him to make the telephone call for Mr. Hewitt, and the five thumps, later, told him to come upstairs and start the ventilating blowers in the potting room, which can be done from the hall. I could admit that I deliberately postponed the second signal to Fritz for three minutes after I learned that the door had been bolted; that I had previously released a minute quantity of ciphogene in the potting room and fumigating room so that Mr. Dill's nose would be accustomed to the smell and would not take alarm at any sudden odor in the potting room after he turned on the valve; that all my arrangements were made with the idea that if Mr. Dill should open that valve, thinking to murder all eight of us, he would die, I



could admit all that to a jury."

Wolfe sighed. "But the fact would remain that Mr. Dill opened the valve of his own volition, intending to exterminate eight people, including you. No jury would find against me even for damage to your self-esteem."

"To hell with my self-esteem," Cramer growled. "Why don't you send a bill to the State of New York for the execution of a murderer f.o.b. your potting room? That's the only thing you've left out. Why don't you?"

Wolfe chuckled. "I wonder if I could collect. It's worth trying. I may tell you privately, Mr. Cramer, that there were several reasons why it would have been unfortunate for Mr. Dill to be brought to trial. One, it might have been difficult to convict him. Only a fairly good case. Two, the part played by Mr. Hewitt's cane would have been made public, and I had undertaken to prevent that. Three, Archie would have been embarrassed. He pulled the trigger and killed the man. Four, Miss Lasher would have committed suicide, or tried to. She's not very bright, but she's stubborn as the devil. She had decided that if she

admitted having seen anything from her hiding-place in the corridor, she would have to testify to it publicly, her relations with Mr. Gould would have been exposed, and her family would have been dishonored."

"They would have been exposed anyway."

"Certainly, once you got hold of her. When Archie brought her to the potting room, with you there, she was a goner. That was the beauty of it. Mr. Dill knew she was bound to crack, and that coupled with the threat of being confronted with the garage man was what cracked him. It was a delicate situation. Among many others was the danger that during my recital Miss Lasher might blurt out that it was Dill, not Hewitt, who had placed the cane there by the door, and that would have spoiled everything."

"Wasn't it Hewitt's cane?"

"Yes. A fact, as I have told you, not for publication."

"Where did Dill get it?"

"I don't know. Hewitt had mislaid it, and no doubt Dill spied it and decided to make use of it. By the way, another item not for publication is Miss Lasher's statement. Don't forget you promised that. I owe it to her. If she



hadn't included that garage job-card when she packed Mr. Gould's belongings in her suitcase I wouldn't have got anywhere."

"And another thing," I put in. "A public airing of the little difficulty Miss Tracy's father got into wouldn't get you an increase in salary."

"Nothing in God's world would get me an increase in salary," Cramer declared feelingly. "And Miss Tracy's father—" He waved it away.

Wolfe's eyes came to me. "I thought you were no longer affianced to her."

"I'm not. But I'm sentimental about my memories. My lord, but she'll get sick of Fred. Peonies! Incidentally, while you're sweeping up, what was Anne's big secret?"

"Not so big." Wolfe glanced up at the clock, saw that it would be nearly an hour till dinner, and grimaced. "Miss Tracy admitted the soundness of my surmises this morning. Mr. Gould was as devious as he was ruthless. He told her that unless she married him he would force Mr. Dill to have her father arrested, and assured her that he had it in his power to do that. He also spoke of large sums of money. So naturally, when he was murdered Miss Tracy suspected that Mr. Dill was concerned

in it, but she refused to disclose her suspicions for obvious reasons—the fear of consequences to her father."

Wolfe put his fingertips together again. "It is surprising that Mr. Gould lived as long as he did, in view of his character. He bragged to Miss Lasher that he was going to marry another girl. That was silly and sadistic. He let Miss Tracy know that he had a hold on Mr. Dill. That was rashly indiscreet. He even infected the Rucker and Dill exhibit with urume yellows, doubtless to dramatize the pressure he was exerting on Dill for his big haul—at least I presume he did. That was foolish and flamboyant. Of course Dill was equally foolish when he tried to engage me to investigate the Kurume yellows in his exhibit. He must have been unbalanced by the approaching murder he had arranged for, since bravado was not in his normal character. I suppose he had a hazy idea that hiring me to investigate in advance would help to divert suspicion from him. He really wasn't cut out for a murderer. His nerves weren't up to it."

"Yours are." Cramer stood up. "I've got to run. One thing I don't get, Dill's going clear to Pennsylvania to



bribe a guy to poison some bushes. I know you spoke about extremes in horticultural jealousy, but have they all got it? Did Dill have it too?"

Wolfe shook his head. "I was then speaking of Mr. Hewitt. What Mr. Dill had was a desire to protect his investment and income. The prospect of those rhodaleas appearing on the market endangered the biggest department of his business." He suddenly sat up and spoke in a new tone. "But speaking of horticultural jealousy—I had a client, you know. I collected a fee in advance. I'd like to show it to you. Archie, will you bring them down,

please?"

I was tired after all the hubbub and the strain of watching Wolfe through another of his little experiments, but he had said please, so I went up to the plant rooms and got them, all three of them, and brought them down and put them side by side on Wolfe's desk. He stood up and bent over them, beaming.

"They're absolutely unique," he said as if he was in church. "Matchless! Incomparable!"

"They're pretty," Cramer said politely, turning to go. "Kind of drab, though. Not much color. I like geraniums better."

## NEXT ISSUE—



### CHINOISERIE

by HELEN McCLOY

### FLOWER OF DEATH

by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

### PULP WRITER

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

### INSTEAD OF THE SAINT—XIV

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

*Chinese communists plot*

*against us in the Caribbean, in*

### BLACK ALLIES

a new story by TERENCE ROBERTS

— in the March 1967 *THE SAINT MAGAZINE*



# tomboy

by Wenzell Brown

Maw claims as how a woman ain't never truly happy till she's had a tragic love affair. Mebbe she's right. Leastwise that's the way it seems with Frankie Wilcox.

Course her name ain't really Frankie, it's Francine. But she wouldn't put up with nothin' that fancy. I've known her ever since she was a little tad, knee-high to a grasshopper. She and her twin brother, Johnny, got into more scrapes than a barrel of monkeys. Then there was Osmund Bilbo who was a year older and always taggin' along and fussin' over 'em. Trouble was, more like than not he'd land up neck-deep in their monkeyshines.

Seein' as how I been sheriff around these parts for the last thirty years, folks was always complainin' to me about Frankie and Johnny and Oz, claimin' that they was the meanest little devils as ever hit Cripple's Bend. But mostly when they calmed

---

*Wenzell Brown is best known for his many novels about the young men in our cities who, from the time they are children, know only hate—a blind hate—for the authority which sees them as the raw material for tomorrow's crime statistics. SM readers know him for sensitive stories such as WITNESS TO MURDER (SMM, July 1958). And stories such as this...*

---



down, they'd have to admit there warn't nothin' really wicked about the trio. They was just high spirited and full o' the old nick. Like the time when they snuck up in back o' the Widder Hawkins when she was singin' a solo at the Strawberry Festival, and dumped a pair o' field mice at her feet. The Widder turned in the performance of her life. She hit high C and held it for full five minutes, jumpin' around all the time and hikin' up her skirts clean to the hips. Will Mooney, who always had a yen for her, got so interested watchin', he fell head-first off'n a stool, cuttin' his forehead so that Doc Crosby had to take ten stitches to sew him back together again.

All summer long, Frankie wouldn't wear nothin' but jeans, sneakers and a boy's shirt. Her hair was cut short and the color o' corn husks and she had so many freckles there warn't hardly no room for the skin to grow in between. She was slim and straight as a boy and she loved baseball and runnin' loose in the woods. She and Johnny was always playin' hookie to go fishin' and inveiglin' Oz to go with 'em. But I'll say this for Frankie, she took her paddlin's along with the boys and never let

out a whoop or a holler about it neither.

Hugh Wilcox, Frankie's dad, was right well off. He had one o' the best dairy farms in the county. Frankie's ma's been dead a long time and Hugh had the rearin' o' the twins all to himself. He warn't a man for coddlin' and as soon as they was old enough, each of 'em had to pitch in with the chores.

I reckon Jessie Bilbo was the nearest to a mother the twins ever had. She was a widder who done the cookin' and housekeepin' for Hugh when she was needed. She come in by the day, havin' a cottage of her own down in Donkey's Holler. Her son, Oz, had the run of the Wilcox place like he was one o' the family.

In high school, you couldn't mistake Frankie for a boy no longer. She was fillin' out the way a girl should but she still had the name of a tomboy. She let her hair grow long and wore dresses but she didn't go in for dancin' and such. She'd a heap rather shoulder a gun and spend a day in the woods huntin' with Johnny and Oz.

The summer Johnny was eighteen, he and Oz got called up for the draft. They were both right happy to go and



seems like the whole o' the town was down at the bus depot to see 'em off. Johnny never did come back to Cripple's Bend. He was killed in an accident in trainin' camp. Oz did his hitch and then re-enlisted. In all he was gone nigh on to six years, most of it spent in Europe.

Meanwhile Hugh Wilcox is crippled up with arthritis and it's Frankie as keeps the farm in apple pie order. You drop by the Wilcox place most any day and you can see Frankie in overalls, pitchin' hay, milkin' the cows or scrubbin' down the barn. She's still slim and straight and she handles herself like a man. In her shapeless clothes, you'd swear she is one till you get up close. Then there's something downright appealin' and feminine in her face.

More'n one of the local boys has come around to pay her court. But they might as well a-stayed at home for all the good it done 'em. Frankie makes it plain she ain't in no marryin' mood and mebbe she's right when she reckons the farm is as much of an attraction as she is, 'cause there ain't no denyin' that anyone as marries her is latchin' on to a fine piece o' property.

Folks around say as how

she's savin' herself for Oz Bilbo when he comes home. But it don't work out that way. When Oz returns to Cripple's Bend he ain't much like the boy who went away. He's grown up, filled out and become a man. There's something gruff, hard and independent about him. He settles down with his ma in their cottage in Donkey's Holler but he don't as much as set a foot on the Wilcox land.

