

Suspense

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MYSTERY ADVENTURE CRIME



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FLY PAPER

By DASHIELL HAMMETT

IT was a wandering daughter job.

The Hambletons had been for several generations a wealthy, decently prominent New York family. There was nothing in the Hambleton history to account for Sue, the youngest member of the clan. She grew out of childhood with a kink that made her dislike the polished side of life, like the rough.

The Hambletons tried to make Sue behave, but it was too late for that. She was legally of age. When she finally told them to go to hell and walked out on them there wasn't much they could

Dashiell Hammett decided at fourteen that "formal education was bunk," and left school for a chain of jobs that ended him up in the famous Pinkerton detective agency. He quit after five years, with raw material for unlimited thrillers. In 1934 he hit the jackpot with The Thin Man (which has recently been running for months with tremendous success on T.V.) and royalties from films, books, and radio serials rose sometimes as high as £2,000 a week. Nowadays he writes little. His comment: "It is the beginning of the end when you discover you have style."

do about it. Her father, Major Waldo Hambleton, had given up all the hopes he ever had of salvaging her, but he didn't want her to run into any trouble that could be avoided. So he came into the Continental Detective Agency's New York office and asked to have an eye kept on her.

The man she ran off with was Nick Casey, a Philadelphia racketeer who had moved to the big city carrying a Thompson submachine-gun, after a disagreement with his partners. New York wasn't so good a field as Philadelphia for machine-gun work. The Thompson lay idle for a year or so while Casey made expenses with an automatic.

Three or four months after Sue went to live with Casey he made what looked like a promising connection with the first of the gang that came into New York from Chicago. But the boys from Chi didn't want Casey; they wanted the machine-gun. So they shot holes in the top of Casey's head and went away with the gun.

Sue Hambleton buried Casey, had a couple of lonely weeks in which she pawned a ring to eat, and then got a job at a speakeasy run by a Greek named Vassos.

One of Vassos's customers was Pat McCloor—hard Scotch-Irish-Indian bone and muscle—a black-haired, blue-eyed, swarthy giant who was resting after doing a fifteen-year hitch in Leavenworth Prison for ruining most of the smaller post offices between New Orleans and Omaha. Pat was keeping himself in drinking money while he rested by playing with pedestrians in dark streets.

Pat liked Sue. Vassos liked Sue. Sue liked Pat. Vassos didn't like that. Jealousy spoiled the Greek's judgment. He kept the speakeasy door locked one night when Pat wanted to come in. Pat came in, bringing pieces of the door with him. Vassos got his gun out, but couldn't shake Sue off his arm. He

stopped trying when Pat hit him with the part of the door that had the brass knob on it. Pat and Sue went away from Vassos's together.

Up to that time our New York office had managed to keep in touch with Sue. It was simply a matter of sending a man around every week or so to see that she was still alive, to pick up whatever information he could from her friends and neighbours, without, of course, letting her know. All that had been easy enough, but when she and Pat went away they dropped completely out of sight.

We had enough photographs to go round, and for the next month or so whatever operative had a little idle time on his hands spent it looking for the missing pair. We didn't find them. Operatives in other cities, doing the same thing, had the same luck.

Then, nearly a year later, a telegram came to us from the New York office. Decoded, it read:

Major Hambleton today received telegram from daughter in San Francisco quote Please send me thousand dollars care apartment two hundred six number six hundred one Eddis Street stop I will come home if you will let me stop Please tell me if I can come but please please send money anyway unquote Hambleton authorizes payment of money to her immediately stop Detail competent operative to call on her with money and to arrange for her return home stop If possible have man and woman operative accompany her here stop Hambleton wiring her stop Report immediately by wire.

The Old Man gave me the telegram and a cheque, saying, "You know the situation. You'll know how to handle it."

I pretended I agreed with him, went down to the bank, changed the cheque for a bundle of bills of several sizes and went up to Eddis Street.

The door was opened by a tall, slim man of thirty-something in neat dark clothes. He had dark eyes set in a long pale face. There was some grey in the dark hair brushed flat to his scalp.

"Miss Hambleton," I said.

"Uh—what about her?" His voice was smooth, but not too smooth to be agreeable.

"I'd like to see her."

His upper eyelids came down a little and the brows over them came a little closer together. He asked, "Is it—?" and stopped, watching me steadily.

I didn't say anything. Presently he finished his question:

"Something to do with a telegram?"

"Yeah."

His long face brightened immediately. He asked, "You're from her father?"

"Yeah."

He stepped back and swung the door wide open, saying, "Come in. Major Hambleton's wire came to her only a few minutes ago. He said someone would call."

We went through a small passageway into a sunny sitting-room that was cheaply furnished, but neat and clean enough.

"Sit down," the man said, pointing at a brown rocking-chair. "You brought the money?"

I said I'd feel more like talking with her there.

"The point is," he said quite reasonably, "that if you brought the money she doesn't expect you to hand it over to anybody except her. If you didn't bring it she doesn't want to see you. I don't think her mind can be changed about that. That's why I asked if you had brought it."

"I brought it."

He looked doubtfully at me. I showed him the money I had got from the bank. He jumped up briskly from the sofa.

"I'll have her here in a minute or two," he said over his shoulder as his long legs moved him towards the door. At the door he stopped to ask, "Do you know her? Or shall I have her bring means of identifying herself?"

"That would be best," I told him.

In five minutes he was back with a slender blonde girl of about twenty-three in pale green silk. The looseness of her small mouth and the puffiness around her blue eyes weren't yet pronounced enough to spoil her prettiness.

I stood up.

"This is Miss Hambleton," he said.

She gave me a swift glance and then lowered her eyes again, nervously playing with the strap of a handbag she held.

"You can identify yourself?" I asked.

"Sure," the man said. "Show them to him, Sue."

She opened the bag, brought out some papers and things, and held them up for me to take.

"Sit down, sit down," the man said as I took them.

They sat on the sofa. I sat in the rocking-chair again and examined the things she had given me. There were two letters addressed to Sue Hambleton there, her father's telegram welcoming her home, a couple of receipted bills, a driver's licence, and a savings book that showed a balance of less than ten dollars.

By the time I had finished my examination the girl's embarrassment was gone. She looked levelly at me, as did the man beside her. I felt in my jacket pocket, found my copy of the

photograph New York had sent us at the beginning of the hunt, and looked from it to her.

"Your mouth could have shrunk, maybe," I said, "but how could your nose have got that much longer?"

"If you don't like my nose," she said, "how'd you like to go to hell?" Her face had turned red.

"That's not the point. It's a pretty nose, but it's not Sue's." I held the photograph out to her. "See for yourself."

She glared at the photograph and then at the man.

"What a smart guy you are," she told him.

He was watching me with dark eyes that had a brittle shine to them between narrow-drawn eyelids. He kept on watching me while he spoke to her out of the side of his mouth, crisply:

"Pipe down."

She piped down. He sat and watched me. I sat and watched him. A clock ticked seconds away behind me. His eyes began shifting their focus from one of my eyes to the other. The girl sighed.

He said in a low voice, "Well?"

I said, "You're in a hole."

"What can you make out of it?" he asked casually.

"Conspiracy to defraud."

The girl jumped up and hit one of his shoulders angrily with the back of a hand, crying:

"What a smart guy you are, to get me in a jam like this. You haven't even got enough courage to tell this guy to go chase himself." She spun round to face me, pushing her red face down at me—I was still sitting in the rocker—snarling: "Well, what are you waiting for? Waiting to be kissed good-bye? We don't owe you anything, do we? We didn't get any of your money, did we? Outside, then. Take the air. Dangle."

"Stop it," I growled. "You'll bust something."

The man said, "For God's sake stop that bawling, Peggy, and give somebody else a chance." He addressed me: "Well, what do you want?"

"How'd you get into this?" I asked.

He spoke quickly, eagerly. "A fellow I know gave me that stuff and told me about this Sue Hambleton, and her old man having plenty. I thought I'd give it a whirl. Then when her father's wire came, saying he was sending a man to see her, I ought to have dropped it, but it was too good to let go of without a try. It looked like there still might be a chance, so I got Peggy to do Sue for me."

"This man gave you the old man's address?"

"Sure he did."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. He was on something really big, and couldn't fool with this. That's why he passed it on to me."

"Big-hearted of him," I said. "You know Sue Hambleton?"

"No," emphatically. "I'd never even heard of her."

"That's too bad. Conspiracies to defraud don't mean as much to me as finding Sue. I might have made a deal with you."

He shook his head again, but his eyes were thoughtful.

The girl had stepped back so she could see both of us as we talked, turning her face, which showed she didn't like us, from one to the other as we spoke.

I got up on my feet, telling him, "Suit yourself. But if you want to play it that way I'll have to take you both in."

He smiled with indrawn lips and stood up.

The girl thrust herself in between us, facing him.

"This is a swell time to be dummying up," she spat at him.

"You're crazy if you think I'm going to take the fall with you."

"Shut up," he said in his throat.

"Shut me up," she cried.

He tried to, with both hands. I reached over her shoulders and caught one of his wrists, knocked the other hand up.

She slid out from between us and ran around behind me, screaming, "Joe does know her. He got the things from her. She's at the St. Martin on O'Connell Street—with Pat McCloor."

While I listened to this I had to pull my head aside to let Joe's right hook miss me, had got his left arm twisted behind him, had turned my hip to catch his knee, and had got the palm of my left hand under his chin. I was ready to give his chin the Japanese tilt when he stopped wrestling and grunted, "Let me tell it."

He rubbed the wrist I had wrenched, scowling past me at the girl. He called her four unlovely names, the mildest of which was "a dumb twist," and told her:

"He was bluffing about taking us in. You don't think old man Hambleton's hunting for newspaper space, do you?" That wasn't a bad guess.

He sat on the sofa again, still rubbing his wrist.

I said, "All right, roll it out, one of you."

"You've got it all," he muttered. "I took that stuff last week when I was visiting Pat, knowing the story and hating to see a promising layout like that go to waste."

"What's Pat doing now?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"How long have he and Sue been here?"

"About six months."

"Who's he mobbed up with?"

" I don't know."

" How's he fixed? "

" I don't know."

Half an hour of this convinced me that I wasn't going to get much information. I went to the phone in the passageway and called the Agency. The boy on the switchboard told me MacMan was in the operatives' room. I asked to have him sent up to me, and went back. Joe and Peggy took their heads apart when I came in.

MacMan arrived in less than ten minutes. I let him in and told him :

" This fellow says his name's Joe Wales, and the girl's supposed to be Peggy Carroll who lives upstairs. We've got them cold for conspiracy to defraud, but I've made a deal with them. I'm going out to look at it now. Stay here with them, in this room. Nobody goes in or out, and nobody but you gets to the phone. There's a fire-escape in front of the window. The window's locked now. I'd keep it that way. If the deal turns out O.K. we'll let them go."

MacMan nodded his hard round head and pulled a chair out between them and the door. I picked up my hat.

Joe Wales called, " Hey, you're not going to uncover me to Pat, are you? That's got to be part of the deal."

" Not unless I have to."

" I'd just as leave stand the rap," he said. " I'd be safer in gaol."

" I'll give you the best break I can," I promised, " but you'll have to take what's dealt you."

The St. Martin was a small three-storey apartment house of red brick between two taller hotels. The vestibule register showed *P. K. McCloor*, 313, as Wales and Peggy had told me.

I pushed the bell button. Nothing happened. Nothing happened any of the four times I pushed it. I pushed the button labelled *Manager*.

The door clicked open. I went indoors. A beefy woman in a pink-striped cotton dress that needed pressing stood just inside the door.

" Some people named McCloor live here? " I asked.

" Three-thirteen," she said.

" Been living here long? "

She pursed her fat mouth, looked intently at me, hesitated, but finally said: " Since last June."

" Think they're in now? " I asked. " I got no answer on the bell."

"I don't know." She talked in a husky whisper. "I haven't seen either of them since the night before last, when they had a fight."

"Much of a fight?"

"Not much worse than usual."

"Could you find out if they're in?" I asked.

She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes.

"I'm not going to make any trouble for you," I assured her. "But if they've gone I'd like to know it, and I reckon you would too."

"All right, I'll find out." She got up, patting a pocket in which keys jingled. "You wait here."

"I'll go as far as the third floor with you," I said, "and wait out of sight there."

"All right," she said reluctantly.

On the third floor she disappeared around a corner of the dim corridor, and presently a muffled electric bell rang. It rang three times. I heard her keys jingle and one of them grate in a lock. The lock clicked. I heard the doorknob rattle as she turned it.

Then a long moment of silence was ended by a scream that filled the corridor from wall to wall.

I jumped for the corner, swung around it, saw an open door ahead, went through it, and slammed the door shut behind me.

The scream had stopped.

The fat manageress stood just inside, her round back to me. I pushed past her and saw what she was looking at.

Sue Hambleton, in pale yellow pyjamas trimmed with black lace, was lying across a bed. She lay on her back. Her arms were stretched out over her head. One leg was bent under her, one stretched out so that its bare foot rested on the floor. That bare foot was whiter than a live foot could be. Her face was white as her foot, except for a mottled swollen area from the right eyebrow to the right cheek-bone and dark bruises on her throat.

"Phone the police," I told the woman, and began poking into corners, closets and drawers.

It was late afternoon when I returned to the Agency. I asked the file clerk to see if we had anything on Joe Wales and Peggy Carroll, and then went into the Old Man's office.

He put down some reports he had been reading, gave me a nodded invitation to sit down, and asked, "You've seen her?"

"Yes. She's dead."

The Old Man said, "Indeed," as if I had said it was raining, and smiled with polite attentiveness while I told him about it—from the time I had rung Wales's bell until I had joined the fat manageress in the dead girl's apartment.

"She had been knocked around some, was bruised on the face and neck," I wound up. "But that didn't kill her."

"You think she was murdered?" he asked, still smiling gently.

"I don't know. Doc Jordan says he thinks it could have been arsenic. He's hunting for it in her now. We found a funny thing. Some thick sheets of dark grey paper were stuck in a book—*The Count of Monte Cristo*—wrapped in a month-old newspaper and wedged into a dark corner between the stove and the kitchen wall."

"Ah, arsenical fly paper," the Old Man murmured. "The Maybrick-Seddons trick. Soaked in water, four to six grains of arsenic can be got out of a sheet—enough to kill two people."

"The cleaner saw McCloor leaving at half past nine yesterday morning. She was probably dead before that. Nobody's seen him since. The police are hunting for him."

"Did you tell the police who she was?"

"No. What do we do? We can't tell them about Wales without telling them all."

"I dare say the whole thing will have to come out," he said thoughtfully. "I'll wire New York."

I went out of his office. The file clerk gave me a couple of newspaper clippings. All they gave me was Wales's working alias—Holy Joe.