Oz has been home for quite a spell afore he meets up with Frankie on the main street. They stop and chat like a couple o' near strangers. Then Frankie walks off, cool as you please, her head high and starin' straight ahead. Oz looks after her and takes a step or two like he's goin' to foller her but then he shrugs and strides off in the other direction.

Frankie don't show up much in Cripple's Bend but she sings in the choir of the Community Church every Sunday and usually attends the Tuesday night dinner and prayer meetin'. Oz goes to church too, but he sits in a back pew and don't speak to nobody. He even keeps his mouth shut durin' the hymn-singin'. He just ain't a musical man.

At first Frankie smiles and



speaks a word or two to Oz when they meet. But pretty soon she don't even do that. She flounces right past him, pretendin' she don't know he's there.

It's about this time that Reggie Van der Breughe arrives in town. He comes a might ahead o' the summer crowd and demands the best room in Cripple's Inn. He's a character is Reggie. He's tall and skinny with curly, bright red hair parted in the middle and china blue eyes. He has a funny little paunch, a high-pitched pompous voice and a struttin' walk that makes you want to laugh. He goes in for silk suits, pale lemon vests, two-toned shoes, bow ties and yeller socks. His trademark though is a bamboo cane with a carved jade head. He's always swingin' it when he walks, or twirlin' or flexin' it when he's standin' still.

Reggie sort o' takes the town by storm. In no time flat he lets it be known he's plannin' to settle in Cripple's Bend. He says as how he's done a lot o' travellin' in his time but no place has ever taken his fancy so fast.

Before a week is up, he's joined the Cripple's Bend Community Church and made a hundred dollar contribution to the Parish Fund. So when he asks Parson

Beam if he can join the choir, the parson can't very well refuse. It turns out Reggie can't sing for sour apples. No one can say he ain't tryin'. He bellers out the words but he ain't only tone deaf, he can't keep time neither.

Usually Parson Beam ain't much of a diplomat but he knows he's got to use kid gloves with a heavy contributor to the Parish Fund. All the same he's got to muzzle Reggie or pretty soon he'll be preachin' to an empty church. He's half-expectin' Reggie to blow up and demand his money back, so he asks me to come along in case o' trouble. Reggie surprises us by bein' real meek and docile. He explains it's been a life-time ambition of his to sing in a church choir. He looks so sad I'm afraid he'll bust out cryin'.

Then he brightens up. "What about a deal, Parson? Just let me sit in the choir and I promise not to utter a word. I'll feel I'm a part anyway."

Parson Beam thinks it over. "It's a might irregular," he admits. "But there's nothing in the Bible as says it's wrong."

The way Reggie thanks him, you'd think the Parson had handed him a million dollars.



The Parson's a bit doubtful of Reggie keepin' his word but he needn't a-been. After the first Sunday it's pretty clear Reggie ain't payin' much attention to the sermon or the hymns. All he's got eyes for is Frankie Wilcox. He sits there a-watchin' her and every now and then heavin' a deep sigh. Frankie's dressed up prettier than I ever seen her before, in a silky dress the color o' rose petals. She's wearin' a frilly little hat with rose-buds on it and a pearl necklace that used to belong to her ma. The flush on her cheeks is right becomin' too. She tries to make like she don't notice Reggie oglin' her but she ain't foolin' nobody. Least of all Reggie.

He don't say nothin' to her till the Tuesday night church dinner when he maneuvers a seat right beside her. He keeps talkin' to her in tones so low that nobody else can hear. But the whole room is watchin' her blush and listenin' to her laugh which is nearer to a giggle than anyone ever expected to hear from Frankie Wilcox. Afterwards Reggie takes her home in his car, which is one o' them low-slung foreign jobs where you have to crunch all up to fit in. He makes quite a production of helpin' her

to settle down, while the church women are oh-in' and ah-in' on the steps.

Pretty soon the whole town is buzzin' about Frankie and Reggie. Seems like he's spendin' most of his evenings up at the Wilcox farm. Maudie Jenkins, who lives nearby and ain't above a bit o' snoopin', tells as how she's seen him a-kissin' Frankie's hand. And all during choir practice, Reggie keeps passin' Frankie folded sheets o' paper. One day Frankie drops one o' them notes and Maudie scoops it up quick as lightnin' and stows it in her bag. 'Tain't no time at all afore the word goes 'round that Reggie's writin' poetry. People say it ain't bad neither, even though Miss Lettie Cushman, who teaches English at the high school, claims as how he cribbed it from some feller named Browning.

All summer the affair grows more and more torrid. You never seen a woman change faster'n Frankie. There's a bloom to her, a sort o' radiance you have to see to believe. Everyone has taken it for granted she's sort o' plain but now most of 'em are willin' to admit she comes close to bein' a beauty.

The town's divided about Reggie Van der Breughe. His



struttin' walk, his flute-like voice and exaggerated manners put the back up of a lot o' men folk. On the other hand there's some, 'specially among the women, who say we can do with a lot more good manners in Cripple's Bend. Even Maw vows she wouldn't mind havin' someone kiss her hand and recite poetry to her.

Oz Bilbo ain't a-sayin' nothin'. He's grown more and more sullen 'til he ain't hardly speakin' to a soul. Sometimes he drops around to church a-Sundays and sits a-glowerin' first at Reggie than at Frankie, but neither of 'em pay him any mind.

One day Oz surprises me by stampin' into my office. I tilt back my chair and light my pipe, waitin' for him to speak his piece. Finally he blurts out, "I want you to investigate Reggie Van der Breughe."

"Well, son," I says, "I can't do that. He ain't broke no laws as far as I know."

"He's crazy as a june-bug."

"What makes you say that, Oz?"

"If I tell you, you won't believe it."

"Try me out and see."

"All right. I was up there to the Wilcox place last Fri-

day. I mean I was passin' by and turned in at the gate, thinkin' I'd have a word with Frankie."

"You weren't a-spyin' on her, was you, Oz?"

He goes brick red. "Mebbe I was a little. I don't trust that Reggie. Anyway, believe it or not, Frankie's leanin' on the balcony o' the second floor and Reggie's standin' on the lawn below, strummin' a guitar and croonin' like a calf who can't find his maw. It was real Romeo and Juliet stuff. I tell you, Sheriff, they've both gone around the bend."

I says, "I don't remember as how Romeo and Juliet was crazy."

"Mebbe not. But you can't deny they came to a sticky end. Can't you do something, Sheriff?"

"What would you suggest?"

"Mebbe a little checkin' back on this Van der Breughe. If you ask me he's phony as a three dollar bill. All he spells is trouble for Frankie."

I ain't got no real reason but I decide it won't do no harm to find out a bit more about Reggie. But wherever I check, I come to a dead-end. His car's rented and the only address he gives when he registers at Cripple's Inn



is New York. Even when I tackle him personally, it's a waste o' time. He's polite but his answers add up to nothin'. He's been livin' around here and there. He don't work but lives off a trust fund. Where's his home? Well, he reckons it's right here in Cripple's Bend.

Meanwhile he lets it drop he's asked Frankie to marry him. She ain't exactly accepted but she ain't said no neither. I don't like it much. A feller like Reggie with his lemon vests and his guitar-strummin' ain't the kind to make a good husband for Frankie. I like it even less when Frankie comes to church wearin' an engagement ring with a diamond that looks as big as a ping-pong ball. But I still ain't got no excuse to stick my oar in.

The way things turn out there ain't no need to. The quarrel between Frankie and Reggie breaks out in Gimpy's Diner on Wednesday night after the moving picture show. It starts off real low-toned but 'tain't long afore everyone in the diner knows there's something wrong. Then Frankie jumps up, pulls off her ring and flings it at Reggie's feet. She walks out o' Gimpy's, head high, heels a-clickin'. Reggie

don't even pick up the ring afore he heads out after her.

He catches up with her on the sidewalk outside and grabs her wrist.

He says, "You've got to listen to me, darling."

Frankie draws herself up straight. "Keep your hands off me," she says, real cold-like.

But Reggie clings to her, babblin' away. Then Oz Bilbo looms out of the shadders. He seizes Reggie by the shoulder and spins him around.

"You heard what the lady said. Leave her alone."

Reggie's voice goes shrill. "Why don't you mind your own business?" he screams. He reaches for Frankie again. This time Oz gives him a hard push.

Reggie ain't the kind you'd expect to put up a fight. But he comes in with a clumsy crouch and takes a poke at Oz. Oz back-pedals but Reggie keeps on comin'. Then Oz lets go with a good hard punch. Reggie swings part way around and the blow lands on his shoulder. It couldn't have hurt him much, but he's off balance and he goes down, sprawlin' on the sidewalk. Oz stands over him, his fists clenched but Frankie steps in between.

She says, "Stop it. Both of



you. You ought to be ashamed."

Oz and Reggie start talkin' at the same time. But she don't listen to neither of 'em. She says, "You're a couple of fools and I don't want to see either of you again as long as I live." Then she walks away, so fast she's almost runnin'.

The next couple o' weeks is bad ones for Reggie. He keeps tryin' to patch things up but it ain't no go. Frankie won't as much as give him the time o' day. He hangs around the Wilcox place 'til Frankie calls me and asks me to take him away.

Reggie ain't never struck me as a very strong character but I warn't expectin' him to go to pieces the way he done. He was blubberin' and moanin' and claimin' that life ain't worth livin' without Frankie. After that night, he takes to his cups in his grief but that don't do him no good. All the time he's talkin' wilder and wilder.

Then one night I get another phone call from Frankie. She says Reggie has just left her place in a terrible state. He's swearin' he'll do away with himself, if she won't marry him.

"I think he meant it," Frankie explains. "And even if he didn't, he shouldn't be

driving in the condition he's in."

The truth of the matter is I don't take Reggie and his suicide threats too seriously. But the next mornin' I change my tune. Sam Berdine who lives out near Maxwell's Cove comes rushin' into my office. He says there's a little red bug of a car abandoned on a deserted strip of beach out where he lives.

I drive out to check and, sure enough, it's Reggie's Volkswagen. There's a rotting jetty nearby that's posted as dangerous. I work my way along it and see where the wood's been freshly splintered. When I get out to the end, I spy a roll of clothing wedged up between two up-rights. There's no mistakin' the Italian silk jacket and lemon vest o' Reggie's. Inside a pocket o' the jacket is a suicide note. It's addressed to Frankie in Reggie's spindly writin'.

I read it and it's flowery as all get-out but there ain't nothin' to do but deliver it.

Frankie takes the news a lot harder'n I expect. She starts cryin' and sayin' it's all her fault and she really loved Reggie all the time. While she's wailin', who should drive up to the house but Oz Bilbo. Frankie don't even look at him. She keeps



carryin' on fit to kill, insistin' I take her out to the jetty.

I drive her out there but there ain't much to see. It's a foggy sort o' day and the beach is gray and forlorn. Frankie paces up and down like she's demented and then she gives a scream and falls to her knees on the sand. I come a-rushin'. There beside her is Reggie's bamboo walkin' stick that he was always a-twistin' and a-twirlin'.

Frankie's still a-crouchin' over it when Oz Bilbo's battered-up jalopy comes skiddin' along the beach. Oz jumps out of it and comes runnin' across the sand to Frankie. I reckon there ain't nothin' for me to do but clear out for awhile, so I walk down the beach quite a piece.

When I turn and look back, Frankie's on her feet and Oz has got his arm around her. Her forehead is restin' against his shoulder and he's pattin' her sort o' rough and awkward. Somehow I don't feel as bad as I should. I reckon Oz will take a lot better care o' Frankie and the Wilcox farm than Reggie Van der Breughe would ever have done.

It turns out I'm right too. We never did find hair nor hide o' Reggie. His body never washed ashore and sure as

shootin' we couldn't dredge the whole Atlantic. I put out a flock o' tracers to try to find some relatives but no one ever came forward. It's like he come out o' nowhere and plain disappeared.

Frankie mourned him for awhile but Oz was always around to comfort her and 'twarn't long afore she seemed to forget Reggie Van der Breughe. Six months later she and Oz got married in the Cripple's Bend Community Church with Parson Beam performin' the ceremony.

That must a-been nigh on to five years ago 'cause their oldest son, Johnny, is goin' on four now.

I guess that's where the story ought to end and it would have if Maw hadn't got it into her head to visit her sister down to Ogunquit last summer. Course, she had to drag me along too. Now Maw's a great hand for amateur theatricals and when she learns there's a road company playin' in the town, nothin' will do but that we go and see 'em.

The play warn't much and I'll have to admit I dozed through the better part of it. Then, when everyone else is filin' out, Maw lags behind.

She says, "Paw, I'm goin'



back stage and you're a-com-in' with me."

I don't argue. There ain't no use with Maw. When we get back, she insists on seein' some actor named Bruce. His dressin' room is pointed out and Maw ploughs right in, with me at her heels tryin' to stop her.

There's two young fellers in the room that ain't no more than a cubby-hole. They look up startled; then one of 'em turns away quick.

Maw walks straight up to him and says, "Hello, Reggie."

He glances at her, his face blank. "You must be making some mistake, ma'am."

"No, I ain't. Sure as God made green apples, you're Reggie Van der Breughe."

I look this feller over. He's got short medium brown hair in a crew cut and light gray eyes. I remember seein' him on the stage. He ain't got no paunch nor no struttin' walk. I don't see no resemblance betwixt him and Reggie. I reckon Maw's gone plum daft. Then he gets up. There's a strength about his face I ain't never seen in Reggie but his tight, mockin' smile is familiar.

He says in a heavy voice, "Supposing I am, what are you going to do about it?"

Maw don't seem to hear

him. She's musin', "Dye that hair red and give it a marcel. Wear contact lenses and a pad around your middle. Walk in the jerky way and talk in a squeakin' voice. You were good, Reggie. You really were."

He laughs. "I thought so too. If you don't mind my askin, how'd you spot me, ma'am?"

"A man can't change his features. His ears, the shape of his forehead and the like. But I'll tell you what set me to thinkin'. All through the show you was twirlin' and flexin' that cane you was carryin'. It was a dead giveaway. It's a habit you ought to break."

He grins at her. "I'll try, Ma'am. I really will."

There ain't no one else back stage now. Maw says, "Frankie Wilcox hired you to make Oz Bilbo jealous, didn't she?"

He shrugs. "I guess there's no reason to deny it any longer. You'll have to admit I did a good job, even if I did ham it up now and then. I hear she's married to the stupid jerk she was angling for. So she got her money's worth, didn't she?"

I'm workin' up to a boil, gettin' madder every minute. I stammer out, "I ought to





# BACK ISSUE BARGAIN

A LIMITED quantity of back issues of **"saint"** MAGAZINE are in stock, dated as far back as 1963. all of them are in mint condition- the cartons were never opened.

12 different issues \$250

24 different issues \$450

Requests for particular issues cannot be filled. Take them "catch as catch can" - and you cant go wrong.

Fill out the coupon below, and get a great big load of thrill-filled reading. . .

FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY 167  
30 East 42nd Street,  
New York, N. Y. 10017

Please send me the following copies of **"saint"** MAGAZINE . I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_\_ (check, money order or cash)

☐ 12 copies \$2.50 — ☐ 24 copies \$4.50

Name .....

Address.....

City.....State....Zip....

put you under arrest. Frankie too."

Maw lays her hand on my arm. "Now calm down, Paw. What laws did he break?"

She's got me stumped. I says, "I can't think of any right off. But give me time and I guess I can dig up one or two."

Maw says, "You ain't doin' nothin' o' the kind. Frankie and Oz have got a right to happiness and you ain't spoilin' it just because she made a fool of you."

I'm still fumin' but there ain't much I can say. I reckon if the truth ever comes out, I'll be the laughin' stock o' the whole o' Pisquaticook County. But I'm not confessin' that to Maw. I reckon it's better to convince her that I knew Reggie was a fraud all the time and I was playin' along so that Frankie Wilcox could have her tragic love affair and Oz could spend the rest of his life comfortin' her. Come to think of it, mebbe it's true. There was a lot o' times when I didn't quite believe in Reggie Van der Breughe.





*what's  
new  
in  
crime*

**by Stefan Santesson**

Alistair Mair's *THE DOUGLAS AFFAIR* (Morrow, \$4.95) will disturb the many for whom James Bond is an entrancing never-never-land phenomenon, whose exploits can be envied (and even dreamt about) but whose actual existence can be doubted. Because, after all, all this can't happen *here*....

This is the story of one man, a successful man, James Douglas, and his impact on Scottish thought and politics.

Douglas stands for a new approach to Scottish Nationalism, that apparently quixotic link to the past which most of us, but not all of us, tend to dismiss as the refuge for politically unrealistic minds. (Even after what has been happening in Wales...) Douglas feels it is time to take a long hard look at the past "achievements" of the Nationalist Party, after "half a century of petty mindedness and failure and ineptitude, of schism and futility and sheer, airy-fairy bee-

---

*The writer, whose anthology, THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, was published by Award Books early this year, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, editor, Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the 1963 Critic's Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.*

---



headedness that must be without equal in the history of any so-called political party." It is high time to recognize that the arts in Scotland need "free air to breathe and a reborn national consciousness to feed on. That, and the removal of the dead hand of class and kirk." Douglas feels that "the time has come for action...or extinction...."

"I am proposing that we should fight every local and parliamentary election from now on. I am proposing that we should launch a publicity campaign to bring home to everybody in the country what it is we stand for, and how we propose to get it. And this time there won't be any emotion in the arguments, no harking back to the guid auld days and the

*Prince over the water. The arguments will be material. Factual. Hard, unanswerable economic arguments that affect every man, woman and child north of the Border. And arguments most of them can understand!"*

What follows is High Adventure, not in the John Buchan sense of those words but in terms of these more sophisticated and also more ruthless days. Whether or not you have ever been aware of some of the socio-political problems touched on in the course of the novel—problems which I assure you do exist—you will find Alistair Mair's THE DOUGLAS AFFAIR both exciting and interesting.

Julia Brown's I TESTIFY (Western Islands, \$1.50), is the story of Mrs. Brown's years as an F.B.I. Undercover Agent within the Communist Party.

Mrs. Brown's experiences illustrate the inadequacy, to put it mildly, of the Communist Party's attempts over the years to gain a foothold within the American Negro community—attempts which have failed and continue to fail, time and time again. One reason for this has been the inability of the average doctrinaire (except, of course, for the late Ben Davis),

THE SOLUTION to the  
PUZZLE on page 138

C	A	L	M		H	O	S	T		F	U	R	O	R
A	R	E	A		A	N	T	E		A	N	O	D	E
B	E	A	R		P	E	O	N		T	I	D	A	L
I	N	S	T	E	P		P	O	L	I	T	E	L	Y
N	A	T	I	V	E	S		R	A	G	E			
			N	E	N	E	S		R	U	D	D	E	R
S	H	E	E	N		N	U	D	G	E		E	D	O
P	O	R	T		L	O	I	R	E		S	A	G	A
A	N	I		C	A	R	T	E		S	H	R	E	D
R	E	C	O	R	D		E	A	G	E	R			
			R	U	L	E		M	I	R	A	C	L	E
S	T	R	I	D	E	N	T		R	E	P	A	I	R
O	R	A	G	E		T	I	E	D		N	I	N	O
P	A	R	I	S		E	R	A	L		E	R	I	S
S	P	E	N	T		R	E	T	E		L	O	S	E



to reach the man in the street, the target, theoretically at least, of any recruiting.

Marxist Garveyites such as Paul Robeson do not, in other words, speak for the masses, but only for the few. And "willing workers" such as Mrs. Brown, monotonously and unimaginatively named to token positions where they can be pointed to as evidence of the Party's dedication to Brotherliness, are in the main people with no influ-

ence either among their neighbors or within their community. The book, though inadequate in many ways, underlines this reality that the influence of the Communist Party on American Negro thought has been and is exaggerated. What we are living with today, and must understand while there is yet time, is that the old "explanations" for the unrest in our cities have no validity. They never did....