MacMan opened the door for me when I returned to Wales's apartment.

"Anything doing?" I asked him.

"Nothing—except they've been belly-aching a lot."

Wales came forward, asking eagerly, "Satisfied now?"

The girl stood by the window looking at me with anxious eyes. I didn't say anything.

"Did you find her?" Wales asked frowning. "She was where I told you?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well then." Part of his frown went away. "That lets Peggy and me out, doesn't—" He broke off, ran his tongue over his lower lip, put a hand to his chin, asked sharply: "You didn't give them the tip-off on me, did you?"

I shook my head.

He took his hand from his chin and asked irritably, "What's the matter with you, then? What are you looking like that for?"

Behind him the girl spoke bitterly. "I knew damned well it would be like this," she said. "I knew damned well we weren't going to get out of it. Oh, what a smart guy you are!"

"Take Peggy into the kitchen, and shut both doors," I told MacMan. "Holy Joe and I are going to have a real heart-to-heart talk."

The girl went out willingly, but when MacMan was closing the door she put her head in again to tell Wales, "I hope he busts you in the nose if you try to hold out on him."

MacMan shut the door.

"Your playmate seems to think you know something," I said.

Wales scowled at the door and grumbled: "She's more help to me than a broken leg." He turned his face to me, trying to make it look frank and friendly. "What do you want? I came clean with you before. What's the matter now?"

"What do you guess?"

He pulled his lips in between his teeth.

"What do you want to make me guess for?" he demanded. "I'm willing to play ball with you. But what can I do if you won't tell me what you want? I can't see inside your head."

I went over and stood in front of him. I took his chin between my left thumb and fingers, raising his head and bending my own down until our noses were almost touching. I said:

"Where you stumbled, Joe, was in sending the telegram right after the murder."

"He's dead?" It popped out before his eyes had even had time to grow round and wide.

The question threw me off balance. I had to wrestle with my forehead to keep it from wrinkling, and I put too much calmness in my voice when I asked, "Is who dead?"

"Who? How do I know? Who do you mean?"

"Who did you think I meant?" I insisted.

"How do I know? Oh, all right! Old man Hambleton, Sue's father."

"That's right," I said, and took my hand away from his chin.

"And he was murdered, you say?" He hadn't moved his face an inch from the position into which I had lifted it. "How?"

"Arsenic—fly paper."

"Arsenic fly paper." He looked thoughtful. "That's a funny one."

"Very funny. Where'd you buy some if you wanted it?"

"Buy it? I don't know. I haven't seen any since I was a kid. Nobody uses fly paper here in San Francisco anyway. There aren't enough flies."

"Somebody used some here," I said, "on Sue."

"Sue?" He jumped so that the sofa squeaked under him.

"Yeah. Murdered yesterday morning—arsenical fly paper."

"Both of them?" he asked incredulously.

"Both of who?"

"Her and her father."

"Yeah."

He put his chin far down on his chest and rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other.

"Then I am in a hole," he said slowly.

"That's it," I cheerfully agreed. "Want to try talking yourself out of it?"

"Let me think."

I let him think, listening to the tick of the clock while he thought. Thinking brought drops of sweat out on his grey-white face. Presently he sat up straight, wiping his face with a fancy coloured handkerchief.

"I'll talk," he said. "I've got to talk now. Sue was getting ready to ditch Pat. She and I were going away. She—here, I'll show you."

He put his hand in his pocket and held out a folded sheet of thick notepaper to me. I took it and read:

Dear Joe, I can't stand this much longer—we've simply got to go soon. Pat beat me again tonight. Please, if you really love me, let's make it soon. Sue.

"When did you see her last?"

"Day before yesterday, the day she posted that letter. Only I saw her in the afternoon—she was here—and she wrote it that night."

"Pat suspect what you were up to?"

"We didn't think he did. I don't know. He was jealous as hell all the time, whether he had any reason to be or not."

"How much reason did he have?"

Wales looked me straight in the eye and said, "Sue was a good kid."

I said, "Well, she's been murdered."

He didn't say anything.

Day was darkening into evening. The light switch was near the door, and I had to watch Holy Joe Wales. I flicked on my torch.

As I held it, trained on Wales, something clicked at the window. The click was loud and sharp.

I looked at the window.

A man crouched there on the fire-escape, looking in through glass and lace curtain. He was a thick-featured dark man whose size identified him as Pat McCloor. The muzzle of a big black automatic was touching the glass in front of him. He had tapped the glass with it to catch our attention.

He had our attention.

There wasn't anything for me to do just then. I stood there and looked at him. I couldn't tell whether he was looking at me or at Wales. I could see him clearly enough, but the lace curtain spoiled my view of details like that. I imagined he wasn't neglecting either of us, and I didn't imagine the lace curtain hid much from him. He was closer to the curtain than we, and the torch light had shown him all he wanted to know.

Wales, sitting dead still on the sofa, was looking at McCloor. Wales's face wore a peculiar, stiffly sullen expression. His eyes were sullen. He wasn't breathing.

McCloor flicked the nose of his pistol against the pane, and a triangular piece of glass fell out, tinkling apart on the floor. It didn't, I was afraid, make enough noise to alarm MacMan in the kitchen. There were two closed doors between here and there.

Wales looked at the broken pane and closed his eyes. He closed them slowly, little by little, exactly as if he were falling asleep. He kept his stiffly sullen blank face turned straight to the window. I'd flicked the torch off, but it was too late.

McCloor shot him three times.

When McCloor jumped away from the window I jumped to it. While I was pushing the curtain aside, unfastening the window and raising it, I heard his feet land on the cement paving below.

MacMan flung the door open and came in, the girl at his heels.

"Take care of this," I ordered as I scrambled over the sill. "McCloor shot him."

Wales's apartment was on the first floor. The fire-escape ended there with a counter-weighted iron ladder that a man's weight would swing down into a cement-paved court.

I went down as McCloor had done, swinging on the ladder till within dropping distance of the court, and then letting go.

It was a wild-goose chase. McCloor had vanished. I checked around. No one had seen him, no one was talking.

I didn't find McCloor.

I rode up to the Hall of Justice. MacMan was in the captain of detectives' office with three or four police sleuths.

"Wales die?" I asked.

"Yep."

"Say anything before he went?"

"He was gone before you were through the window."

"You held on to the girl?"

"She's here."

"She say anything?"

"We were waiting for you before we tapped her," Detective Sergeant O'Gar said, "not knowing the angle on her."

"Let's have her in. I haven't had any dinner yet. How about the autopsy on Sue Hambleton?"

"Chronic arsenic poisoning."

"Chronic? That means it was fed to her little by little, and not in a lump?"

"From what he found in her kidneys, intestines, liver, stomach and blood, Jordan figures there was less than a grain of it in her. That wouldn't be enough to kill her. But he says he found arsenic in the tips of her hair, and she'd have to be given some at least a month ago for it to have worked out that far."

"Any chance that it wasn't arsenic that killed her?"

"Not unless Jordan's a bum doctor."

A policewoman came in with Peggy Carroll.

The blonde girl was tired. Her eyelids, mouth corners and body drooped, and when I pushed a chair out towards her she sagged down in it.

O'Gar ducked his grizzled bullet head at me.

"Now, Peggy," I said, "tell us where you fit into this mess."

"I don't fit into it." She didn't look up. Her voice was tired.

"Joe dragged me into it. He told you."

"You his girl?"

"If you want to call it that," she admitted.

"You jealous?"

"What," she asked, looking up at me, her face puzzled, "has that got to do with it?"

"Sue Hambleton was getting ready to go away with him when she was murdered."

The girl sat up straight in the chair and said deliberately:

"I swear to God I didn't know she was murdered."

"But you did know she was dead," I said positively.

"I didn't," she replied just as positively.

I nudged O'Gar with my elbow. He pushed his undershot jaw at her and barked:

"What are you trying to give us? You knew she was dead. How could you kill her without knowing it?"

While she looked at him I waved the others in. They crowded close around her and took up the chorus of the Sergeant's song. She was barked, roared, and snarled at plenty in the next few minutes.

The instant she stopped trying to talk back to them I cut in again.

"Wait," I said, very earnestly. "Maybe she didn't kill her."

"The hell she didn't," O'Gar stormed, holding the centre of

the stage so the others could move away from the girl without their retreat seeming too artificial. "Do you mean to tell me—"

"I didn't say she didn't," I remonstrated. "I said maybe she didn't."

"Then who did?"

I passed the question to the girl: "Who did?"

"Pat," she said immediately.

O'Gar snorted to make her think he didn't believe her.

I asked, as if I were honestly perplexed, "How do you know that if you didn't know she was dead?"

"It stands to reason he did," she said. "Anybody can see that. He found out she was going away with Joe, so he killed her and then came to Joe's and killed him. That's just exactly what Pat would do when he found it out."

"Yeah? How long have *you* known they were going away together?"

"Since they decided to. Joe told me a month or two ago."

"And you didn't mind?"

"You've got this all wrong," she said. "Of course I didn't mind. I was being cut in on it. You know her father had the money. That's what Joe was after. She didn't mean anything to him but a way into her old man's pockets. And I was to get my cut. Pat found out and fixed the pair of them."

"Yeah? How do you figure Pat would kill her?"

"Oh!" She shrugged. "With his hands, likely as not."

"Once he'd made up his mind to do it, he'd do it quick and violent?" I suggested.

"That would be Pat," she agreed.

"But you can't see him slow-poisoning her—spreading it out over a month?"

Worry came into the girl's blue eyes. She put her lower lip between her teeth, then said slowly:

"No, I can't see him doing it that way. Not Pat."

"Who can you see doing it that way?"

She opened her eyes wide, asking, "You mean Joe?"

I didn't say anything.

"Joe might have," she said persuasively. "God only knows what he'd want to do it for, why he'd want to get rid of the kind of money she was going to mean. But you couldn't always guess what he was getting at. If he was going to kill her, though, that would be the way he'd go about it."

"Did he go to McCloor's much?"

"Not at all that I know about. He was too scared of Pat to take a chance on being caught there. That's why I moved upstairs, so Sue could come over to our place to see him."

"Then how could Joe have hidden the fly paper he poisoned her with in her kitchen?"

"Fly paper!" Her bewilderment seemed honest enough.

"Show it to her," I told O'Gar.

He got a sheet from the desk and held it close to the girl's face.

She stared at it for a moment and then jumped up and grabbed my arm with both hands.

"I didn't know what it was," she said excitedly. "Joe had some a couple of months ago. He was looking at it when I came in. I asked him what it was for, and he smiled that knowing smile of his and said, 'You make angels out of it,' and wrapped it up again and put it in his pocket. I didn't pay much attention to him: he was always fooling with some kind of tricks that were supposed to make him wealthy, but never did."

"Ever see it again?"

"No."

"Did you know Sue very well?"

"I didn't know her at all. I never even saw her. I used to keep out of the way."

"But you know Pat McCloor?"

"Yes, I've been at a couple of parties where he was. That's all I know of him."

"Who killed Sue?"

"Joe," she said. "Didn't he have that paper you say she was killed with?"

"Why did he kill her?"

"I don't know. He pulled some awful dumb tricks sometimes."

"You didn't kill her?"

"No, no, no!"

I nodded at O'Gar.

"You're a liar," he bawled, shaking the fly paper in her face.

"You killed her." The rest of them closed in, throwing accusations at her. They kept it up until she was looking sick and the policewoman beginning to look worried.

Then I said angrily, "All right. Throw her in a cell and let her think it over." To her: "You know what you told Joe this afternoon: this is no time not to talk. Do a lot of thinking tonight."

"Honest to God I didn't kill her," she said.

I turned my back to her. The policewoman took her away.

O'Gar yawned. "We gave her a pretty good ride at that, for a short one."

"Not bad," I agreed. "If anybody else looked likely, I'd say she didn't kill Sue. But if she's telling the truth, then Holy Joe

did it. And why should he poison the goose that was going to lay nice yellow eggs for him? And how and why did he cache the poison in their kitchen? Pat had the motive, but damned if he looks like a slow poisoner to me. You can't tell, though; he and Holy Joe could even have been working together on it."

"Could," O'Gar said. "But it takes a lot of imagination to get that one down. Any way you twist it, Peggy's our best bet so far. Try her again in the morning?"

"Yes," I said. "And we've got to find McCloor."

The others had eaten. MacMan and I went out and got ours. When we returned an hour later the place was practically deserted.

"All gone to Pier 42 on a tip that McCloor's there," the desk sergeant told us.

"How long ago?"

"Ten minutes."

MacMan and I got a taxi and set out for Pier 42. We didn't get to Pier 42.

Halfway there the taxi suddenly shrieked and slid to a halt.

"What—?" I began, and saw a man standing close to the driver. He was a big man with a big gun. "Pat," I grunted, and put my hand on MacMan's arm to keep him from getting his gun out.

"Take me to—" McCloor was saying to the frightened driver when he saw us.

He came around to my side and pulled the door open, pointing the gun.

He had no hat. His hair was wet, plastered to his head. Little streams of water trickled down from it. His clothes were dripping wet.

He looked surprised at us and ordered:

"Get out."

As we got out he growled at the driver:

"Why the hell have you got your flag up?"

The driver wasn't there. He had hopped out the other side and was scooting away down the street. McCloor cursed him and poked his gun at me, growling:

"Go on, beat it."

Apparently he hadn't recognized me. The light here wasn't good, and I had a hat on now. He had seen me for only a few seconds in Wales's room.

I stepped aside. MacMan moved to the other side.

McCloor took a backward step to keep us from getting him between us and started an angry word.

MacMan threw himself on McCloor's gun arm.

I socked McCloor's jaw with my fist. I might just as well have hit somebody else for all it seemed to bother him.

He swept me out of his way and pasted MacMan in the mouth. MacMan fell back till the taxi stopped him, then came back for more.

I was trying to climb up McCloor's left side.

MacMan came in on his right, failed to dodge a chop of the gun, caught it square on the top of the head, and went down hard. He stayed down.

I kicked McCloor's ankle, but couldn't get his foot from under him. I rammed my right fist into the small of his back and got a left-handful of his wet hair, swinging on it. He shook his head, dragging me off my feet.

He punched me in the side and I could feel my ribs flattening together like leaves in a book.

I swung my fist against the back of his neck. That bothered him. He made a rumbling noise down in his chest, crunched my shoulder in his left hand, and chopped at me with the gun in his right.

I kicked him somewhere and punched his neck again.

Down the street, a police whistle was blowing. Men were running towards us.

McCloor snorted and threw me away from him. I didn't want to go. I tried to hang on. He threw me away from him and ran up the street.

I scrambled up and ran after him, dragging my gun out.

At the first corner he stopped to squirt metal at me—three shots. I squirted one at him. None of the four connected.