**And NOW** the newest and finest PAPERBACK editions of *LESLIE CHARTERIS'* book-length novels.

The following titles are now on sale:

- 101—The SAINT Steps In
- 102—The SAINT Sees It Through
- 103—The SAINT Closes The Case
- 104—The Avenging SAINT
- 105—The SAINT'S GETAWAY
- 106—The SAINT in New York
- 107—Enter the SAINT

- 108—The SAINT Meets His Match
- 109—Featuring the SAINT
- 110—Alias the SAINT
- 111—The SAINT Overboard
- 112—The SAINT—The Brighter Buccaneer
- 113—The SAINT vs Scotland Yard
- 114—The SAINT and Mr. Teal

Additional titles will be announced as released. Ask for these books at your newsdealer or use the coupon below ... copies will be rushed to you. 50¢ per copy at your newsdealers—60¢ by mail.

**FICTION PUBLISHING CO.**

167

30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

Please send me the following SAINT novels:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT Steps In        | <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT Closes The Case    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Avenging SAINT        | <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT in New York        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT'S Getaway       | <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT Meets His Match    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enter The SAINT           | <input type="checkbox"/> Featuring The SAINT          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT Sees It Through | <input type="checkbox"/> Alias The SAINT              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Saint Overboard       | <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT—Brighter Buccaneer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT and Mr. Teal    | <input type="checkbox"/> The SAINT vs Scotland Yard   |

I am enclosing 60¢ per copy for a total of \$.....

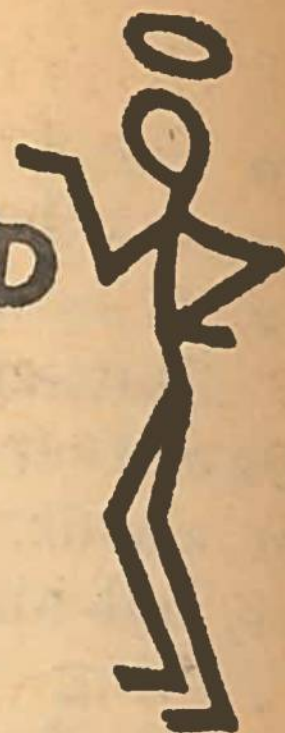
Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone..... State .....



# THE *saint* CROSSWORD



## ACROSS

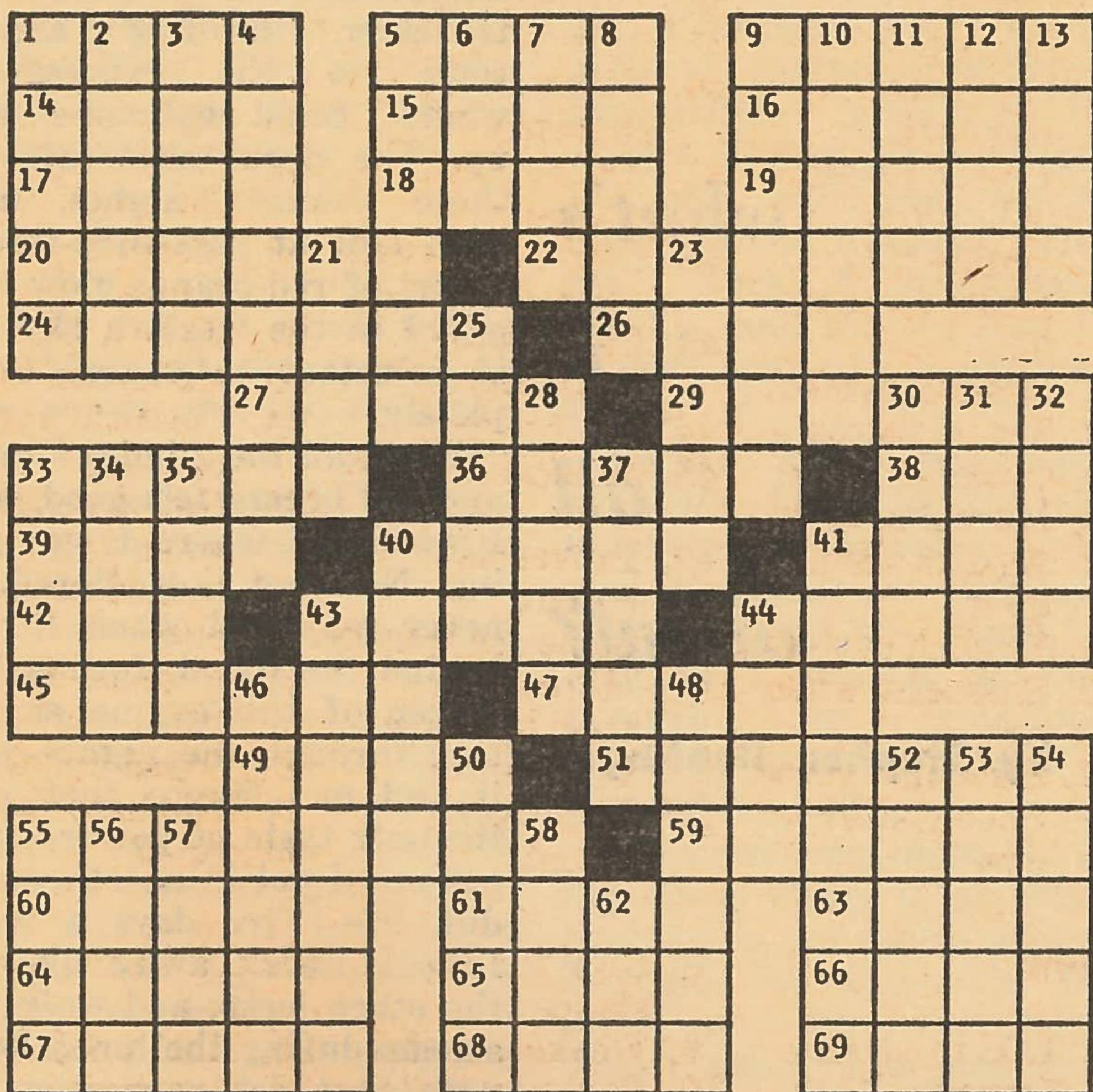
- |                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Eye of hurricane            | 33. Bright gloss                         |  |
| 5. Large mob                   | 36. Clue with elbow                      |  |
| 9. Hitler-like excitement      | 38. Ancient Tokyo                        |  |
| 14. French measure in hectares | 39. Rifle hold                           |  |
| 15. Untidy tidy                | 40. Valley of chateaux                   |  |
| 16. Emits positive ions        | 41. All the Saint stories                | 59. Commonly blocks 32                         |
| 17. Russian symbol             | 42. Ovid's dog without head or tail      | 60. Storm in 40 across                         |
| 18. Trujillo's pawn            | 43. Blanche for unlimited                | 61. To be a fit                                |
| 19. Outlet of river            | 44. A bit torn                           | 63. Mallorcan kid                              |
| 20. Marching arch              | 45. Musical achievement                  | 64. Classical apple-polisher                   |
| 22. As a 25 should do it       | 47. Proverbial rodent                    | 65. Not so genuine when half turned inside out |
| 24. English oysters            | 49. Some use thumb                       | 66. Papa backing up                            |
| 26. Shameful when out          | 51. More advertised by soaps than saints | 67. Tired bullet                               |
| 27. Hawaiian geese             | 55. Unpleasing sound                     | 68. Gladiator's net                            |
| 29. Should steer a cow         |  | 69. Shed                                       |

## DOWN

- |                            |   |                             |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Taxi to confine         | 8. Gigli for instance                     | 23. De Gaulle's open sea    |
| 2. Scope for 68            | 9. Weakens metal                          | 25. Half a Saint title      |
| 3. Very little like rented | 10. Powerful states                       | 28. Courtiers               |
| 4. Bird-like tyrant        | 11. Cowboys would miss nothing            | 30. Priced like Bambi       |
| 5. What 51 can do          | 12. Upset freight                         | 31. Perimeter of 45         |
| 6. Salt-maker in headstand | 13. Trust without the middle of an answer | 32. Another way to spell 11 |
| 7. Highway sign            | 21. Six to half-dozen                     | 33. Sailor's stick in ring  |



34. Gives razor 31  
 35. The French wax bottoms up  
 37. Shut-eye show  
 40. Server  
 41. Broken shell  
 43. 3 like 22  
 44. Yellow leaf
46. Begin if eaten  
 48. Hip grip  
 50. Appear on stage  
 52. Common to Egypt, Georgia, and Illinois  
 53. Take oil out of the last place
54. Gnawed  
 55. Dunks  
 56. Carriage that would turn some over  
 57. Once over lightly  
 58. Cause 9 down



(Please turn to page 136 for the solution.)



# NOTE:

*Any letters complaining that this month's clues are worse than ever will be much appreciated. That is what we are trying for.*

*L.C.*



*what's  
it  
all  
about?*

**by Stephen Dentinger**

The engine coughed once and then caught, throbbing to life as I eased down on the accelerator. Then I was traveling, heading across town to the expressway where I could really open her up. The dark came late on these summer nights, and even now at past nine-thirty a sort of red-orange glow lingered in the western sky, as if reluctant to vanish completely.

I had all the windows open and the breeze felt good, and I wondered where I was going. Not that it mattered. It never mattered when I was behind the wheel, feeling the power of the engine as we tore through the night—just it and me. Maybe that was the only taste of power—real power—I got in an otherwise dull life. Five days a week I could work away like all the other jerks, and walk the streets during the lunch hour with that set expression of pleasant boredom, but when Friday nights came I was

---

*How many times have you wondered what was in the mind of that hit and run driver just before he struck? Just before he ran into that old woman—or that child... What were his thoughts, in his all too brief moment of mastery over life and death, as he saw his victim....*

---



master of myself, driving two tons of steel along a gray ribbon of highway.