He disappeared round the corner. I swung wide round it, to make him miss if he were flattened to the wall waiting for me. He wasn't. He was a hundred feet ahead, going into a space between two warehouses. I went in after him, and out after him at the other end, making better time with my weight than he was making with his.

He crossed a street, turning up, away from the waterfront. There was a light on the corner. When I came into its glare he wheeled and levelled his gun at me. I didn't hear it click, but I knew it had when he threw it at me. The gun went past with a couple of feet to spare and raised hell against a door behind me.

McCloor turned and ran. I ran after him.

I put a bullet past him to let the others know where we were. At the next corner he started to turn to the left, changed his mind, and went straight on.

I sprinted, cutting the distance between us to forty or fifty feet, and yelled, "Stop or I'll drop you."

He jumped sideways into a narrow alley.

I passed it on the jump, saw he wasn't waiting for me, and went in.

Enough light came in from the street to let us see each other and our surroundings. The alley was blind—walled on each side and at the other end by tall concrete buildings.

McCloor faced me, less than twenty feet away. His jaw stuck out. His arms curved down free of his sides. His shoulders were bunched.

"Put them up," I ordered, holding my gun level.

"Get out of my way, little man," he grumbled, taking a stiff-legged step towards me. "I'll eat you up."

"Keep coming," I said, "and I'll put you down."

"Try it." He took another step, crouching a little. "I can still get to you *with* slugs in me."

"Not where I'll put them." I was wordy, trying to talk him into waiting till the others came up. I didn't want to have to kill him. We could have done that from the taxi. "If I can't get your kneecaps with two shots at this distance, you're welcome to me. And if you think smashed kneecaps are a lot of fun, give it a try."

"Hell with that," he said and charged.

I shot his right knee.

He lurched towards me.

I shot his left knee.

He tumbled down.

"You would have it," I complained.

He twisted round, and with his arms pushed himself into a sitting position facing me.

"I didn't think you had sense enough to do it," he said through his teeth.

I talked to McCloor in the hospital. He lay on his back in bed with a couple of pillows slanting his head up. The skin was pale and tight around his mouth and eyes, but there was nothing else to show he was in pain.

"You sure devastated me," he said when I came in.

"Sorry," I said, "but—"

"I ain't beefing. I asked for it."

"Why'd you kill Holy Joe?" I asked, off-hand, as I pulled a chair up beside the bed.

"Nothing doing. You're on the wrong track."

I laughed and told him I was the man in the room with Joe when it happened.

McCloor grinned and said:

"I thought I'd seen you somewhere before. So that's where it was. I didn't pay no attention to your face, just so your hands didn't move."

"Why'd you kill him?"

He pursed his lips, screwed up his eyes at me, thought something over, and said:

"He killed a broad I knew."

"He killed Sue Hambleton?" I asked.

He studied my face a while before he replied: "Yep."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Hell," he said, "I don't have to. Sue told me. Give me a smoke."

I gave him a cigarette, held a lighter under it, and objected:

"That doesn't exactly fit in with other things I know. Just what happened and what did she say? You might start back with the night you gave her the black eye."

He looked thoughtful, letting smoke sneak slowly out of his nose, then said:

"I hadn't ought to hit her in the eye, that's a fact. But, see, she had been out all afternoon and wouldn't tell me where she'd been, and we had a row over it. What's this—Thursday morning? That was Monday, then. After the row I spent the night out. I got home about seven next morning. Sue was sick as hell, but she wouldn't let me get a doc for her. That was kind of funny, because she was scared stiff."

McCloor shook his head meditatively and let the smoke leak out of his mouth, looking dully through the cloud at me. Then he said brusquely:

"Well, she went under. But before she went she told me she'd been poisoned by Holy Joe."

"She say how he'd given it to her?"

McCloor shook his head.

"I'd been asking her what was the matter, and not getting anything out of her. Then she says she's poisoned. 'I'm poisoned,' she says. 'Arsenic. That damned Holy Joe,' she says. Then she won't say anything else, and it's not a hell of a while after that that she kicks off."

"Then what'd you do?"

"I went gunning for Holy Joe. I knew him but didn't know where he jungled up, and didn't find out till yesterday. You were there when I came. You know about that."

"You knew Sue was planning to run out on you with Joe?"

"I don't know it yet," he said. "I knew damned well she was cheating on me, but I didn't know who with."

"What would you have done if you had known that?" I asked

"Me?" He grinned wolfishly. "Just what I did."

"Killed the pair of them," I said.

He asked calmly, "You think I killed Sue?"

"You did."

"Serves me right," he said. "I must be getting simple in my old age. What the hell am I doing talking with a lousy dick? That never got nobody nothing but grief. Well, you might just as well take it on the heel and toe now, my lad. I'm through."

And he was.

I couldn't get another word out of him.

The Old Man sat listening to me, tapping his desk lightly with the point of a long yellow pencil, staring past me with mild blue, rimless-spectacled eyes. When I had brought my story up to date, he asked pleasantly:

"How is MacMan?"

"He lost two teeth, but his skull wasn't cracked. He'll be out in a couple of days."

The Old Man nodded and asked:

"What remains to be done?"

"Nothing. We can put Peggy Carroll on the mat again, but it's not likely we'll get much more out of her. Otherwise the returns are pretty well all in."

"And what do you make of it?"

I squirmed in my chair and said: "Suicide."

The Old Man smiled at me, politely but sceptically.

"I don't like it either," I grumbled. "And I'm not ready to write it in a report yet. But that's the only total that what we've got will add up to. That fly paper was hidden behind the kitchen stove. Nobody would be crazy enough to try to hide something from a woman in her own kitchen like that. But the woman herself might hide it there."

"According to Peggy, Holy Joe had the fly paper. If Sue hid it, she got it from him. For what? They were planning to go away together, and were only waiting till Joe raised enough money. Maybe they were afraid of Pat, and had the poison there to slip him if he tumbled to their plan before they went. Maybe they meant to slip it to him before they went anyway."

"When I started talking to Holy Joe about murder, he thought Pat was the one who had been killed. He was surprised, but as if he was surprised that it had happened so soon. He was more surprised when he heard that Sue had died too, but even then he wasn't so surprised as when he saw McCloor alive at the window."

"Sue died cursing Holy Joe, and she knew she was poisoned, and she wouldn't let McCloor get a doctor. Can't that mean that

she had turned against Joe, and had taken the poison herself instead of feeding it to Pat? The poison was hidden from Pat. But even if he found it, I can't see him as a poisoner. He's too rough. Unless he caught her trying to poison him and forced her to swallow the stuff. But that doesn't account for the month-old arsenic in her hair."

"Does your suicide hypothesis take care of that?" the Old Man asked.

"It could," I said. "But, if she committed suicide this time, there's no reason why she couldn't have tried it once before—say after a quarrel with Joe a month ago—and failed to bring it off. That would have put the arsenic in her. There's no real proof that she took any between a month ago and the day before yesterday."

"No real proof," the Old Man protested mildly, "except the autopsy's finding—chronic poisoning."

I was never one to let experts' guesses stand in my way. I said:

"They base that on the small amount of arsenic they found in her remains—less than a fatal dose. And the amount they find in your stomach after you're dead depends on how much you vomit before you die."

The Old Man smiled benevolently at me and asked:

"But you're not, you say, ready to write this theory into a report? Meanwhile what do you propose doing?"

"I think I'll get a copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and run through it. I haven't read it since I was a kid. It looks like the book was wrapped up with the fly paper to make a bundle large enough to wedge tightly between the wall and stove, so it wouldn't fall down. But there might be something in the book. I'll see anyway."

"I did that last night," the Old Man murmured.

I asked: "And?"

He took a book from his desk drawer, opened it where a slip of paper marked a place, and held it out to me. "This is obviously where the idea came from," he said.

"Suppose you were to take a milligramme of this poison the first day, two milligrammes the second day, and so on. Well, at the end of ten days you would have taken a dose of a whole centigramme: at the end of twenty days, increasing another milligramme each day, you would have taken a dose you would support without inconvenience, but which would be very dangerous for any other person who had not taken the same precautions as yourself. Well, then, at the end of the month, when drinking water from the same carafe, you would kill the person who had drunk this water, without your perceiving otherwise than from slight

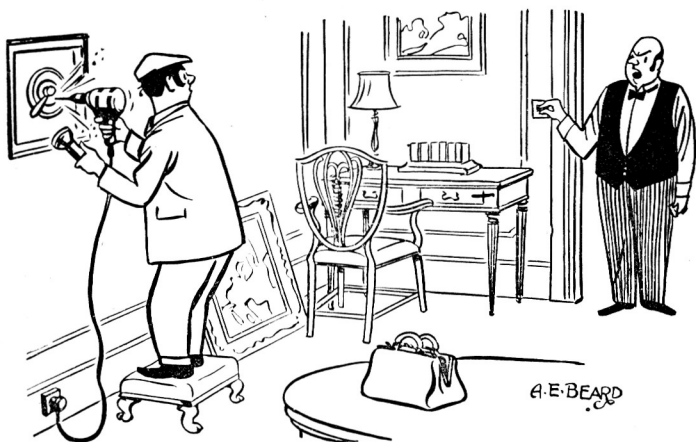
inconvenience that there was any poisonous substance mingled with the water."

"That does it," I said. "That does it. They were afraid to go away without killing Pat, too certain he'd come after them. She tried to make herself immune from arsenic poisoning by getting her body accustomed to it, taking steadily increasing doses, so when she slipped the big dose into Pat's food she could eat it with him without danger. She might be sick, but wouldn't die, and the police couldn't hang his death on her because she too had eaten the poisoned food."

"After the row on Monday night, when she wrote Joe the note urging him to make the getaway soon, she tried to hurry up her immunity, and took too large a shot. That's why she cursed Joe at the end: it was his plan."

"Possibly she overdosed herself in an attempt to speed it along," the Old Man agreed, "but not necessarily. There are people who can cultivate an ability to take large doses of arsenic without trouble, but it seems to be a sort of natural gift, a constitutional peculiarity. Ordinarily, anyone who tried it would do what Sue Hambleton did—slowly poison themselves until the cumulative effect was strong enough to cause death . . ."

Pat McCloor was executed, for killing Holy Joe, six months later.



"So that's what's interfering with the telly."

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Geoffrey Household has a Hungarian wife, speaks fluent Spanish, has lived in Bucharest, and knows the Middle East like the back of one of his books, due to wartime intelligence work thereabouts. Cloaking this glamorous past is an English country-house appearance of such impeccability that one expects to see beautiful spies and mysterious types on horseback surge out of the Bucks landscape around him. Maybe he's best known for Rogue Male, but The Third Hour and A Rough Shoot run it close.

CORPORAL VALDES

THE only murderer I ever knew was a personal friend. Yet I admit that his sentence was just, legal and merited.

Even the Military Police were kind to Valdes. They assured him that it did not hurt at all to be executed by a firing squad. Valdes politely agreed with them—not that he cared about pain. He was as used to that as a retired boxer, and looked a little like one, too. He wanted to live as eagerly as the rest of us, but he realized that his death, like any other military ceremony, had to be performed with dignity. He was a soldier all through.

He was an Andalusian, sturdy, of middle height and with the type of face which the Spaniards call *chato*—looking as if it had been flattened out by a road roller and come up smiling. It must be common in the Peninsula. I had three other toughs with much the same lack of features.

Valdes had fought right through the Spanish Civil War and been interned in France at the end of it. In 1940 some of those internees were evacuated before the Germans could grab them, and formed into a Spanish commando. A good idea on paper. What they didn't know about bloodshed wasn't worth knowing. And yet their commando was unusable. Too fierce, too desperate. They hadn't the flair of the British for discreet, deadly action. When the Spanish commando was disbanded, Valdes, with a few of his mates, was posted to the Pioneer Corps.

What an outfit that was! We had plain labourers recruited



BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

from Africa or obscure islands in the Indian Ocean, the able-bodied poor of every colour in need of work and regular rations, and always some Q men, as they were called—habitual army criminals who had learnt by experience and cunning to anticipate the psychiatrist's next move and to get themselves registered as psychopaths.

My own company was a mixture of Arabs, Q men and vaguely oriental beachcombers. Corporal Valdes and his section of Spaniards formed a solid island of sanity and hard work.

In 1944 the company was with the Eighth Army in Italy, cleaning up close behind the advance. My main trouble was Italian hospitality. The men were not accustomed to red wine in that quantity. Valdes and his Spaniards, who were, acted off duty as nursemaids in the cafés, and the cases of rape and murder those fellows prevented was astonishing. They were proud of the reputation of the British Army. For them there was no other army in the war at all. Of course, when they joined up, there wasn't. "My captain," Valdes said to me one night, "we cannot

all be in the Guards. But we wish to assure you that we know how to die with decency."

They were going out beyond the front line with a Field Company of sappers, to fill up craters in a mountain track which was going to be badly needed next day. It was late in the evening when they volunteered for the job, and they were all, I suppose, at the third litre; but there was no telling where the generosity of wine ended and Andalusian pride began.

Pride. Perhaps murder is never very far from it. There didn't seem room for either when I sent Valdes and his section down to railhead to collect a consignment of picks and shovels. Only picks and shovels—but to Valdes they were Toledo steel. I had seen him use them under shell fire with such nonchalance that even the Q men didn't find an excuse to run back to safety.

That hardware was important to my Spaniards. So important that when a young French sergeant told them to get the hell out of the way, and let him load his truck with warlike stores, they ignored him.

Unfortunately Valdes, after two years of internment, spoke French. Unfortunately, too, he had that unreasonable Spanish contempt for the neighbour across the northern frontier. He told the French sergeant to pipe down and wait his turn.

The sergeant replied that he was not going to wait for any non-combatant bastards who were not fit to shovel—well, you can imagine the number of uses that an angry and imaginative Frenchman could find for a shovel. Valdes did not lose his temper. He rose with dignity to the occasion and developed his favourite creed: that if there were no shovels the luckier men who had fighting to do would never get near enough to the front line to do it. The Frenchman—so much we had in evidence—remarked that all the British Army ever did was shovelling, while their allies did the fighting.

Corporal Valdes quietly picked up a rifle belonging to the French detachment, and shot the sergeant dead.

It was astonishing how correct and soldierly Valdes's movements then were.

The only authority handy was the railway transport officer. While the startled Frenchmen were busy with their sergeant, Valdes marched up to the R.T.O., saluted smartly, gave his name and unit, handed over the rifle and reported the incident. The R.T.O. wiped the sweat off his elderly brow—he had been naturally disconcerted by the approach of a murderer with a loaded rifle—and sent for the Military Police. The section, still an island of proud discipline, returned to camp.

There was nothing I could do. If it had been a British soldier he had shot, I think I might have got the court martial sentence reviewed. But he had shot an ally, and allies were touchy. It was more essential for the war effort that Valdes should die than that the French should suffer a sense of grievance.

He admitted as much himself. He did not regret the murder at all; he only regretted that it had been unavoidable. He pointed out that he had paid no attention to personal insults, but that an insult to the British Army was not to be borne. For three years, he said, we had treated him as a friend and a gentleman. The least he could do in return was to protect our honour.

I was determined that Valdes should not be executed. Somehow I, a mere captain, reached the French G.O.C. I speak reasonable French—that, and a bit of Arabic, and the remains of several tropical diseases were my qualifications for the Pioneer Corps—and I nearly won him over. I insisted that there was no need to prove Valdes mad; to shoot an unknown and gallant Frenchman he *must* be mad.

The general was exquisitely courteous. He knew that these were mere empty words, but they pleased him. Speaking for himself, he said at last, Valdes could be reprieved. But for the sake of the suffering mothers of France and the damned politicians—he dared to couple the two together with the irony of a man who was absolutely sure of himself—he regretted that he could not interfere. I came to a dead end against French obstinacy.

I tried the corps' psychiatrist—with whom, thanks to the curiosities among my Q men, I was on excellent terms. He told me that Valdes had the only faultlessly healthy human mind he had met in years, and that if hard scientific lying could help him, helped he would be.

He did his dishonest best, but the big shots above him refused to play. About ten per cent of my company had deserved a firing squad at some time, and they were tired of finding excuses for their behaviour. They refused to distinguish between Q men and emotionally primitive Spaniards.

I had no military ambition. I was just a grey-haired captain, fit enough only for the Pioneer Corps. So my plans for saving Valdes were quite uninhibited. I seriously considered every trick one reads of in fiction—down to supplying the firing squad with blanks and bribing them to say nothing. But not a single one of my ideas was practicable.

Valdes's section was equally desperate. They took it for granted that I was on their side. They had no more logic than women, and were just as right. Their experience of impossible

escapes in the chaos of civil war was to the point, but such plans in a more formal army were unworkable.

Private Moreno, who was some sort of relation of Valdes from the days when they had possessed homes and wives, wanted to get inside the gaol and substitute himself for the condemned man. He couldn't very well be shot instead, and a court martial—always merciful when its collective sense of humour was aroused—was unlikely to give him more than a year.

I thought about it night after night. I even trained Moreno to imitate Valdes's voice and accent. But he was a good inch too tall; and, though he did have a similar type of squashed and wrinkled features in the same tint of deep tan, common sense insisted that one could never be mistaken for the other unless they were heavily made up or bandaged, and then only in a crowd of Arabs or Englishmen.

Valdes was in the jug at Bari. I used to drive down and see him whenever I had a spare moment and could invent a reasonable excuse. On what would have to be my last visit, two days before he was due to be executed, I ran into the corps' psychiatrist, who was being let out through the formidable gate as I was being let in.

"Another of your beauties," he said to me.

"Who is it this time?"

"Pidgegood. There's nothing wrong with him whatever, except that he knows as much of our routine as I do. You can have him back when he's served his sentence."

Myself, I knew all along that there was not a trace of maladjustment in Pidgegood; he had merely been born without a sense of shame. But it had taken a long time for over-conscientious psychiatrists to realize that gaol was the proper place for him. He was a gipsy—or said he was. He had found in peacetime that wild eyes and dirt and a general air of rural eccentricity always intimidated housewives and farmers, and he trusted that the military were just as easy.

They were. Pidgegood couldn't read or write, but he had the cunning of the devil. By the time he had been dismissed from his battalion as an incorrigible and cowardly rogue, he knew enough psychiatry to fool any solemn doctor. He put on an act just sufficiently unbalanced to ensure that his crimes would land him in a mental ward rather than a cell, but not enough to get him invalided out of the service. He preferred the army—what little he saw of it—to being drafted into a factory.

Court martials had no effect on him; he always came back to me with a careful letter of advice from the psychiatrists. But

my chaps found a use for the man. If there were any inquiries about missing pigs or chickens and no chance of the company's innocence being believed, they always put the blame on Pidgegood. He was perfectly willing to accept it, even on the rare occasions when he wasn't guilty, and was rewarded by privileged idleness.

I was far from fond of him, but he was a part of my company and we were used to him, so I asked to be escorted to his cell. I went there before I went to Valdes. It was going to be the last time I should see my corporal, and I knew I should want to be alone afterwards.

Pidgegood would talk of nothing else but Valdes. He reproached me to my face with not getting him off. There wasn't a man in the company, he said, whatever his colour, who wouldn't have died for Valdes, except me. I didn't attempt to explain. Pidgegood never understood the army machine.

"Have you seen him?" I asked.

"Gawd, yes! We runs round the yard together."

They did not have a condemned cell, you see. Firing squads were hardly ever used in the humane army of the last war. I suppose the proper procedure for dealing with Valdes was laid down, but it was not a matter of everyday experience and nobody wanted to be too formal.

And then, corrupted by the mere presence and criminality of Pidgegood, I suddenly saw a remote chance.

"Do you want to go back to the psychiatric ward?" I asked him.

"They won't 'ave nothing more to do with me," he said.

"Ever tried attempted murder?"

"Not worth it. Touch one of them warders, and they'll 'alf kill you and swear it was done resisting constraint."

"It wasn't one of them I meant," I explained.

He got it. He got it instantly. His gipsy mind took him right to the point before I had done more than feel for it myself.

"I couldn't do 'im any 'arm with my bare 'ands," he said, "before they'd separate us."

We were alone in the cell. The warder was outside, but he didn't bother to supervise interviews between a prisoner and his long-suffering commanding officer.

I took a handkerchief from the pocket of my battle-dress trousers and blew my nose, looking away from Pidgegood. When I had replaced the handkerchief and done up the button, I noticed that the familiar lump against my thigh—my formidable pocket knife—had disappeared. I swear I felt nothing. It only occurred to me later that the unaccountable loss of several of my

treasured possessions had always taken place when that scoundrel was with the company.

"The face, if possible, Pidgegood," I said, getting ready to go. "And if there is anything I can do for you at any time, you know I will."

"Thank you, sir. But I reckon I won't be coming back to the company this time."

Then I went on to see Valdes. There was a sergeant of Military Police present throughout the interview, and I couldn't drop a hint of what was brewing. When I left the cell I returned Valdes's salute with the tears running down my face. I was sure I would never see him again. Pidgegood seemed a frail ally against the imposing formality of military justice.

Not till the morning when Valdes, we all assumed, had been executed did I hear what had happened. The Spaniards of his section came babbling into the orderly room all at once, and for the first time in their lives had to be reminded by a roaring and indignant sergeant major that they were soldiers.

Did I know the news from Bari? No, I didn't. Valdes had been attacked in the exercise yard by Pidgegood, and carved up with two strokes of a knife. The first had slit him from mouth to ear and taken the ear three-quarters off; the second had ripped open the artery of his left arm. Did I know that it was not the custom to execute a hospital patient? Did I know that he must be nursed back to health before he could be shot?

I showed as much pleasure as could be expected from an unemotional company commander, and asked how Pidgegood had come by a knife.

That did not seem to bother anybody. Pidgegood could not be imagined without a knife.

Through the correct channels I asked whether it was permissible to visit Valdes in hospital, not being quite sure whether he was officially dead or not. Nothing against it. He was very glad to see me. His head was swathed in bandages, and the pale oak colour of his face had changed to yellow. He could not understand what had come over Pidgegood. He assumed that the doctors must have been right about him after all.

Military justice was now following all the rules of the game. Valdes had a guard continually at his bedside—or at least playing cards not more than three beds away. He was not even allowed to attend to the needs of nature alone, though his escort remained outside the swing door. I took a fatherly interest in all these arrangements. I also took note of the exact measurements and windings of his bandages.

I gave liberal leave to the Spaniards of his section—with the exception of Moreno. The hospital doorkeepers became accustomed to their cheerful arrivals and chattering departures. Valdes soon looked his normal self and colour. The surgeons, knowing what was in store for him when they released him, kept him as long as they mercifully could, and even wasted time in removing the scar of Pidgegood's knife—or mine, rather—by the latest plastic operation. But at last the week arrived when he had to be passed fit for execution.

I allowed four of the section to take a company truck and pay a good-bye visit. I met the truck on the road and put Moreno in the back of it, holding a saint of painted wood on a rather large base representing a rock. Inside the base was a cap made of bandages on the thinnest possible mould of plaster of Paris. It needed only one more wind and a safety pin to be an exact replica of Valdes's bandage. Parcels brought by visitors were examined at the door, so we had to use this subterfuge. We felt sure the saint would not object to taking part in an errand of mercy.

Beyond providing the party with very precise operation orders which I made them learn by heart, I had nothing else to do with the proposed felony. Whatever happened I knew they would never give me away, or even refer to the matter again.

At 14.15 hours the detachment passed the lavatories on Valdes's floor. Moreno whipped the cap out of its hiding place and entered the third lavatory. The rest went straight on to Valdes's ward and presented him with the saint.

At 14.18 hours Valdes, accompanied by his guard, also entered the third lavatory, sidling in and not opening the door too wide. It was a stable door, but so long as they kept their heads down they could not be seen. We simply had to trust that the guard would not look under the door and see four feet instead of two.

Valdes put on Moreno's battle-dress, and shoved his bandages in the pocket. Moreno put on the cap, and Valdes's pyjamas. Groaning a little and holding his tummy to disguise his height, he trotted back to bed and dived under the bed-clothes. His four visitors made a little doleful conversation and said an emotional good-bye. Then they picked up Valdes and drove like hell for our camp, passing close behind the French sector of the front where they dropped their corporal.

I wasn't sure that I had not been too impudently ingenious there. But the plan worked. After all, the last place anyone would look for Valdes was among the French.

He changed into ragged civilian clothes—also provided in the truck—and spent the night crawling through the French forward positions until he was sure that only enemy patrols were ahead

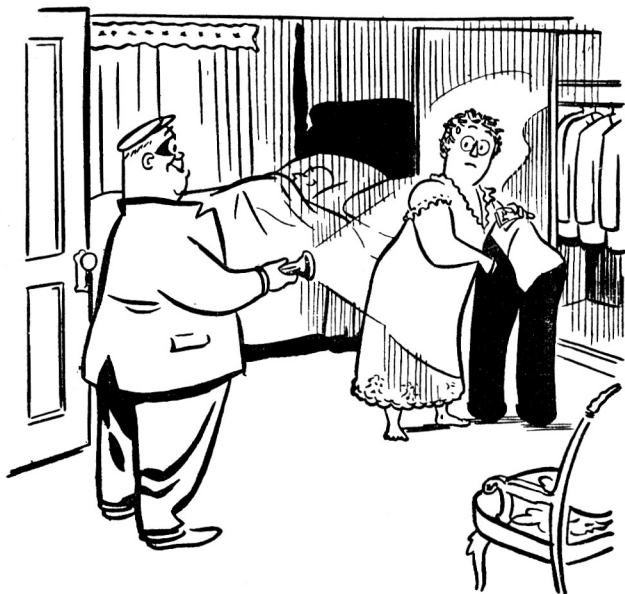
of him. Next morning, pretending to have escaped from a German labour battalion, he came in. The French believed him, or said they did. Six hours later Valdes had enlisted in the Foreign Legion.

Moreno had a much better run for his money than we ever thought he could. He kept up the deception till dawn of the following day, and very gladly accepted what I had prophesied—two years reduced to one when the sentence came up for revision. The others swore that they had never known that the man in bed was not Valdes, and the prosecution just failed to prove beyond a doubt that they did.

Pidgegood enjoyed a happy and idle war in the mental home. As for me, the worst I had to bear was an interview with my colonel, who told me privately that I was strongly suspected of knowing more about the escape of Valdes than I had stated in evidence. He had sworn to my character and assured the military detectives that their suspicions were impossible.

"It's an immoral trade, command," he said, looking me straight in the eye. "One becomes far too fond of one's subordinates."

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"Well! Shame on you!"

Joan Aiken has written two Goonish children's books, All You've Ever Wanted and More Than You Bargained For. The second was produced shortly after she won a washing machine and six years' supply of soap for a slogan which she says she has mercifully forgotten. She is in her thirties, has two children, and a chemist brother of hers brews marmalade liqueur of unusual potency.

MARMALADE WINE

By JOAN AIKEN

"PARADISE," Blacker said to himself, moving forward into the wood. "Paradise. Fairyland."

He was a man given to exaggeration; poetic licence he called it, and his friends called it "Blacker's little flights of fancy," or something less polite, but on this occasion he spoke nothing but the truth. The wood stood silent about him, tall, golden, with afternoon sunlight slanting through the half-unfurled leaves of early summer. Underfoot, anemones palely carpeted the ground. A cuckoo called.

"Paradise," Blacker repeated, closed the gate behind him, and strode down the overgrown path, looking for a spot in which to eat his ham sandwich. Hazel bushes thickened at either side until the circular blue eye of the gateway by which he had come in dwindled to a pinpoint and vanished. The taller trees overtopping the hazels were not yet in full leaf and gave little cover; it was very hot in the wood and very still.

Suddenly Blacker stopped short with an exclamation of surprise and regret: lying among the dog's-mercury by the path was the body of a cock-pheasant in the full splendour of its spring plumage. Blacker turned the bird over with the townsman's pity and curiosity at such evidence of nature's unkindness; the feathers, purple-bronze, green, and gold, were smooth under his hand as a girl's hair.

"Poor thing," he said aloud, "what can have happened to it?"

He walked on, wondering if he could turn the incident to account. "Threnody for a Pheasant in May." Too precious? Too sentimental? Perhaps a weekly would take it. He began choosing rhymes, staring at his feet as he walked, abandoning his conscious rapture at the beauty around him.

*Stricken to death . . . and something . . . leafy ride,
Before his . . . something . . . fully flaunt his pride.*

Or would a shorter line be better, something utterly simple and heartfelt, limpid tears of grief like spring rain dripping off the petals of a flower?

It was odd, Blacker thought, increasing his pace, how difficult he found writing nature poetry; nature was beautiful, maybe, but it was not stimulating. And it was nature poetry that *Field and Garden* wanted. Still, that pheasant ought to be worth five guineas. *Tread lightly past, Where he lies still, And something last. . .*

Damn! In his absorption he had nearly trodden on *another* pheasant. What was happening to the birds? Blacker, who objected to occurrences with no visible explanation, walked on frowning. The path bore downhill to the right, and leaving the hazel coppice, crossed a tiny valley. Below him Blacker was surprised to see a small, secretive flint cottage, surrounded on three sides by trees. In front of it was a patch of turf. A deck-chair stood there, and a man was peacefully stretched out in it, enjoying the afternoon sun.