It was at times like this that I knew what the air aces of the First World War must have felt when they took to the sky in their Spads and Fokkers and Sopwith Camels. This, right here now, speeding along the expressway at seventy miles an hour, was what life is all about. I flipped on the radio but then turned it off again. I didn't need it. I didn't need anything but the speed and the power and the certainty that I was going somewhere.

But where tonight? I jack-ed up the speed to eighty-five, taking a long low hill as if it didn't exist, roaring down the other side with all the fury of the night around me. I passed a little sports car with a girl at the wheel, turned sharply in front of her and debated having some fun. But no, I had other things on my mind. She might remember me, or the license number, and report it to the cops later. I couldn't take a chance on anything like that.

Further along, pressing ninety, I caught an animal in the road—a rabbit, probably—and pinned him to the pavement before he knew what hit him. All right, all

right. No faster, or they might pick me up. I slowed it back gradually, seeing the lights of the city off on my right.

And turned off into downtown. The city reminded me of the resort season in Florida. Flowering sport shirts, girls in shorts, open-topped convertibles prowling the streets. Friday, Friday night, the beat beat beat of the rock place as I passed. "Hey, cat." Sure. I remembered Florida, and the old man I'd caught on the crosswalk there.

Friday night was alive, with the blood of the city throbbing in its veins, and I was its master, as long as I stayed behind the wheel, as long as I saw it all only through the windshield specked with the guts of a dozen dead bugs.

I cruised some more, thinking about where to go. Maybe down to the Negro section. I could hit a kid in the street and keep on going. They'd see a white man driving away and that would be enough for a nice riot on a hot Friday night. Or maybe down to the beach, where there'd be a crowd even after dark. They were never individual people when I had them in my sights, never men or women or children



when I gunned the car forward in that final second. They were only objects like bags of sand.

Some kids in a pickup truck yelled at me as they went by, and I followed them for a while until I got tired of it. Then I swung around to follow the circling red flasher of an ambulance as it roared through the night. I figured it would be an accident and I was right. A couple of hot rodders piled into each other on a turn. The one kid was screaming when they lifted him out, and I watched it for a long time through my windshield.

Pretty soon I was heading back toward the expressway, hungry for another taste of the speed. A few big drops of rain glanced off the glass in front of me, and I rolled up the windows as the full fury of a brief downpour hit the road ahead. It was good, and I liked driving in the rain. I remembered the first car I'd ever owned—a supercharged French job with an eight cylinder engine. My father had bought it for my eighteenth birthday, back when the family had money, and it had rained the first day I drove it. They'd taken it away from me soon after that, because of the accident and my father's death, but I

always had the memory of that first drive in the rain.

Now my tastes ran to American cars, because the foreign ones were too distinctive. Someone might remember, reports might be compared. I was very, very careful—always.

Two girls loomed up in my headlights as the rain abated. They had a flat tire and they huddled under a single black raincoat while they debated what to do. I sped past them, then cut back to the exit lane and left the expressway at the next feeder. It took me only a few minutes to double back and get on again where I had before. This time I turned off my headlights.

The rain had stopped and they were trying to do something with the tire. I could see them clearly in the reflected glow from the distant lights, but they didn't see me. The car hummed along like a silent bat swooping through the night. I pushed it to the speed limit and held it there—no faster, because they might be able to tell later. No faster...careful....

The girl in the raincoat glanced up at the last instant, her dim face a mixture of surprise and then terror.

*[(please turn to page 154)]*



# *druid doom*

**by Richard S. Ullery**

The island crouches off the northwest coast of Wales. Flat sands edge into the Irish Sea, dotted with beach-houses and amusement places. Steamships, coal barges and sometimes yachts slide through bays and straits.

Twenty centuries ago the island was known as Mona. What is beach today was then swamp, where lived snakes, scorpions, birds and the fish on which they fed. Inland, wolves and wild boars ranged the forest where are small busy towns today. Ships were seldom seen. Occasionally a Phoenecian trading vessel, a Scandinavian galley or a Roman trireme passed the island headed for more important places.

Cedmon pushed through the brush hedging the forest and limped onto flat pastureland. Beyond him lay the village, where torch-flares were wavering red streaks against the black of night. He forced

---

*I met Richard S. Ullery, Dean of Administration and Director of the Summer Division at American International College, in Springfield, Mass., when I spoke there this July at SM author Wenzell Brown's course. I think you will agree with me that Dean Ullery's story of the Druid Talgarth is the story of many men who, over the centuries, have misused such authority...*

---

*H.S.S.*



himself into a stumbling run.

A sharp command cut through the darkness. "Stop there!"

Into the circle of light cast by the nearest torch strode a man. Beads glittered at the collar of his sleeveless cloak and the knife he gripped was ready.

"Hail, Artog. It is Cedmon."

Artog took a step closer and peered into the other's face. He thrust his knife into his belt.

"We had thought you dead."

"I have been near death," Cedmon answered. He hobbled forward into the full light of the torch.

"You are lame! And your face is scarred from cheek to chin!" Artog exclaimed.

"What has happened to you?"

"It is a long tale. I must go to my house to eat and rest. Is Dara well?"

"Cedmon, your wife is dead," Artog said softly.

Cedmon cried out and clutched Artog's arm. "Dead? When? How?"

"Food is on the fire at my house," Artog said. "Come. Lanilar will give you something to eat, and I will tell you what happened."

In the middle of Artog's one-room homestead a fire of

thorns and bark blazed and hissed. Cedmon lay on the hide-covered bed that extended along the wall, his ragged cloak tossed aside. The children of Artog and Lanilar slept, under a cover of skins, at the far end of the bed.

"Drink this," Lanilar said. She handed him a wooden bowl brimming with broth and chunks of meat, her long skirt swirling as she turned, its beaded fringe gleaming many colors in the firelight.

Cedmon put the bowl to his lips and drank deep of the broth.

"Ah!" he sighed. "There is warmth and strength in that. It is long since I—" He set down the bowl. "What of Dara?"

"She was bitten by a swamp adder," Artog said. "During spring sowing, soon after you left."

"She was in the swamp?" Cedmon asked, surprised.

"That is the strange thing," Lanilar said. "She was in the pasture-land, had lain down to rest and fallen asleep."

"She did not die at once," Artog said. "Your half-brother Talgarth was there—he who is studying to become a Druid priest. He took her to your house and cared for her. The snake had not bitten deep and it seemed that she



might live. But she became worse, even with Talgarth's medicine, and next morning she had died."

Cedmon groaned. "If I had been here—" he began.

"Talgarth never left her side," Artog broke in. "And as an apprentice Druid he knows more of medicine than a hunter like you."

"But why were you not here?" Lanilar asked. "The moon has been full several times since you left—where have you been?"

"When I left on my hunting trip I went deep into the forest," Cedmon answered. "I climbed a high ridge. From the upper end a wild boar charged down. Not at me, but at a man beyond me facing the other way. I shouted and as the boar rushed by me I threw my long spear into its side, and it turned on me. My face was gored, as you can see. I fell backward into the gulley below the ridge. My leg crumpled and I could not rise. The man whom I had saved and some others came down to help me."

"Who were they?" Artog asked.

"They had come from the sea," Cedmon replied. "They wore shiny hats with wings. They spoke a different tongue. I asked them to take

me to our village, but they did not understand. They were kind because I may have saved the life of one of them. They made a sort of bed from branches and carried me away."

"To their camp?" Lanilar asked.

"They had no camp. They circled the swamp and finally we came to the sea. There they had a ship, as long as your house and mine and two more like them."

Artog stirred uneasily. "You had fever from your injuries?" he suggested.

"I was on that ship after I was well," Cedmon answered. "My leg healed—badly, as you have seen—but then I walked from end to end of the ship. And later we rode on it."

"Where to?" Lanilar asked.

"I do not know. The Winged Hats knew. They had a small round box fastened to the ship which told them which way to turn when they were in doubt."

"Did it speak to them?"

"It did not speak, but it pointed the way," Cedmon answered. "We rode a great distance, watching the box, and after a long time we were back here again. We stopped above the swamp,



and they let me come ashore."

"It is a marvellous tale," Artog said doubtfully.

"They made me a gift," Cedmon added. He took from his belt a small flat piece of metal, shiny in the firelight. "Have you ever seen such a thing as this?"

"It is like the surface of the lake when no wind blows, and makes a picture of what is above," Lanilar said. "But it is not water." She stared at her reflection and reluctantly handed back the steel mirror.

Cedmon pulled himself to his feet. "I thank you for the food. Now I must go to my own house."

Artog rose and laid a hand on Cedmon's arm. "Do not go," he said. "For—you have no house!"

Cedmon swung about to face Artog. "I have no house! What are you saying?"

"After Dara died Talgarth saw a vision of you lying dead in the forest. He said that your spirit came to him saying that since he is your half-brother he should have your house and all your goods!"

"He is my brother, Artog. We were not friendly—he wanted Dara too, as you know, and Dara disliked even looking at him—but he is my

brother. When he sees me he will give back what belongs to me. I will go to see him now."

"I will go with you," Artog said.

In the dancing red flicker of torches Cedmon and Talgarth faced each other before what had been Cedmon's house. A dozen or so villagers who had recognized Cedmon stood in a half-circle around them.

"You see I am not dead, Talgarth. Your vision was false."

Talgarth, tall, robed in white, his plumed headdress casting a gigantic shadow, regarded him calmly.

"Is it truly Cedmon?" he asked.

Cedmon took a step forward. "Look well and see."

Talgarth stared back steadily, then touched his fingers lightly against the scars on Cedmon's face.

"This is not Cedmon," he said, his voice full and resonant.

"What does he mean?" a villager asked. "It is surely Cedmon, is it not?"

"What trickery is this?" Cedmon demanded.

"Tell the tale of your wanderings, Cedmon," Artog called out. "Tell of the wonders that you saw!"



Cedmon swung away from Talgarth and retold the story of his adventures. When he had finished an uproar broke out from the villagers.