Blacker's first impulse was to turn back; he felt as if he had walked into somebody's garden, and was filled with mild irritation at the unexpectedness of the encounter; there ought to have been some warning signs, dash it all. The wood had seemed as deserted as Eden itself. But his turning round would have an appearance of guilt and furtiveness; on second thoughts he decided to go boldly past the cottage. After all there was no fence, and the path was not marked private in any way; he had a perfect right to be there.

"Good afternoon," said the man pleasantly as Blacker approached. "Remarkably fine weather, is it not?"

"I do hope I'm not trespassing."

Studying the man, Blacker revised his first guess. This was no gamekeeper; there was distinction in every line of the thin, sculptured face. What most attracted Blacker's attention were the hands, holding a small gilt coffee-cup; they were as white, frail, and attenuated as the pale roots of water-plants.

"Not at all," the man said cordially. "In fact you arrive at a

most opportune moment; you are very welcome. I was just wishing for a little company. Delightful as I find this sylvan retreat, it becomes, all of a sudden, a little *dull*, a little *banal*. I do trust that you have time to sit down and share my after-lunch coffee and liqueur."

As he spoke he reached behind him and brought out a second deck-chair from the cottage porch.

"Why, thank you; I should be delighted," said Blacker, wondering if he had the strength of character to take out the ham sandwich and eat it in front of this patrician hermit.

Before he made up his mind the man had gone into the house and returned with another gilt cup full of black, fragrant coffee, hot as Tartarus, which he handed to Blacker. He carried also a tiny glass, and into this, from a blackcurrant-cordial bottle, he carefully poured a clear, colourless liquor. Blacker sniffed his glassful with caution, mistrusting the bottle and its evidence of home brewing, but the scent, aromatic and powerful, was similar to that of curaçao, and the liquid moved in its glass with an oily smoothness. It certainly was not cowslip wine.

"Well," said his host, reseating himself and gesturing slightly with his glass, "how do you do?" He sipped delicately.

"Cheers," said Blacker, and added, "My name's Roger Blacker." It sounded a little lame. The liqueur was not curaçao, but akin to it, and quite remarkably potent; Blacker, who was very hungry, felt the fumes rise up inside his head as if an orange tree had taken root there and was putting out leaves and golden glowing fruit.

"Sir Francis Deeking," the other man said, and then Blacker understood why his hands had seemed so spectacular, so portentously out of the common.

"The surgeon? But surely you don't live down here?"

Deeking waved a hand deprecatingly. "A weekend retreat. A hermitage, to which I can retire from the strain of my calling."

"It certainly is very remote," Blacker remarked. "It must be five miles from the nearest road."

"Six. And you, my dear Mr. Blacker, what is your profession?"

"Oh, a writer," said Blacker modestly. The drink was having its usual effect on him; he managed to convey not that he was a journalist on a twopenny daily with literary yearnings, but that he was a philosopher and essayist of rare quality, a sort of second Bacon. All the time he spoke, while drawn out most flatteringly by the questions of Sir Francis, he was recalling journalistic scraps of information about his host: the operation on the Indian Prince; the Cabinet Minister's appendix; the

amputation performed on that unfortunate ballerina who had both feet crushed in a railway accident; the major operation which had proved so miraculously successful on the American heiress.

"You must feel like a god," he said suddenly, noticing with surprise that his glass was empty. Sir Francis waved the remark aside.

"We all have our godlike attributes," he said, leaning forward. "Now you, Mr. Blacker, a writer, a creative artist—do you not know a power akin to godhead when you transfer your thought to paper?"

"Well, not exactly then," said Blacker, feeling the liqueur moving inside his head in golden and russet-coloured clouds. "Not so much then, but I do have one unusual power, a power not shared by many people, of foretelling the future. For instance, as I was coming through the wood, I *knew* this house would be here. I knew I should find you sitting in front of it. I can look at the list of runners in a race, and the name of the winner fairly leaps out at me from the page, as if it was printed in golden ink. Forthcoming events—air disasters, train crashes—I always sense in advance. I begin to have a terrible feeling of impending doom, as if my brain was a volcano just on the point of eruption."

What was that other item of news about Sir Francis Deeking, he wondered, a recent report, a tiny paragraph that had caught his eye in *The Times*? He could not recall it.

"Really?" Sir Francis was looking at him with the keenest interest; his eyes, hooded and fanatical under their heavy lids, held brilliant points of light. "I have always longed to know somebody with such a power. It must be a terrifying responsibility."

"Oh, it is," Blacker said. He contrived to look bowed under the weight of supernatural cares; noticed that his glass was full again, and drained it. "Of course I don't use the faculty for my own ends; something fundamental in me rises up to prevent that. It's as basic, you know, as the instinct forbidding cannibalism or incest—"

"Quite, quite," Sir Francis agreed. "But for another person you would be able to give warnings, advise profitable courses of action—? My dear fellow, your glass is empty. Allow me."

"This is marvellous stuff," Blacker said hazily. "It's like a wreath of orange blossom." He gestured with his finger.

"I distil it myself; from marmalade. But do go on with what you were saying. Could you, for instance, tell me the winner of this afternoon's Manchester Plate?"

"Bow Bells," Blacker said unhesitatingly. It was the only name he could remember.

"You interest me enormously. And the result of today's Aldwych by-election? Do you know that?"

"Unwin, the Liberal, will get in by a majority of two hundred and eighty-two. He won't take his seat, though. He'll be killed at seven this evening in a lift accident at his hotel." Blacker was well away by now.

"Will he, indeed?" Sir Francis appeared delighted. "A pestilent fellow. I have sat on several boards with him. Do continue."

Blacker required little encouragement. He told the story of the financier whom he had warned in time of the oil company crash; the dream about the famous violinist which had resulted in the man's cancelling his passage on the ill-fated *Orion*; and the tragic tale of the bullfighter who had ignored his warning.

"But I'm talking too much about myself," he said at length, partly because he noticed an ominous clogging of his tongue, a refusal of his thoughts to marshal themselves. He cast about for an impersonal topic, something simple.

"The pheasants," he said. "What's happened to the pheasants? Cut down in their prime. It—it's terrible. I found four in the wood up there, four or five."

"Really?" Sir Francis seemed callously uninterested in the fate of the pheasants. "It's the chemical sprays they use on the crops, I understand. Bound to upset the ecology; they never work out the probable results beforehand. Now if *you* were in charge, my dear Mr. Blacker—but forgive me, it is a hot afternoon and you must be tired and footsore if you have walked from Witherstow this morning—let me suggest that you have a short sleep . . ."

His voice seemed to come from farther and farther away; a network of sun-coloured leaves laced themselves in front of Blacker's eyes. Gratefully he leaned back and stretched out his aching feet.

Some time after this Blacker roused a little—or was it only a dream?—to see Sir Francis standing by him, rubbing his hands, with a face of jubilation.

"My dear fellow, my dear Mr. Blacker, what a *lusus naturae* you are. I can never be sufficiently grateful that you came my way. Bow Bells walked home—positively *ambled*. I have been listening to the commentary. What a misfortune that I had no time to place money on the horse—but never mind, never mind, that can be remedied another time.

"It is unkind of me to disturb your well-earned rest, though;

drink this last thimbleful and finish your nap while the sun is on the wood."

As Blacker's head sank back against the deck-chair again, Sir Francis leaned forward and gently took the glass from his hand.

Sweet river of dreams, thought Blacker, fancy the horse actually winning. I wish I'd had a fiver on it myself; I could do with a new pair of shoes. I should have undone these before I dozed off, they're too tight or something. I must wake up soon, ought to be on my way in half an hour or so. . .

When Blacker finally woke he found that he was lying on a narrow bed, indoors, covered with a couple of blankets. His head ached and throbbed with a shattering intensity, and it took a few minutes for his vision to clear; then he saw that he was in a small white cell-like room which contained nothing but the bed he was on and a chair. It was very nearly dark.

He tried to struggle up but a strange numbness and heaviness had invaded the lower part of his body, and after hoisting himself on to his elbow he felt so sick that he abandoned the effort and lay down again.

That stuff must have the effect of a knockout drop, he thought ruefully; what a fool I was to drink it. I'll have to apologize to Sir Francis. What time can it be?

Brisk light footsteps approached the door and Sir Francis came in. He was carrying a portable radio which he placed on the window sill.

"Ah, my dear Blacker, I see you have come round. Allow me to offer you a drink."

He raised Blacker skilfully, and gave him a drink of water from a cup with a rim and a spout.

"Now let me settle you down again. Excellent. We shall soon have you—well, not on your feet, but sitting up and taking nourishment." He laughed a little. "You can have some beef tea presently."

"I am so sorry," Blacker said. "I really need not trespass on your hospitality any longer. I shall be quite all right in a minute."

"No trespass, my dear friend. You are not at all in the way. I hope that you will be here for a long and pleasant stay. These surroundings, so restful, so conducive to a writer's inspiration—what could be more suitable for you? You need not think that I shall disturb you. I am in London all week, but shall keep you company at weekends—pray, pray don't think that you will be a nuisance or *de trop*. On the contrary, I am hoping that you can do me the kindness of giving me the Stock Exchange prices in advance, which will amply compensate for any small trouble I

have taken. No, no, you must feel quite at home—please consider, indeed, that this *is* your home.”

Stock Exchange prices? It took Blacker a moment to remember, then he thought, Oh lord, my tongue has played me false as usual. He tried to recall what stupidities he had been guilty of. “Those stories,” he said lamely, “they were all a bit exaggerated, you know. About my foretelling the future. I can’t really. That horse’s winning was a pure coincidence, I’m afraid.”

“Modesty, modesty.” Sir Francis was smiling, but he had gone rather pale, and Blacker noticed a beading of sweat along his cheekbones. “I am sure you will be invaluable. Since my retirement I find it absolutely necessary to augment my income by judicious investment.”

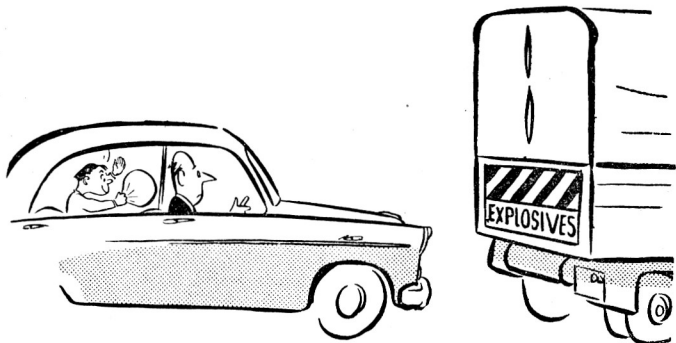
All of a sudden Blacker remembered the gist of that small paragraph in *The Times*. Nervous breakdown. Complete rest. Retirement.

“I—I really must go now,” he said uneasily, trying to push himself upright. “I meant to be back in town by seven.”

“Oh, but Mr. Blacker, that is quite out of the question. Indeed, so as to preclude any such action, I have amputated your feet. But you need not worry; I know you will be very happy here. And I feel certain that you are wrong to doubt your own powers. Let us listen to the nine o’clock news in order to be quite satisfied that the detestable Unwin did fall down the hotel lift shaft.”

He walked over to the portable radio and switched it on.

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THE JESSE WYNTER STORY

There's nothing like the trek to the West—through unknown, dangerous Indian country—for proving the mettle of a man. It's quite a responsibility for me, Seth Adams, leading these folk to their goal. But we're travelling in hope towards a fresh country and a new start—we and the folk you're reading about, people like Jesse Wynter.



THE barman was saying: "I ain't sellin' no liquor to no wagon train."

"I just rode in," the fair-haired boy said. "I ain't no wagon train. Just one man wantin' one bottle of rye."

"Liquor's short," the barman said. "We ain't got enough for no bums."

Men stopped talking. One or two moved away to give them more room.

"I ain't no bum, mister." The youngster was dogged, not angry yet. "I got the money an' I got the right to buy what's on sale."

A fat, pale cow-handler in a greeny black hat said: "On your way, boy." Then to the barman, "O.K. I'll take his bottle, Charlie."

The man sitting by himself watched it all. He watched it quietly, because a man who knew nothing of farming or cattle got so as he was used to solitude. More so if, like this one, he did not even look like other men.

Unhurriedly he sipped his drink. Had he wished, he could have looked sideways into the flyblown mirror on the wall and seen himself as he was: huge, not young, black-haired and heavily bearded. Underneath the thick eyebrows his eyes were a bright, almost china blue and his face had the look of old oak, worn and lined and very brown. The hands resting on the table in front of him were huge. Physically he could have been duplicated often enough, and there was nothing remarkable about his clothes. Nevertheless a difference was there and the other men sensed it.

At the bar the boy was watching the bottle slide across the counter, away from him, and for the first time his voice was sharper as he said: "Look, mister—"

The fat man turned. He said nothing. Unhurriedly he cleared his throat and spat accurately on the young man's boots.

Watching him, Jesse Wynter thought that this was the way it always happened. This was the way it had been where he had come from. The saloon was different, and the dust and the heat of early evening outside the dirty windows, the dress and the horses and the talk of cows. All this was another world, but apart from that the men were the same.



Abruptly, Jesse stood up and walked over to the young man's side. His voice sounded harsh and unfamiliar, but there was no anger in it when he said to the fat man: "Friend, you ain't got no reason to do that."

"You keep your God-damn mouth shut." The fat man had his back to the bar, thick fingers unbuttoning his coat. There was a gun strapped to the broad leather belt beneath it, and somewhere at the back of the room a man stood up quickly, his chair scraping with sudden and violent noise across the rough pine floor.

Jesse Wynter said: "Take not the Lord's name in vain." He felt little emotion. Only sadness that men should be like this, and the knowledge that he could do what it would now be necessary to do. He waited for a very little while until he was sure that the fat man's hand was moving towards the gun, and then he reached out and took the other man's wrist in his left hand, feeling the flesh and sinew shrinking under his fingers and almost at once the sudden sharp snap of a bone.

The fat man screamed and fell to his knees.

"Let's go," the boy who had wanted the whisky said.

Jesse Wynter nodded and followed him out into the street, the men silent, falling back from his path as he passed. There were horses tied at the rail in front of the saloon, his own and the boy's among them. They untied the reins, mounted and rode slowly out of the drab little town, the hoofs of their ponies leaving spirals of dust behind them.

"I'm Pete Buxton," the boy said. "The wife and me—we're goin' to California along with the Adams wagon train."

"Adams?" The name meant nothing to him and he cared less, but the boy had spoken as if he had expected to be asked.

"Major Seth Adams. He's wagonmaster." Buxton had forgotten about the brawl in the saloon, forgotten also about the whisky. He rode lightly, his hat on the back of his head. Eager. Young. He asked, "Where are you goin', mister?"

"The name's Wynter an' I'm from Nantucket," Jesse said. He was aware he had not answered the question, but his mind was still too full of the need to leave New England to question where he might be going. He neither knew nor cared, knowing only, deep within himself, that all places were alike and all equally without comfort for him. He asked: "Where about's this wagon train?"

"One-two mile." Pete Buxton made a gesture with his hand. "Major Adams said to water the stock." Then, diffidently: "You'll eat with us, mister? My wife makes the best damn hash you ever saw."

"I'd be proud to," Jesse said.

They rode in silence then. The trees flanking the river came up, dark green through the dust. White canvas of wagons and the smoke from camp-fires. The horses picked their way through kids that ran screaming, fish-wet and naked from swimming. Women-folk round the chores, gossiping as they worked.

"This here's my wife, Kate," Pete Buxton said.

They had stopped by a wagon and the girl had straightened her back from bending over the cooking. She was very young and her body was quick and straight under the cheap gingham, and she smiled a welcome with her face still flushed with the heat of the fire.

Why did her name have to be Kate? Jesse found himself thinking. Bad enough, cruel enough that she should look like his dead Kate without her having to bear the same name. He sat very still on the horse, seeing not the wagons, but white houses and another girl's face flushed by another fire.

It had seemed once that he might forget a little were he but far enough away, but he saw now that this was not to be. He prayed: *Oh God, how hard are Thy afflictions*, and pictured in his mind the gaunt, white-haired pastor who had sat with him all one night in the church above the harbour of Nantucket Sound, speaking of sin and the wrath of the Lord. He did not understand how he had sinned, but the ways of the Almighty were strange, and how was one to know?

"Pete'll show you where you can wash up. An' the coffee's on the boil right now."

It was Kate Buxton's voice. Not his Kate's. "Thank you, ma'am," Jesse said.

He walked with the girl's husband to the river to wash and then went back and ate with his back to a wagon wheel, his eyes through long habit searching the sky for the first stars. He listened while they talked of California and the stock they'd buy if only they had the money. Young Buxton was going to work as a hired hand and save, the girl said. And perhaps one day—Jesse's eyes took in the skimped gear and poor clothes. Money meant so much to them. Yet how many thousands of carefully stored dollars lay to his name in the safe New England bank? Money meant for his Kate.

Too late now.

After a while someone shouted in the darkness, and Pete Buxton grinned and said: "That there's Seth Adams. You sure can tell the major's voice."

"You'll pardon me, ma'am," Jesse said. He got up stiffly and

walked into the shadows between the wagons, searching for the wagonmaster and finding him among the horses. A short, thick bull of a man, understood at a glance. A man of his own kind. Had he one left, a man after his own heart?

"I was aimin' on comin' to California along of you, Major," Jesse said. He added: "If you're agreeing."

Adams looked at him. Blue-eyed too, beneath the heavy brows. A far-seeing man. He asked: "Family?"

Jesse said steadily: "I'm a widow man. Ain't got no family. Only myself an' a horse."

They stood silent for a time. Then the wagonmaster said, "You ain't a farmer. When you get to California, what do you reckon to do?"

They all knew he weren't no farming man, Jesse thought. For a moment he had a mind to tell of the seas beyond the north-east coast and the fleet of which he had been captain. He thought of trying to put it into words, and almost at once the need to speak about it passed. The sailing days were gone, just as Kate and little Sibella were gone. No use in talking, because being mindful of a thing didn't make it return.

Jesse said simply, "I ain't given much thought about what to do. Guess I can fix that when I gets there."

"You got money? Food?"

"I'll get by," Jesse said.

The major nodded. "You can come an' welcome. All I ask is you don't give me no trouble."

Jesse smiled a little, without humour. "Thanks, Major. I'll remember that."

That night he lay by his horse, sleepless, listening to the sound of the wind in the tall grass. He thought no more about California, because that was just a place and all places were alike to him now. Instead, he lay awake and thought of his dead wife and child, his eyes open, staring at the familiar, well remembered pattern of the stars.

There was a warmth and neighbourliness about the wagon train and Jesse sensed it, knowing that it could not touch him, but grateful for it just the same. He rode on his own, looking neither to right nor left, impervious to fatigue, unmindful as to whether the day were hot or cold. At the end of a fortnight, the Buxtons were still the only members of the wagon train that he knew.

He got to dropping by at their wagon of an evening, drinking coffee with them, listening to them talk. He spoke little himself,

and only once did Kate Buxton say anything that could even remotely be a probe into his past. That had been the time when she'd said: "Have you got any children, Mr. Wynter?"

"No, ma'am. No children." It was strange to discover that coming from her he found no offence in such talk. Even so he had to force himself a little to go on. "Had a daughter, pretty as a picture. She and my wife died of cholera a year back."

Kate Buxton said, "I'm sorry."

"There ain't nothin' a man can do about it," Jesse had said. He had been conscious at the time that once he would have quoted Pastor Wakeman about the will of God, but it had got so as it didn't seem that way any more. So instead he'd said slowly, "Seems like a man like me ain't got anything to do anyway."

"Mr. Wynter," the girl had said, "it ain't fittin' to talk like that. Every man's got work to do."

"I'm a sailor, ma'am," Jesse had reminded her. "Seems like I should have stopped with the sea."

The girl had shaken her head. "I think there's a reason for everything, somewhere, Mr. Wynter."

And he'd said in the bitterness of his hurt, "I reckon the Lord'll have to think fast if he's got a use for me."

He'd got drunk that night, but even that didn't make it any easier to forget.

It was in the middle of the third week that he left the wagon train to make a solitary call at a trading post for supplies.

And the night before he rejoined was the night the Indians made their raid.

Jesse had seen the glow of burning wagons red against the sky for ten miles away. Riding hard, he was still five miles off when he realized that a dot on the horizon was coming towards him and that it was another man. Ten minutes later the figure was recognizable as Flint McCullough, Major Adams' scout.

"What happened?" Jesse drew rein.

McCullough gestured behind him. He looked tired and his horse was caked with sweat. His voice was unemotional as he said, "Couple of dozen Comanche bucks hit the train last night. Took a woman an' ran for it." Then: "I'm sorry, Jesse. They got the Buxton girl."

Jesse said slowly: "It ain't a thing I understand. Comanches is fightin' men, ain't they? What they want with one girl?"

"They got a ceremony this time of year that needs a girl. Most years they raid one off another tribe. This time they've gone for a white."

He hadn't known it was like this, Jesse thought. And why did it always have to be Kate? His first and now this one. Aloud he asked, "How you goin' to get her back? You know Indians. What do we do?"

Flint said wearily, "I been out to Fort Mason an' only just got back. Seth Adams has gotten himself a bunch of the boys together an' gone after them." He paused for a moment and then went on, "Which ain't goin' to do no good, because from what I hear tell they gone after them the wrong way." He nodded at the ground. "This here's the way they went. You seen anything?"

"I ain't seen a thing." Jesse shook his head.

"They could have turned off. The tracks'll show."

Jesse said heavily, "You goin' after them alone?" Kate Buxton with her quick smile and her brave, cheap gingham dress. Kate. He flexed his hands but they gripped only air.

"Yeah. I'm the only tracker an' there ain't any men to spare till the major gets back."

So this was where it would end, Jesse thought. Here, and not in California after all. In a way he was glad.

He said, "I'm comin' too."

"There ain't a thing you can do," Flint told him. "Two ain't a mite better than one."

"I'm comin', I said."

"Then get that damn horse around."

They rode. They rode all day with the sun beating down on the back of their necks. Flint leading, slumped forward over the neck of his tired horse, his eyes reading the path the Comanches had taken. They rode, following surely a trail invisible to Jesse, but after a while he knew that he had faith in the scout, and he was not surprised when Flint reined back late that afternoon, his fingers gesturing, Indian fashion, towards the brow of the hill in front of them.

He said: "Behind there."

They went on foot, leading the horses, their fingers in the animals' nostrils to keep them from making any sound, till suddenly the Comanche camp was below them.

Jesse studied it. In a way it was as he had imagined an Indian camp would be. Tepees and drifting smoke from fires, and ponies running free. And at one end something like a corral, and in it—

He said: "What's that?"

"Buffalo," Flint said. He dropped to the grass beside Jesse. "They're for the feast of Chindachook. Not to eat. To show the young men's skill."

Jesse said: "What happens to the girl?"

"I'm tellin' you." The scout's voice was flat, impersonal. "Chindachook is a hunting feast to make medicine for plenty of buffalo in the coming year. They corral buffaloes and let them out one by one. Then the bucks play it off against each other for the best kill. The brave who kills best is Chindachook, an' the hell of a man. The girl they capture is his bride."

Jesse said thickly, "How are the buffalo killed?"

"I saw it once," Flint said. "Sure is murder. They make the boys do it with a spear. An' buffalo ain't spear game. Not unless you're figurin' on gettin' killed."

Oh Lord, Jesse thought, *Thou has delivered my enemies unto my hand*. He, who had shown so little faith. Mighty and terrible was the Lord. Aloud he said: "I'm goin' down."

The scout looked at him. "You gone crazy? I'm taking care of this."

Jesse shook his head. "No, I ain't gone crazy, friend. It's just that you an' I have got to put our trust in the Lord. Now answer me, boy. Do you speak their talk?"

"Sure," Flint said. "But—"

"There ain't no buts if we're goin' to get back this girl," Jesse told him. "Listen here. You take me down there an' tell them that I want to kill a buffalo an' be Chindachook. Tell them it's goin' to be fun watchin' me being killed, if you like. Tell them what you like, but talk—"

Even had he minded, Jesse thought, there would be no time for fear. He shut his mind to everything, seeing only the grass of the hillside in front of him, the naked warriors and the children playing round the camp-fires. They looked at him with blank eyes as he approached, until Flint started speaking from somewhere behind him. The scout spoke for what seemed a long time. After a while one of the older Comanches answered back.

Then: "He says you may kill a buffalo if you want to," Flint said. "An' he says if you don't kill no buffalo he'll kill you."

"That's fittin'," Jesse said. There was a stir over by the women's tepees, and he saw that they had brought out the girl. That was fitting too. She was the prize and it was right that she should watch. She smiled at him bravely, once.

He did not look at her again.

Flint said, "The chief says his best hunter will kill a bull to show you how it is done."

They sat on the ground and watched a buffalo cut out from those in the corral and then loosed among the tents. It erupted with the speed of a young horse but ten times as strong, vast-shouldered, broad-horned, making for the centre of the camp

where a young buck waited on a palomino pony, balancing a slender spear. As the buffalo got within striking range he spun his mount with slow grace, struck once and got away. The buffalo stood shaking its head, dripping blood on the sand for a minute before he charged again.

"The boy can ride," Jesse said. The scene had a beauty of its own, black bull and pale horse against the hot sand. Dust rose in slow, drifting clouds as the buffalo charged, tirelessly at first, then slower as each time the lance went home. Then all at once it turned too slowly and the youth on the palomino got the placing he wanted. The lance went in deep, and the bull tipped forward to its knees and died.

The contest had taken perhaps a quarter of an hour.

"He was good," Flint said. He spoke to the chief, thick gut-terals, gesturing with his hands. "The chief says he is the greatest of the hunters. He will have the girl and be Chindachook."

"We must trust in the Lord," Jesse said. He walked stiffly to an empty tepee, took the ridge pole and pulled it down. He stood looking at what he held in his hand; the trunk of a young sycamore, four inches thick and nine feet long from end to end. Of Flint he asked: "I want a hatchet."

Over by the fire he trimmed one end to a point, and hardened it in the red-hot ashes. The Indians watched him in silence. Only Flint said: "For God's sake, Jesse, what are you at?"

"I'm at my business," Jesse said. "Tell that savage to turn his beast loose."

He stood up, the young tree swinging easily in his hand, feeling the silence about him, seeing the Comanche chief motionless on his pony, watching, two of his braves at his side.

"He wants to give you a horse. A fresh horse that is not tired," Flint said.

Jesse shook his head. "Tell him this year's Chindachook needs no horse. That the fight will be one buffalo an' one man."

Flint translated, his voice sounding loud in the still air. The chief raised his hand and from the distant corral came the bull. Fast. Very fast. Running clean and straight as an arrow.

Jesse stood with his legs braced apart, waiting for it. Now for him there was no Indian village but only the feel beneath his feet of the whale boats of his youth, the swell of the seas before he was a captain in his own right, the good, fine feel of his skill.

He lifted his arm and the tree was no longer a tree but the great North Banks harpoon, sweet and truly balanced in his hand. The bull before him was big, but it was not as big as a whale and it was a poor thing, fettered to the land. It turned a little as it

came and Jesse cried, "Now!" as he cast his harpoon. Strongly. As strongly as he had done in his youth. A cast that would drive deep through the hide and blubber of a whale.

The bull took the sharpened tree trunk in its shoulder. It smashed through the hair and sinews, crushing lungs and heart, passing through its body, the fire-blackened point coming out the other side. The bull was dead before it fell. It lay huddled, the thing that had killed it straight up above it, so that it looked as though it was pinning the dead beast to the ground. As a fight, it had lasted perhaps fifteen seconds.

"Good God Almighty," Flint McCullough said.

"Tell him," Jesse said, "that I will take the girl. That if I do not have the girl I will curse his crops and his hunting for a year. Tell him I want my prize. That I am Chindachook."

They rode away after the Indians had brought the girl. She was very pale but very brave, and she sat on the chief's own horse and Jesse rode by her side. He was tired and satisfied, full of faith and a new knowledge of the Lord. He looked at Kate Buxton and now the sight of her no longer brought him pain, because he knew now what God in His mercy had planned for him to do, both with his life and the thousands of dollars in the safe New England bank.

That night he went along to Adams with a bank draft in his hand. He said: "I'll be pushin' along on my own, Major. In the morning you'll be givin' this to the Buxtons. Say it's for stock and a place of their own."

"I'll give it them," the wagonmaster said.

Jesse nodded. "I'm obliged." The money had always been meant for Kate. This way it seemed almost as though she were getting it after all.

He left the wagon train before it was light, but he rode with his head high, not really alone any more. For the first time Nantucket was something not present and painful, but something good and beautiful in the past. He thought of California for the first time, and knew it to be his promised land.

*Well, that's the Jesse Wynter story.
Next month we'll tell you about Mary
Anderson, whose courage braved the
dangers of the long trek West.*

Wagon Train appears every Monday night at 8.30 on all ITV programmes.

PARIS ADVENTURE

A Saint Story

SIMON TEMPLAR had to admit that the photograph of himself which adorned the front page of the journal on his knee left nothing to be desired.

Taken only a couple of years ago, at the studio of an ambitious photographer who had clearly seen the potentialities of future revenue from an authentic likeness of such a disreputable character, it brought out to perfection the rakish curve of his jaw, the smooth backward sweep of black hair, the mocking challenge of the filibuster's smile. The eyes glinted back at him from under the bantering lines of eyebrow with all the vivid dangerous dance of humour that was in his own.