"Your vision was only partly true, Talgarth. Cedmon was near death but was saved!"

"Return his property, Talgarth! It is yours no longer!"

Talgarth raised his hand high, then stood silent and motionless. His large eyes, glinting in the firelight, raked the faces before him. The cries and murmurs of the villagers trailed into silence.

When all was quiet Talgarth lowered his arm. "You have heard the words from Cedmon's mouth," he exclaimed in deep tones that floated somberly on the night air. "Now I will tell you the truth. This is not Cedmon who stands before us." His voice rolled out in a swelling volume that overwhelmed Cedmon's protest.

"The vision I saw was truth," Talgarth continued. "I saw Cedmon dead. He is dead. A wicked spirit has entered the body of my brother. That spirit has come here to do us great harm."

Cedmon staggered as if struck. He knew that sometimes a human body became

inhabited by a wicked spirit, but this had not happened to him, he was certain of that. What was Talgarth doing to him? He pulled a knife from his belt and made a stumbling dive at Talgarth but his rush was blocked by the villagers. "You have told your story, Cedmon," said one. "Let Talgarth speak now."

"These things I can prove," Talgarth went on. "You know that when a wicked spirit enters a body it always damages the body in some way. You remember Ronad the wolf, whose body carried a devil that made him invisible for so long? And you remember, do you not, that it was only after Karmat, our Arch-Druid, made a spell that the spirit left? And was not Ronad the wolf lame because of the evil soul that broke into his body?"

"I remember Ronad the wolf," one of the villagers said. "For a long time we saw only his tracks which proved him lame."

"And it is true that we never saw him until Karmat had cast the spell," another added.

Talgarth spoke again. "You see that Cedmon is lame, and scarred also, proving that the wicked spirit in his body is one of greatest evil since it had to damage



the body so badly to enter. And here is more proof. Just now you heard words from Cedmon's mouth of magic boxes and giant ships. We know that Cedmon has no knowledge of magic, therefore it is not Cedmon who speaks but the devil-spirit that now lives in his body, wishing to confuse us and gain power over us."

"Cedmon was never lame or scarred," someone in the crowd muttered. "And we know that those who carry wicked spirits within them are never whole of body."

Talgarth swung his arm to point at Cedmon, tightly held by two villagers. "Look! We know my brother Cedmon was a calm and peaceful man whose speech was always reasonable. Tonight we heard words from him in tones that are not those of Cedmon. See how he struggles to attack and silence me because it is Talgarth's eyes which can see through the body to the wicked spirit within! That is not Cedmon!" He raised his arm above his head.

"Let us drive out the spirit that is in my brother's body!" he exclaimed. "Let us pierce that body with spears until the evil soul flees from our village!"

A few men in the group began to move ominously to-

ward Cedmon. Several other villagers headed for Artog, cut in front of them. The two parties faced each other, and knife blades gleamed in the torch light.

"There will be no fighting among ourselves!" called out a new voice. A short-legged, heavy-set man, white-robed and with headgear even taller than that of Talgarth thrust his way forward. His huge head seemed to rest upon wide shoulders as snugly as if there were no neck between.

"It is Karmat, the Arch-Druid!" called out a villager.

The Arch-Druid strode with short staccato steps to a point between the opposing groups.

"Put away your weapons, my people." The great round head swung back and forth like a huge ball as his eyes swept from one faction to the other.

"If Cedmon is dead and a bad spirit now lives in his body we should drive out that spirit before it does us harm—already we have come close to fighting among ourselves. Perhaps that was the spirit's work. Should we strike our spears into Cedmon's body, as Talgarth urges, we shall force out the wicked spirit, if it is there. But if it is Cedmon's spirit, we have



murdered one of ourselves!"

He turned toward Talgarth.

"Although only an apprentice Druid as yet, Talgarth, you have shown unusual powers. Can you cast the spell to drive out an evil spirit as I did with Ronad the wolf?"

"I can, Karmat," Talgarth answered.

"Then there is no need of spears. Talgarth will go to the Great Oak tomorrow at sunrise to cast his spell. If by the next sunrise the evil spirit has left Cedmon's body it will be proof that there is a demon within him. But if Cedmon is still well and strong at that time, we shall know that there was no wicked spirit, and Talgarth will return his house and goods. Is this a fair test, my people?"

"It is indeed fair," one of the villagers said.

"I accept the test," Karmat," Cedmon stated.

That night Cedmon slept at the house of Artog and Lanilar. After the first meal of the next day word came from a passer-by that Talgarth, carrying a Druid wand and a serpent's egg, had stood at the foot of the Great Oak at sunrise, built a fire, burned the egg, and

made his incantations over its charred shell.

"Are you going to do nothing against his spell, Cedmon?" Artog asked.

"No wicked demon is in me, so his magic cannot do me harm," Cedmon replied. "But I should like to go hunting this morning. I have not thrown a spear for a long time. Perhaps I can bring something back for the evening meal. —If you will lend me a spear."

He limped away over the pasture-land toward the forest. Artog shook his head. "I know it is Cedmon, and no evil spirit," he said to Lanilar. "But I still fear Talgarth's powers."

Cedmon returned before the sun had reached its height, a pair of rabbits slung over his shoulder. Lanilar eagerly took charge of them for cleaning and cooking. Cedmon tossed the spear on the ground behind him and squatted beside Artog at the entrance to the house.

"I do not think that Talgarth believes I have a foreign spirit in me," he said. "And it is not that he wants my house and goods enough to destroy me. He fears me for something else. And when the sun has risen tomorrow—"

"You will not be here!" a



harsh voice interrupted. Behind them stood Talgarth, his large eyes fixed on Cedmon.

"The spell I cast is working. Its power increases as the time grows shorter." He took a long step over Cedmon's spear and strode away.

"He is dangerous," Artog said. "And he heard what you were saying."

"It does not matter," Cedmon replied. "But perhaps I should keep this by me for awhile." He stood up and reached down for the spear. As his hand closed upon it a searing pain stabbed into his palm. He gazed in horror at the many-clawed little creature clinging to the spear's shaft, its brown body almost invisible against the dark wood. Tiny malignant eyes glared upward while the barbed tail that had struck deep into the flesh of Cedmon's hand thrashed frantically.

"Scorpion!" he cried out. "Poison scorpion!"

Artog was at his side and Lanilar came rushing from the house. Artog whipped out his knife and sliced twice across Cedmon's palm, then made two more cuts across the first pair.

"Now press hard, Lanilar!" he ordered. Lanilar gripped Cedmon's hand be-

tween both of hers and squeezed with all her strength. Artog put his lips to the gashes and sucked in his breath with a mighty pull. He spit out a mouthful of blood mixed with yellow fluid, alternately applying his lips to the wound and ejecting blood and poison while Lanilar maintained the pressure against the palm of Cedmon's hand.

"The most of it is out," Artog said at last. "Rest upon the grass, Cedmon. A bandage of wet leaves and the sting will be no more than a fly-bite." He spat again. "Faugh! It was well we were nearby."

Cedmon, reeling with pain and shock, sank to the ground. "You spoke of magic and spells," he said. "It is the greatest magic of all to have such friends!"

"Artog!" Lanilar called, pointing to the spear. "Look! the scorpion! It is still there!"

The deadly little reptile, lashing out with claws and tail, had not left the spear-handle.

"Tied by the head with swamp-grass just where a man would grasp it!" Artog said. "See the spot beneath the scorpion where the sweat of Cedmon's hand has stained the wood!"



"Talgarth stood there, and our backs were to him," Cedmon pointed out.

"How could he handle a scorpion and not be stung himself?" Lanilar wondered.

"A drop or two of spirit-water on its head and it would sleep for awhile," Artog answered. "Long enough for Talgarth to bring it here and fasten it on the spear while we were talking."

Cedmon struggled to his feet. "I do not feel well," he said. "Take me inside."

They helped him onto the bed. "I am not so ill as I appear," he said. "Do not worry. One more favor—Lanilar, will you go through the village, telling everyone that I am sick and have taken to my bed?"

For the rest of the day Cedmon lay on his pallet, with Artog lounging and playing with his children just outside the entrance.

"All the people now believe that Talgarth is right, that his spell is working, and the evil spirit is being driven out of Cedmon's body," Lanilar reported after her journey through the village.

"That is good," Cedmon stated. "What has Talgarth to say?"

"The spirit within you will be gone before sunrise."

"He thinks that your blood

is filled with the scorpion's poison," Artog said. "If that were so, you would surely die tonight."

A brief smile rippled the scar on Cedmon's cheek. "Let him be happy in that thought for now," he said.

Lanilar prepared the evening meal, and she, Artog and their children crouched beside the bed to share it with Cedmon.

"I have another favor to ask," Cedmon announced when they had finished. "Will you take your children somewhere for the night and send word to Talgarth to come here. Tell him that I have things to talk about with him."

"My sister will take the children," Lanilar said. "But the other—is it wise?"

"While he believes you are dying, you are safe," Artog warned. "But when he sees you he will know that you are not sick, and he will become dangerous again!"

"I shall be on my guard. And you and Lanilar will be just outside the doorway while he is here. There will be nothing to fear."

Darkness had fallen when Lanilar returned.

"Talgarth is coming," she reported. "The village thinks that your evil spirit, knowing itself conquered, has sent for



Talgarth to plead with him to remove the spell."

"That is well," Cedmon replied. "Let the torch be set in the doorway so the light will be bright. You have some spirit-water, of course?"

Lanilar nodded.

"Good. Fill two gourds and leave them with us when he comes. Then sit outside with Artog while he is here."

While Artog placed the torch in the doorway Cedmon marked with his knife a small circle on the dirt floor beside the bed. Then, kneeling, he took from his belt the steel mirror given him by the Winged Hats and held it above the bed against one of the poles supporting the roof.

He was very careful as to the height of the mirror and its angle of reflection. When he was satisfied, he stuck the mirror into the bark of the pole so that as he lay he could see reflected the little circle which he had marked on the floor beside him.