The story illustrated by the picture occupied two columns of the front page and was continued somewhere in the interior. One gathered from it that that elusive and distressingly picturesque outlaw, the Saint, had set the laws of England by the ears again with a new climax of audacities; "the Robin Hood of modern crime" they called him, and with that phrase the Saint himself had least fault of all to find.

At the next table a fair-haired English girl was struggling to explain the secret of successful tea-brewing in halting French to an unsympathetic waiter. At other tables, the guests of the Café Berry read their evening papers, sipped *apéritifs*, chattered, argued, and gazed incuriously at the drifting march and counter-march of humanity on the pavements. And beyond the pavements flowed the ceaseless wheeled floods of the Champs Elysées. Paris at six—or any city in the world.

In those surroundings anyone but Simon Templar might have been embarrassed by the fact that a portrait of himself, accompanied by an account of his latest misdeeds and a summary of several earlier ones, was at the disposal of any citizen who cared to buy a London paper. The Saint was never embarrassed.

At that very moment some exciting radio correspondence was

The name of Leslie Charteris is familiar to all worshippers at the shrine of the Saint—urbane Simon Templar who has strolled with suavity and sang-froid through adventures running into triple figures. Charteris, a sort of Bulldog Drummond himself, after a conventional education has run the gamut of jobs from tramp to wood distiller, meanwhile keeping up a staggering output of adventurous fiction. He lives in Florida, likes food, fishing, and lying in the sun.

By **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

in progress between the officials of Scotland Yard and the Captain of a liner bound for Panama, who had discovered and clapped in irons a passenger answering very satisfactorily to the broadcast description of the much-wanted Simon Templar. Simon had paid the passenger five hundred pounds to make the trip and endure the inevitable indignities, with all rights in subsequent actions for damages against the shipping company thrown in, and he had left a well-organized trail of clues for Scotland



Yard to trace him by. For the next ten days he felt relieved of all responsibility.

He folded his paper and lit a cigarette, with the comforting assurance that any casual glancer at his classic features would be far less likely to suspect him of a hideous past than to suspect the eminent politician, or the débutante victim of a motor accident, whose portraits, in smaller frames, had flanked his own on either side. Certainly he saw no reason to creep into a corner and hide.

At the next table the English girl was getting more hopelessly entangled, the waiter more surly and inattentive. The girl's grey eyes wavered in humorous despair towards the Saint, which to Simon Templar was sufficient invitation.

"*Ecoute, toi!*" The Saint's voice lanced through the air with a sudden quiet command, snapping the waiter's wandering eyes round like a magnet dropped within an inch of twin compass needles. "Mademoiselle desires that the pot shall first be warmed. After that one will put two spoonfuls of tea within and pour boiling water on it. It is necessary that the water should be really boiling. Go to it."

The waiter nodded sourly, and moved away in a daze.

Simon smiled. The tide of cool spring twilight was rising in slow pools of intangible shadow, breaking in soft waves against the island of brightness where they sat; the night pulse of Paris picked up its beat of tinsel and tragedy and laughter. To the Saint any city was an oyster for his opening, a world for conquest; anything was adventure. He let his cigarette smoulder in absolute contentment.

The second pot of tea arrived. The girl poured, tasted, and grimaced ruefully—he decided that she had a mouth that couldn't look anything but pretty even when it tried.

"I should give it up and try a Martini," he advised.

He gave the order, and the girl looked at him enviously.

"I wish I could speak the language as you do."

"I've been here more often than any respectable man should be," said the Saint cheerfully. "I used to be the *conciierge* of a home for inebriate art students in the Rue des Deux Paires de Chaussettes de M. Alexandre Dumas. We all lived on absinthe and wore velvet next the skin. It went very well until someone discovered that half the inmates were wearing false beards and reading Edgar Wallace in secret."

The grey eyes laughed. "You must know your way about."

"Paris is yours," said the Saint with a gesture. "What would you like? Respectable night clubs? Artists with real beards? Apaches?"

She tasted her Martini, and nodded as if she liked it. She seemed to be thinking of something else. And then she turned towards him in a pose very like his own. The deep friendly eyes had a queer wistfulness.

"Tell me, stranger—where do you think a girl should go on a great occasion? Suppose she had something rather desperate to do, and if it went wrong she mightn't be able to choose where she went any more."

The Saint's very clear blue gaze rested on her thoughtfully. He had always been mad, always hoped to be.

"I think," he said, "I should take her across the river to a quiet little restaurant I know in the Place Saint-Michel, where they make the best omelettes in the whole world. And then we should ride up the Boulevard Saint-Michel and have coffee at the Closerie des Lilas, which is a café with a name that ought to send pilgrims in search of it . . ."

He flicked a thousand-franc note across the marble top of the table, and beckoned the waiter. The waiter counted out change laboriously from a bulging wallet.

"Shall we?" said the Saint.

The girl gathered up her gloves and bag and Simon stood up quickly. He trod heavily on the waiter's toes, overbalanced him backwards, and caught him again dexterously as he was on the point of descending, like Newton's apple, on the bald head of a customer in the next row. Somewhere in the course of the acrobatics the bulging wallet travelled from the waiter's pocket to the Saint's own.

"*Mille pardons*," murmured the Saint, patting the anguished man soothingly on the shoulder, and sauntered after the girl.

There was a taxi crawling by, and they climbed in.

"I'm free till twelve, stranger," said the girl.

She pulled off her hat and leaned far back on the cushions, with one slim nyloned leg stretched out to rest a toe on the folding seat in front. The passing lights picked up her face in almost breathless perfection, then let it sink back reluctantly into shadow.

"And then do you have to hurry home before the clock strikes, and only leave a glass slipper for a souvenir?"

"No," she said. "I have to burgle a house."

There was an omelette. She had never dreamed of anything so delicate, wrapped in such a gossamer skin, so richly red-gold inside, so different from the dry coagulation of half-scrambled eggs which passes under the same name in too many places.

"There's a trick in it," she said with a sigh, when it was finished.

"Of course there is," said the Saint. "It's one of the higher mysteries of life, only to be revealed to the pure in heart after many ordeals and battles and much travelling."

She accepted a cigarette from his case, dipped it in the flame of his lighter. Across the table the grey eyes looked into his with the serene intimacy which must come from the sharing of any sensuous pleasure, even of eating. She said: "I'm glad I met you, stranger. You take things very calmly, and you don't ask awkward questions."

In the course of his career the Saint had taken a good many things calmly enough, but he could not remember having heard it accounted unto him for righteousness before.

"The questions may come later," he said. "We burglars aren't easily startled."

She let a trail of smoke rise and disintegrate towards the ceiling.

"I'm going to talk to you, stranger," she said quietly. "A girl likes to talk; and nothing about this evening is real. We never met before, and we shan't meet again. This is an interlude that doesn't count, except for remembrance."

"Is there a dragon in it?"

"There's a Robber Baron. Have you ever heard of Lord Northwade?"

Simon had. His knowledge of unlovable characters, in or out of the peerage, was very nearly unique.

He knew Northwade for one of the most unpleasant products of the war, a man who had successfully conceived the notion of selling inferior bootlaces to the British Army for extortionate prices, and had gained for himself much wealth for that patriotic service. The Northwade business was still welding together the uppers of half the world, but Northwade himself had retired a couple of years ago to a mansion on the outskirts of Paris, leaving the female part of his family to pursue its strenuous climb through the social gradings of Mayfair.

"Yes, I've heard of Northwade. One of these monuments of other people's industry, isn't he?"

"He's also my uncle," said the girl. "I'm Judith Molloy."

Simon Templar hadn't blushed since he was eight years old. Also he considered that his remark was very nearly a compliment compared with what he would probably have said to Lord Northwade's face, had that undesirable nobleman been present.

"You have our sympathy," he said coolly.

"My father's a professor of engineering," said the girl. "You've probably never heard of him. You couldn't have two brothers who were more different. Northwade only wanted to make money. My father never wanted it. He's just a quiet, kind,

completely ordinary man—almost a child outside his work. He worked his way through school, went on to Oxford as a Ruskin scholar, and got to where he is now. The thing that came between them was my mother. Northwade wanted her too, but she just happened to prefer Dad."

The Saint nodded.

"Northwade never forgave him," she said. "I don't think he was really jealous—maybe he wasn't really in love at all—but he'd come on to something that money couldn't buy, and his vanity never got over it. Oh, he didn't say anything outright. He's always been friendly—too friendly—but Dad wouldn't suspect a cannibal who was weighing him. I tried to tell him, but he wouldn't believe me. He even helped Northwade to make more money—he's a clever inventor, too, and during the war he designed a machine that would put tags on laces twice as quickly as the old way, or something like that. I think Northwade gave him fifty pounds for the design." She smiled a little. "It's beginning to sound like a detective story, isn't it?"

"It has begun already," said the Saint.

"It's going to sound more like that. For the last eighteen months or so Dad's been working on a new car engine with an infinitely variable gear. It means that the engine'll always be working at its maximum efficiency, and it's far in advance of anything that's been done in that line so far. There's a fortune in it already; but it wasn't good enough for Dad. He wanted his engine to be the best that had ever been made, and that meant the perfect carburettor as well. He's been working on that too. Three months ago he'd spent every penny he'd saved on his experiments. Then he went to Northwade for help."

The Saint's mind moved in certain channels with the speed and precision of infinite experience. He took up his cigarette again and regarded her steadily over it.

"Northwade helped him, of course," he said.

"Northwade lent him five thousand pounds. On a nominal security—purely nominal. And with a few legal documents—just as a matter of form. I expect you can guess what that means."

"I could try."

"The plans of the engine are in Northwade's safe, over at Fontainebleau—all the results of Dad's work up till now. And there's a deed with them which says that all rights in them belong to Lord Northwade. No time limit specified. It was supposed to be until the loan was repaid, but the deed doesn't say so. Dad hasn't any mind for legal trickeries, and he signed the papers while I was away."

"One gathers," said the Saint composedly, "that this is the house you propose to burgle."

She gazed at him without flinching, grey eyes frank and resolute, even with that strain of wistful loneliness in them.

"Listen, stranger," she said softly. "This is still the game of Let's Pretend, isn't it? Pretending that this evening is right outside the world. Because that's the only reason why I'm telling you all this. I'm going to burgle Northwade's house, if I can. I'm going to try and get hold of his keys and open his safe and take those plans away, with the deed Dad signed. Dad hasn't perfected his carburettor yet, and he's no hope of paying back that five thousand pounds. And Northwade knows it. He's practically completed arrangements to sell the engine to a French manufacturer. There's no legal way of stopping him. It's one of those cases where possession is nine points of the law. If we had that deed back, Northwade would never have the face to go into a court and publish the terms of it, which he'd have to do if he wanted to make any claim. Do you think I'm quite mad?"

"Only a little."

She turned the stem of her wineglass between her fingers, looking at him quietly.

"Maybe I am. But have you ever heard of the Saint?"

"The Robin Hood of modern crime?" murmured Simon, with only the faintest lift of an eyebrow.

"I think it's the sort of thing he'd do," she said. "It's justice, even if it's against the law. I wish I could meet him. He'd understand. I think he'd say it was worth taking a chance on. You're very understanding, too, stranger. You've listened to me awfully patiently, and it's helped a lot. And now we'll go up to your café with the beautiful name and have coffee; and will you please forget it all?"

Simon Templar smiled.

He poured out the last of the wine, and took up his glass. Over the rim of it his clear blue eyes raked the girl with a cavalier challenge that matched his devil-may-care smile and the mocking slant of his brows. His face was alight suddenly.

"I don't propose to forget, Judith," he said. "I am the Saint; and the safe hasn't been made that I can't open. Nor has anything else been thought of that I can't do. We'll go to Fontainebleau together!"

"This is the place," said the girl.

Simon switched off the engine and let the car coast to a stop at the gates. It was her car—she had telephoned from the

Closerie des Lilas, and it had been fuelled and waiting for them outside the garage near the Madeleine.

Lord Northwade's home, an unwieldy mansion in the Napoleonic style, stood on a slight rise of ground some distance back from the road, in the centre of its extensive and pleasant grounds.

Standing by the open door of the car, Simon could see the solid rectangle of its upper part painted in dull black on a smudged grey-blue sky. He felt that he knew every corner of it, that he had lived there for years, from the descriptions she had given him, and the rough plans she had drawn while their coffee grew cold and neither of them cared. That had been a time of delight shared in adventure which he would always like to remember; but now it was over, and the adventure went on.

It was a night without moon or stars, and yet not utterly dark; perfect for the purpose. She saw the clean-cut lines of his face, etched sharply in the burst of light as he lit a cigarette.

"I still don't know why you should do this for me," she said.

"Because it's a game after my own heart," he answered.

"Northwade is a bird I've had ideas of my own about for some time. And as for our present object—well, no one could have thought of a story that would have been more likely to fetch me a thousand miles to see it through."

"I feel I ought to be coming with you."

He drew smoke into his lungs, and with it the sweet smell of green leaves.

"This sort of thing is my job, and I've had more practice than you."

"But suppose Northwade wakes up."

"I shall immediately hypnotize him so that he falls into a deep sleep again."

"Or suppose the servants catch you."

"I shall tie them up in bundles of three and heave them into the outer darkness."

"But suppose you *are* caught?"

He laughed.

"It'll be a sign that the end of the world is at hand. But don't worry. Even if that happens it'll cause a certain amount of commotion, and if you hear it I shall expect you to drive rapidly away and await the end in some other province. I shall tell them I came out here on roller skates. It's not your burglary any more—it's mine."

He planted a kiss on her upturned face and without another word he was gone, melting into the obscurity like a ghost.

He walked up the turf path beside the drive with the quick confidence of a cat. No lights showed in any of the front windows as

he approached, but he made a careful circle of the house to make sure. His eyes adjusted themselves to the gloom with the ease of long habit, and he moved without rustling a blade of grass under his feet.

The ground floor was a rugged façade of raised arches and pilasters broken by tall gaunt windows, with a pair of carved oak doors in the middle that would have given way to nothing short of a battering ram; but it is an axiom of housebreaking that those buildings whose fronts look most like fortresses are most likely to defend their postern gates with a card saying "No Admittance." In this case, there was an open pantry window six feet above the ground. Simon squeezed up through the aperture, and lowered himself gently over the shelves inside.

He passed through into the kitchen. With the help of a tiny pocket flashlight he located the main switchboard and removed all the fuses, burying them in a sack of potatoes. Then he made his way down the main hall and unbarred, unbolted, unchained, and unlocked the great oak portals. Simon Templar owed much of his freedom to a trained eye for emergency exits; and he carried on the good work by opening a pair of windows in the library before he gave a thought to the safe.