The tall form of Talgarth momentarily blocked off the light from the torch in the doorway. Cedmon rolled on his side, lifting his left shoulder enough to conceal the mirror hanging above and behind him, and slid his right hand beneath him until it

touched the handle of the knife in his belt.

"Hail, Talgarth." Cedmon's greeting was little more than a whisper. "Enter, and sit. Lanilar, bring spirit-water for my brother."

From the rear of the house Lanilar brought two tall gourds, set them on the floor between the two men, and glided outside to join Artog.

"There is no use begging my mercy now," Talgarth declared. "You have seen the sun for the last time. The power of my spell is too strong for the evil spirit within you."

Cedmon reached for one of the gourds and pulled out the tuft of cow's tail with which it was corked. "The power of the scorpion's poison is what you mean, Talgarth," he muttered.

"The spell brings death by one means or another," Talgarth retorted. "If a scorpion has stung you, the greater the power that made it happen."

Cedmon drank deep from the gourd and set it back beside the bed. "You have no power, Talgarth," he said in a loud voice that made the Druid start with surprise. "I saw, and Artog and Lanilar too, how the scorpion was fastened to my spear. The scorpion for me—and the



swamp-adder for my wife Dara."

Talgarth sat motionless, his huge eyes raised in a stare of amazement and alarm.

"Your spell can do me no harm. I am as well as you, and will live as long!" Cedmon declared. "All the village will know these things when the sun is risen. Then you can try to make a spell that will explain how it happens that I am still alive!"

Talgarth sprang to his feet. He threw a glance toward the doorway. Artog had also risen, and the torch light gleamed red on his spear.

"Sit, Talgarth," Cedmon ordered. "We have a long night before the sun rises and I show the village how weak are your spells!"

He took up one of the gourds. "Will you not drink, while we wait?"

"I will," Talgarth answered. His voice was pinched. He took up the other gourd. Cedmon, lying on his side, with one hand on his knife, sipped his drink, keenly aware of Talgarth's eyes watching his every move, then replaced the gourd on the ground. This time he was careful to set it exactly in the small circle which he had marked out earlier.

"This lying in bed wearies me," he complained, rolling

over so that his back was toward Talgarth. By lowering his right shoulder slightly he was able to see his gourd reflected in the mirror above his head.

"Rest, if you will. You have nothing to fear from me, my brother," Talgarth said in a low voice.

Cedmon, squinting in the mirror, caught a flashing glimpse of long fingers fluttering for an instant above the gourd. He sat up suddenly.

"Talgarth, I learned a bit of magic while I was away. By making a picture of a man in my mind, I can see what he is doing even though I am not looking at him."

Talgarth regarded him steadily, his eyes enormous.

"I made a picture of you in my mind just now," Cedmon continued. "Tomorrow the village will know what I saw."

Talgarth jumped to his feet and Cedmon leaped off the bed, his knife ready.

"They will not believe you," Talgarth said in a strangled voice. "I can tip over the gourd and then you cannot prove what you say."

"Now I know that you murdered Dara!" Cedmon shouted. "You hated her because she would have nothing to do with you! Your swamp-



adder did not kill her, so you gave her poisoned medicine. When I returned you feared I would discover your wicked deed—and you had to kill me too!”

Talgarth moved a step forward and Cedmon levelled the knife at his heart. “I am not sleeping, as was Dara when you brought the swamp-adder. And I have not my back to you, as when you fastened the scorpion to my spear. Take one more step, Talgarth!”

Talgarth stood motionless, the knife an inch from his heaving chest.

“I will not kill you, Talgarth,” Cedmon added. “I

have another picture of you in my mind. I see the former Druid, stripped of robe, head-dress and serpent egg. All the village knows him as the man who pretended to make spells but had no power, who tried to kill me when he was found out, and failed in that too. I see him scorned by the men, laughed at by the children, helping the women break sticks for the fires, washing the cook-pots—”

“That you will never see!” Talgarth shouted. He ducked below Cedmon’s knife and seized the poisoned gourd.

“Your magic, too, will fail,” he said as he drank.

---

*(Continued from page 142)*

As I felt the car crunch against them, I slammed on the brakes and switched on my headlights. It would look good, even if they searched for skid marks on the wet pavement. It would look fine.

I got out then and looked at them. It was the first time I’d ever tried two at once.

The police came finally, with their spotlights cutting little arcs in the night. There was no need for the ambulance that came along too.

“God, officer, I never saw them. Not till it was too late. That black raincoat, and they didn’t have any lights..”

“It wasn’t your fault, buddy. It was just one of those things.”

I turned away, covering my face, feeling the exhilaration flood through my veins. All right, all right for now. In a few months, in another state, with a different name and a different car, I’d be ready again.

*That’s what life is all about....*



*fall*

*of*

**ZOO**

**by Edward D. Hoch**

The evening mists lay thick in the grassy fields of the *Tiergarten* as Rudolph Bohg made his way slowly home. There was still enough daylight in the Sunday sky for him to see the shell craters and fallen trees that dotted the park, and in the distance he could hear the sporadic firing that marked the Russian progress into the city.

He had played here as a child, running through the streets of Berlin with all the others, and then working here in the park when manhood came. It was home to him, more of a home than he'd known in the little apartment by the Teltow Canal, and certainly more of a home than his six years in the German army had ever provided. Now, as the battered barred cages of the Berlin zoo came into view he felt the tension ease for the first time in hours.

He passed the blasted re-

---

*We have been told many stories, each purporting to be the truth, about the last hours of this man who came so close to destroying forever the Europe our fathers knew. We may in fact never know who fired the shot which wrote finis to his story, as his world crashed around him....*

---



mains of the reptile house, and then the empty cages where the lions had been. Here and there animals still remained—a few monkeys, the crusty-skinned hippo, even some frightened zebras. They all seemed to be waiting for the end that seemed so near. Behind him, near the victory monument at the center of the *Tiergarten*, a Russian artillery shell landed with a deafening blast. He could hear other shells passing overhead along the trees, sounding that strange low keening that built to a piercing scream like nothing else on earth.

He halted now, along a line of empty cages where only a single dead baboon was visible in the deepening dusk. There was someone ahead, a figure in shabby work pants and leather jacket. Rudolph Bohg raised the machine pistole he'd carried almost forgotten in his right hand. "Who are you?" he shouted.

The figure came closer, unafraid—because the days of fear had passed. Then he saw that it was a woman. She could have been forty, but he knew she was ten years younger, knew even after six years that only Lotta Kruger would have remained here with the animals she loved. "This is my home," she

answered him quietly. "Are you a deserter?"

He glanced down at the dirt-stained uniform of an SS Major that he still wore. "This is my home, too," he told her. "I'm Rudolph. Rudolph Bohg—do you remember?"

"Rudolph!" She ran to him then, and he let the gun drop limply in his hand as they embraced. It was an embrace without meaning, for they had never been lovers, not even in those days before the war when they'd worked long hours together with the animals.

"I've come back," he said. "I had no place else to go."

"My God, Rudolph! They say the Russians are only a mile away!"

"The Russians are everywhere." He kept his left arm around her, still holding the pistol in his right as if it offered some protection against the shells and the bombs. He glanced around in the twilight. "You've been hit hard here."

"No worse than the rest of Berlin. We were open until nine days ago, when the water and electricity went off. People still came, too—every day."

"Your father?" He had been a zookeeper, had given Bohg his first job.



"Killed in an American air raid last year. Many of the zookeepers are dead or gone, but a few of us have stayed on."

"The cages seem empty."

A shell burst a bit too close, sending a sudden fireball to break against some remaining trees. She led him quickly into the shelter of the elephant house, where one great beast still remained.

"You remember there were six elephants," she said. "Now we have one. Of fifteen thousand animals, only sixteen hundred remained alive when we closed the zoo. Now there are even fewer. The Russians have been shelling us for days."

"But why? Why the zoo?"

She wiped a bit of soot from her cheek, and he was reminded of how pretty she'd been once. "Over there," she pointed, toward the bird sanctuary. "They call it the Zoo Bunker—a giant flak tower covering a city block and as tall as a thirteen-story building. They say there are thirty thousand people jammed inside, and the walls are impregnable. The Russians have been shelling it for days. Some say it can hold out for months. They have enough food." She paused a moment as a shell went over.

"Why aren't you in there?"

"They die, still. Sometimes at night the soldiers bring the bodies out, just to be rid of them. They die in there, too. Jammed in worse than our animals ever were."

"I saw the lion cages were empty."

"We had to kill them, when the shelling started. And the other dangerous things. We ate some—I couldn't, but the men did. The ostriches died early, last year, but we still have some swans and even a stork left alive. Sometimes the people came to steal them too," she said. "But they were hungry."

Bohg had heard scattered reports about conditions at the zoo itself, but now that he was here, the full import of it seemed to strike him. "One elephant," he said sadly, looking up at its grandeur. "You say there's no water or electricity?"

Lotta Kruger shook her head. "Or gas. But the telephones still work, where the lines are up. The thing came so suddenly. I remember looking at the spring flowers just two weeks ago, and thinking how far away the war seemed—even with the bombings."

"April was always a fine month in Berlin," he told her.

"What about you? You're an SS Major."



"Yes," he admitted.

"And you've deserted?"

Now he could barely see her face in the failing light. Soon it would be night. "Everyone is deserting. The war will be over in a few days."

"Hitler has not deserted. He announced that he is remaining in his bunker beneath the Chancellery."

"I know," Bohg said, looking back across the *Tiergarten* toward the distant Chancellery building. Fires were burning in the park now, and the ruins of a small airplane were visible in their glow.

"Then why did you desert?"

He closed his eyes for a moment, trying to get his bearings. "Perhaps you could call me a war criminal," he answered finally.

"A war criminal! You killed Jews?"

"Jews, gypsies, madmen—does it matter? They're looking for me. I suppose they'll kill me if I'm found."

"You should be in the Zoo Bunker."

"No. Out here is fine."

A shell landed nearby, shaking the building and sending the great elephant into new spasms of terror. "The Russians will be here in another day or two," she

told him. "This afternoon we could see their tanks coming up the *Lutzowstrasse*. The city is being defended by boys and old men. There is no one else."

"The women?"

"Many are killing themselves. They fear what the Russians will do to them. I think we were all hoping the Americans would get here first."

Outside there were voices, shouting something in a language he couldn't understand. "Russians!" he whispered. "An advance patrol! Come on."

They ran from the elephant house, and he pulled her along by the hand as he had so many years ago, when they were both so close to being children. He had a flashing memory of a sunny summer's day when they'd left the animals to eat their lunch by the banks of the Landwehr Canal. That was long before the war, in the days when people still laughed at Hitler.

They'd followed the path toward the demolished aquarium, but now suddenly a soldier blocked their path, his machine gun outlined against the glow of distant flames. He shouted in Russian, and Bohg threw Lotta to the ground. He went down on one knee and



fired a quick burst from his machine pistol before the Russian could aim. As the man toppled backward in death, he ran forward to grab the fallen weapon. He knew there would be others nearby.

"Rudolph!" Lotta shouted. "To your left!"

He turned, firing as he did so, and saw two more figures topple before his bullets. "They're all around us," Lotta sobbed.

"I don't think so. The main firing is still a good half-mile away."

There seemed to be no others, and he rose slowly to his feet. "Take the pistol," he told her. "I'll keep the machine gun."

"I wouldn't know how to use it."

"You'll learn quickly enough. You may want it—after I'm gone."

"I know," she said, close to his ear. "You want to die, don't you? Rather than be arrested as a war criminal. But what could you have done that was so terrible? How could you have changed in six years?"

"I didn't change. The world changed. Come on."

They'd almost reached the hippopotamus pen when an artillery shell hit it dead center, throwing them backward to the ground and

ripping through the hide of the tough old animal. "Rudolph! Are you all right?"

"I think so. Cut my arm a little."

"The hippo! It's..."

"Don't look."

"What kind of a war is this, where the animals must die?"

He helped her to her feet, and they made their way past the great dead beast. "The people die, why not the animals? Most of them are just as innocent."

"Will there be nothing left for tomorrow?"

He couldn't answer, because he did not know. He thought that something—the city—would remain, but he could not be certain. They came at last to a monkey cage where a wounded chimp screamed and chattered in pain. Bogh shot the animal, and that was the only sort of answer he could give.

"We used to cure them," she said.

"Yes."

"And feed them. Remember the crowds on a Sunday in the spring?"

"It was a good life."

"I wish I had a cigarette."

He gave her one, and they stopped by the canal to smoke. The shells had stopped, but not far off they could



hear the rumble and squeak of tanks in the darkness.

"We heard about you once," she said finally. "We heard you were on Hitler's personal staff."

"Yes."

"Whatever you did, he made you do it. That will be a defense."

There was fire from the direction of the flak tower now, as the German defenders caught sight of the enemy tanks moving across the park. At moments the entire night seemed alive with the blinding brightness of flares and tracers. "This must be what hell is like," Lotta said.

"I've got to get you out of it, to someplace safe."

"Don't be foolish," she told him. "I'm only glad you came back tonight, before..." She left it unfinished.

"I had to see the place once more, even like this."

Across the canal, a Russian tank exploded and burst into flame. The others turned, uncertain now that the defenders had their range. But then, in the fire's glow, a machine-gunner spotted Bohg and Lotta. The second tank's turret revolved slowly, spraying a thin line of bullets toward them across the water. Bohg stepped in front of her, trying to fire back, but

the bullets staggered him as they hit.

"Rudolph!" She was on her knees beside him, screaming his name. "Rudolph!"

He rolled over in the damp grass, feeling suddenly warm but without pain. "Don't cry, Lotta. I came back here to die. Run and hide yourself. Keep the pistol with you."

"Rudolph!"

The tanks were pulling back, but he knew it would not be for long. The zoo—his zoo—would fall to them soon. "I have to tell you something," he whispered. "About this afternoon."

"What? What are you saying, Rudolph?"

"You're the only one that will ever know it." He was suddenly very tired and he tried to hurry on. "I wasn't running from the Russians. It was the Germans I feared."

"What?"

"I was in that bunker with them all," he said, pointing across the park. "I went into the room and she was dead already, but he was alive and he had a gun. I don't know why I did it."

"What, Rudolph?"

He coughed, and the blood began to fill his mouth. He stared up at her in the darkness, wondering if she would ever understand. "This afternoon I killed Hitler."



# NOW! JOIN THE **HANOVER RECORD CLUB** FOR **FREE CHOICE OF ALBUMS** **WITH NO RESTRICTIONS** **AT 38% TO 80% OFF MFR'S LIST PRICE!**

- *Free choice of 300 labels...over 30,000 LP albums!*
- *Order only the records you want...no minimum quota!*
- *Save on each record you order—from the very first!*
- *Enjoy lifetime membership for only a one-time \$5 fee!*

## **5** *Important Reasons Why The* **HANOVER RECORD CLUB Is Different!**

### **1—ARE ALL LABELS AVAILABLE PLUS LATEST RELEASES?**

**YES!**

Choose from over 300 labels—30,000 LP albums in the Schwann catalog—monaural, stereo, foreign, domestic! Popular, Jazz, Classical, Folk, Opera, Shows! Plus special listings in our supplements!

### **2—IS THERE A QUOTA TO BUY? HOW MANY?**

**NO!**

As a member, you select only the albums you want—when you want them! No record is ever shipped unless you order it. You are not obligated to buy even one record. Freedom of choice is all yours!

### **3—ARE ALL RECORDS AVAILABLE AT DISCOUNT PRICES?**

**ALWAYS!**

You enjoy savings of at least 38% off mfr's list price—often as much as 80% off—from the very first record you order! No commitment to buy 4, 5 or 6 records at list price before savings can start!

### **4—ARE ORDERS PROCESSED THE SAME DAY AS RECEIVED?**

**IMMEDIATELY!**

No long waits! Orders are processed on the same day they are received. Even newest releases are available immediately! And you can be confident that every record is factory-fresh!

### **5—IS SATISFACTION GUARANTEED?**

**ABSOLUTELY!**

You must be thoroughly satisfied with every record purchased or you are free to return it within 10 days, in good condition, for any other selection—or a quibble-free refund in full—if you prefer!

**CLASSICAL • JAZZ • OPERA**  
**DANCE • POPULAR HITS**  
**SHOW MUSIC • TEEN HITS**  
**VOCALS • COUNTRY & FOLK**  
**SOUNDTRACKS • SPOKEN WORD**

# **FREE!**

## **SCHWANN CATALOG** **WITH MEMBERSHIP**

Your personal copy of the famous SCHWANN Catalog—encyclopedia to the record industry—lists over 300 Labels, 30,000 Albums for you to choose from! A \$3.79 record will never cost you more than \$2.35; a \$4.79 record never more than \$2.97; a \$5.79 record never more than \$3.59—plus postage and handling. And on our special releases, you'll find greater savings than you ever dreamed possible!

### **HANOVER RECORD CLUB**

SUITE 1124

30 E. 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10017

- ☐ Enclosed is my \$5.00 fee for Lifetime Membership in the Hanover Record Club. Please rush my FREE copy of the Schwann catalog and other membership material, including my membership card.

- ☐ Enroll \_\_\_\_\_ additional memberships for only \$2.50 each. Their name(s) and address(es) are listed on a separate sheet of paper, attached.

**TOTAL ENCLOSED \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### **LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP FOR A SINGLE ONE-TIME FEE OF ONLY \$5**

All the tremendous savings, convenience and other advantages of membership in the Hanover Record Club are yours for life for the low one-time fee of \$5. Don't delay—fill out and mail the membership coupon now—you'll always be glad you did!

**Additional Memberships Make Great Gifts!** By joining now, you may also enroll additional members for only \$2.50 each. They enjoy full lifetime privileges, including FREE Schwann catalog and membership card, just as you do. A gift to please every music lover!

**HANOVER RECORD CLUB**

Suite 1124  
30 East 42nd Street  
New York, N.Y. 10017

**EVERY  
RECORD  
GUARANTEED  
FACTORY  
FRESH!**



# Forgotten road to success in writing

By J. D. Ratcliff

I can't imagine why more beginners don't take the short road to publication — by writing magazine and newspaper articles.

I've made a good living for 25 years writing articles, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I've interviewed Nobel Prize winners and heads of state. I've covered stories from Basel to Bangkok to Buffalo.

It's a great life. No commuter trains to catch, no office routine. Whether I'm at home or abroad on assignment, I write from eight to noon every day — no more, no less. My afternoons are my own.

The market for articles is vast and hungry. Over 350,000 were sold last year to magazines alone. Editors want pieces on almost any subject that comes natural to you — but they demand that your writing be sound and professional.

To teach professional writing techniques to serious beginners, I joined with Rod Serling, Faith Baldwin, Bennett Cerf, and eight other leading authors to start the Famous Writers School.

We poured everything we know about successful writing into a new kind of course which trains you at home, in spare time. You begin with the fundamentals of *all* good writing. Then, you specialize in articles and other non-fiction. (Or in Fiction, Advertising or Business Writing.)

You learn to write *by writing*. Our instructors, themselves all published authors, work with you by mail much as editors do with established writers.

Our School is young. Yet students, many still in training, have broken into print in more than 100 publications. Several sold pieces they wrote as School assignments.

## Writing Aptitude Test offered

To find out if you too can be a published writer, send for the School's revealing Aptitude Test. If you test well — or offer other evidence of writing ability — you may enroll. However, there is no obligation to do so.



"Jack" Ratcliff is one of America's highest paid free-lance writers. Although he works only four hours a day, he has had hundreds of articles published in top magazines, including over 100 in *Reader's Digest* alone.

## Famous Writers School

Dept. 6060, Westport Connecticut 06880

I want to know if I have writing aptitude. Please mail me, without obligation, your Aptitude Test and 48-page brochure.

Mr.  
Mrs. .... Age .....  
Miss [Circle one and please print]

Street .....

City .....

State ..... Zip .....

Accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council.