The girl had described its location accurately. It was built into one wall, behind a small bookcase which opened away from it like a door; and Simon held his torch on it for just three seconds before he decided that it was one of those situations in which neither a bent hairpin nor a tin-opener would be adequate.

He slid cheerfully back into the hall and stepped soundlessly up the broad staircase. A large selection of burglarious tools was not part of his usual travelling equipment, but that shortcoming had rarely troubled him. It was another axiom of his philosophy that most safes have keys, that most keys are in the possession of the owners of the safes, and, therefore, that the plodding felon who finds it necessary to pack nitroglycerine and oxyacetylene blow-pipes in his sponge bag is usually deficient in strategic genius.

Lord Northwade was sleeping soundly enough, with his mouth open and a reassuring drone issuing from the region of his adenoids; but even if he had been awake it is doubtful whether he would have heard the opening of his bedroom door, or sensed one movement of the sensitive hands that lifted a bunch of keys from his dressing-table and detached an even more probable one from the chain round his neck.

Simon went down the stairs again like a ghost. It was the key from the chain that turned the lock, and the heavy steel door swung back with the smooth acquiescence that even Simon Templar could never feel without a thrill. He propped his torch

up over one instep so that its light filled the interior of the safe, and went to work with quick white-gloved hands. Once he heard a board creak overhead, and he froze into granite immobility; but he knew that he had made no noise, and presently he went on.

The draft plans made a thick roll of foolscap sheets tied up with tape; the specifications were packed in a long fat envelope with "Liberty Variable Gear" roughly scrawled on it, and a deed on glazed parchment was enclosed with them. There were also some letters from an internationally known French automobile company.

The Saint was so busily engaged for the next ten minutes, and so absorbed in his labours, that he missed certain faint sounds which might otherwise have reached his ears. The first hint of danger came just as he had finished, in the shape of a cautious scuffle of feet on the terrace outside, and a hoarse whisper which was so unexpected that he raised his head almost incredulously.

Then his eyes dropped to the safe which he had just closed. He saw something that he had not noticed before—a flat leaden tube that rose a bare inch from the floor and disappeared into the crack under the lowest hinge, an obvious conduit for alarm wires. The girl had told him that there were no alarms; but that was one which Northwade had probably preferred to keep secret, and it had taken the Saint off his guard.

Simon snapped off the flashlight, leapt through the blackness to the windows, slammed them together, and secured the catch. He was knotting a handkerchief round the lower part of his face as he crossed the room again. In the darkness his hand closed on the doorknob, turned it stealthily; at the same time his fingers stretched downwards, and could feel no key in the lock. It looked as if it might be a tight corner, a crisp and merry getaway, but those were the moments when the Saint's brain worked at its swiftest.

He opened the door with a quick jerk and took one step into the hall. On his right, covering the retreat to the back of the house, stood an outsize butler in a nightshirt with a rolling-pin clutched in one hand. On his left, barring the way to the front door, was a wiry youth in trousers and vest. A little way up the stairs stood Lord Northwade himself, with a candle in one hand and a young cannon of a revolver in the other. The Saint's most reckless smile touched his lips under the handkerchief.

"*Bon soir, messieurs,*" he murmured politely. "It appears that you were not expecting me. I am accustomed to being received in formal dress. I regret that I cannot accept you in this attire."

He stepped back rapidly through the door, closing it after him. The butler and the wiry youth took a few seconds to recover; then they made a concerted rush for the door. They burst in together, followed by Lord Northwade with the candle. The spectacle of a completely deserted library was the last thing they were expecting, and it pulled them up short with bulging eyes.

Then the night-shirted butler returned to life. He tiptoed gingerly forward into the darkness, and peered behind and under a large settee in the far corner. The wiry youth made a dash to the nearest curtains and pulled them apart, disclosing a large area of glass with the round goggling faces of two other servants pressed against it from the outside, like startled fish in an aquarium. Lord Northwade discreetly remained a scant yard inside the doorway, his spluttering candle held helpfully aloft.

On the top of a massive ladder of bookshelves beside the door, Simon Templar rose like a panther from his prone position and dropped downwards. He fell squarely behind Northwade, easing his fall with a hand applied to the crown of Northwade's head, and drawing from his lordship a sudden squeal of terror. The same hand pushed Northwade violently forward, and the candle which supplied the only illumination of the scene flickered and went out.

In the darkness the door banged.

"We might even get back in time to go dancing somewhere," said the Saint.

He materialized out of the gloom beside her like a wraith, and she gasped.

Simon chuckled. Back towards the Northwade mansion there were sounds of muffled disturbance, floating down to his ears like the music of hounds to an old fox. He slipped into the driving seat and touched the starter. The engine purred unprotestingly.

"I ran it once while you were away, to keep it warm," she said.

"Good girl!"

The car gathered speed. Simon felt for a cigarette, and lit it skilfully with one hand.

"Did you get everything?" she asked.

"I am the miracle man who never fails, Judith," he said reproachfully. "Hadn't I explained?"

"But that noise—"

"There seems to have been some sort of alarm that goes off when the safe is opened. Not that it mattered a lot. The ungodly were fatally slow in assembling, and if you'd seen their waist measurements you wouldn't have been surprised."

She caught his arm excitedly.

"I can't quite believe it! Everything's all right now. And I've actually been on a raid with the Saint himself! Do you mind if I give way a bit?"

She reached across him to the button in the middle of the steering wheel. The horn blared a rhythmic peal of triumph and defiance into the night: "*Taaa ta-ta, taaa ta-ta, taaa ta-ta!*" like a jubilant trumpet. Simon smiled. Nothing could have fitted better into the essential rightness of everything that had happened that evening. It was true that there had been a telephone in the library, and if there was an extension upstairs there might be gendarmes already watching the road; but they would be an interesting complication that could be dealt with in its proper turn.

Then he coaxed the car round a sharp bend and saw a line of red lights spring up across the road. He dropped his hand thoughtfully to the brake.

"This wasn't here when we came by first," he said, and realized that the girl had gone tense and still.

"What do you think it is?" she whispered.

The Saint shrugged. He brought the car to a standstill with its bonnet three yards from the red lights, which appeared to be attached to a long plank rigged squarely across his path.

Then he felt a hard cold jab of metal on the side of his head, and turned quickly. He looked down the barrel of a gun in the hand of an overcoated man who stood beside the car.

"Take it easy," advised the man grimly.

The Saint heard a rustle of movement beside him, and glanced round. The girl was getting out.

"This is as far as I ride, stranger," she said.

"I see," said the Saint gently.

The man with the gun jabbed again.

"Let's have those papers," he ordered.

Simon took them from his breast pocket. The girl received them, and turned on the dashboard light to squint down the roll of plans and read the inscription on the long envelope. Her golden-yellow hair stirred like a shifting halo in the slight breeze.

"Lord Northwade hasn't got a brother who's a professor," she explained, "and I'm no relative of the family. Apart from that, most of what I told you was true. Northwade bought this invention from a young Rumanian inventor—I don't know what sort of a price he gave for it, but he bought it. He was going to sell it to a French company, as I told you."

"What are you going to do with it?" inquired the Saint curiously.

"We've got an unwritten offer from Hardt's of Stuttgart."

She went forward and swung back the plank with the red lights, so that the road was clear again. Then she came back. The grey eyes were as frank and friendly as before.

"We've been planning this job for a week, and we should have done the job ourselves tonight if I hadn't seen your photograph in the paper and recognized you at the Berry. The rest of it was an inspiration. There's nothing like having the greatest expert in the profession to work for you."

"Which paper do you read?" asked the Saint.

"I saw you in the *Continental Daily Mail*. Why?"

"I bought an imported London paper," said the Saint conversationally.

She laughed quietly, a friendly ripple tinged with a trace of regret.

"I'm sorry, stranger. I liked you so much."

"I'm rather sorry, too—Judith," said the Saint.

She was still for an instant. Then she leaned over and kissed him quickly on the lips.

The gun jabbed again.

"Drive on," ordered the man. "And keep driving."

"Won't you be wanting your car?" murmured the Saint.

A harsher chuckle came from the depths of the dark overcoat.

"We've got our own. I knocked that one off and left it at a garage for you when I had a phone call to say you were hooked. Get moving."

Simon engaged the gears, and let in the clutch.

"Good-bye, stranger!" cried the girl; and Simon raised one hand in salute, without looking back.

He drove fast. Whoever the girl was, whatever she was, he knew that he had enjoyed meeting her far more than he could ever have enjoyed meeting the real Judith Molloy, whose unfortunate motor accident had been featured, with portrait, on the front page of his London newspaper, alongside his own two columns. She could never have looked anything but a hag. Whereas he still thought that her impostor was beautiful.

He hated to think what she would say when she delved deeper into the duplicate envelope and dummy roll of plans which he had so rapidly prepared for her in Lord Northwade's library. But he still drove fast; because those sad things were a part of the game and it was a longish way to Stuttgart.

★ **More Saint stories will be
appearing in future issues
of *SUSPENSE*.**

Believe it or not, this is a true story . . . and when Belle Gunness hit the headlines fifty years ago it was one of the horror stories of all time. Hair-raising, grisly, with a chilling touch of mystery and on a truly horrifying scale, it was enough to give the bravest man nightmares. The story has appeared in countless forms since then, including a very lively ballad, but we like none better than this.

BELLE

By STEWART H. HOLBROOK

HAD it not been for an unfortunate hired man and a fire, Belle Brynhilde Poulsatter Sorenson Gunness might have been in business to this day. She was an extremely retiring and uncommunicative person, and until fire destroyed her home near La Porte, Indiana, she was practically unknown except to a circle of what one shudders to call her intimates.

When Belle first appeared in La Porte she was known as the Widow Sorenson, relict of Mads Sorenson who died the year before, leaving her with two children and eight thousand dollars in life insurance. From sale of the Sorenson home in Illinois the widow received another five thousand dollars, and so she was financially well fixed when she bought a forty-eight-acre farm about a mile out of La Porte.

The Widow Sorenson was forty-two years old at the time. Neighbours described her as "rugged," which would seem wholly inadequate. She was five feet seven inches tall and weighed about fourteen stone, most of which was pure brawn. When her household effects arrived at the farm, the truck drivers were amazed at the ease with which she juggled heavy trunks, boxes and crates. One of them, who may have been drinking that day, swore that he saw the woman pick the big upright piano clean off the floor of the porch, lug it unaided into the front room, and set it down as gently and easily as she would have handled

a basket of eggs. "Ay like music in home," Belle had beamed.

In spite of her retiring disposition, neighbours soon learned that the Widow Sorenson was an accomplished farmer who could pitch hay and milk cows and who did her own butchering of hogs and calves, the meat of which she sold in La Porte. And she wasn't a widow long.

How they first met isn't clear; but soon she married Peter Gunness, a Norwegian who seemed to be a jolly, honest person and became well liked by neighbouring farmers. But Peter wasn't long for this world. In December, after only seven months of wedded bliss, he was killed when, as Mrs. Gunness explained, he was struck on the head by a sausage grinder that fell from the shelf.

It is of course idle to speculate on whether or not the shelf had been jiggled. The La Porte coroner was called and, although later he admitted that the sausage-grinder affair "looked a little queer," he found officially that Peter Gunness, God rest his soul, had been the victim of an accident.

The widow, now known as Belle Gunness, was no doubt glad of the four-thousand-dollar life-insurance policy which the oddly animated sausage machine had liquidated. But she continued to live modestly, even frugally, and it soon became apparent that in spite of her forty-three years Belle was in an interesting condition. A son whom she named Philip was born. In addition, her brood included daughters Lucy and Myrtle by her previous marriage and a Jennie Olson she was caring for.

Although it was not known until later, Belle Gunness was addicted to the use of matrimonial journals. That is, she advertised in them—expressing her desire for a good husband and being not too coy regarding her own personality and qualifications.

What Belle wanted, it seemed, was a man of Scandinavian birth, preferably Norwegian, who was kind and honest and who would help a lovable and hard-working widow to lift the mortgage on her little farm. The "kind and honest" part of the desired man's qualifications might be winked at, one gathers; but the mortgage-lifting end of the deal was nothing short of imperative. "Triflers," Belle's advertisement said coldly, "need not apply."

Shortly after the death of Mr. Gunness, Belle engaged a hired man to work around her place; but she herself was still active in butchering pigs, of which she had many, and in caring for the garden. The hired men changed from time to time, some of them very suddenly indeed; but none entered Belle's life very deeply until the next to last one, of whom we shall hear more.

Three years later a Mr. John Moo arrived at Belle's farm from Minnesota. He was a husky, good-looking man of about fifty

years of age, well dressed by country-town standards, and a native of Norway. His object was matrimony, and he had been fetched by one of Belle's advertisements in the wedding-bells periodicals. With him John Moo brought one thousand dollars to "pay off the mortgage" on his intended's farm.

John was introduced to callers and neighbours as Cousin John, and for almost a week he was seen about the house every day. Then, one day, he wasn't there. And he hasn't been seen since.

Hard on the heels of the disappearing Moo came George Anderson, of Tarkio, a village in Missouri. George, like both Peter Gunness and John Moo, was a native of Norway. Living in Missouri must have given him some of the scepticism for which that state is famous: George Anderson did not bring very much money with him to Belle's place.

He was mighty glad he hadn't. Long afterwards he related why.

Early on his visit to the farm he suddenly awoke in the middle of the night. "All in a cold sweat," he recalled. Bending over him and peering intently into his face was Belle herself, a lighted candle in her hand. What she intended to do, if anything, George Anderson never found out. He was so startled at the odd expression in the eyes of his intended bride that he let go a yell. Belle ran out of the room. So did George. He put on his clothes and got the hell out of there as fast as he could go, and kept going until he reached the La Porte railway station, where he got a train for Tarkio, Missouri.

After Anderson's departure there *may* have been a lull, a sort of brief hiatus, between the arrivals of men with matrimonial intentions. Again, there may have been no break at all. It is difficult to say. In any case, Belle was not idle. She changed her advertising copy in the wedding-bells journals, and she also engaged a new hired man—a rather dim-witted young French-Canadian by name of Lamphere.

Either just before or just after Lamphere came to live and work at the farm, young Jennie Olson, a sixteen-year-old girl who had been put in Belle's care by the child's father, disappeared. Possibly "disappeared" is too strong a word to use at this point, for Belle explained everything to the neighbours. Jennie had "gone to California," she said, and was at school there. It certainly is a fact that Jennie went somewhere that midsummer. And she hasn't been seen since.

During the lull in the mortgage-raising, Belle began to be something of a mystery woman in the neighbourhood. Farmers going by late at night often saw Belle herself on the prowl, around

her barn or in a small yard some fifty by seventy-five feet which she had recently enclosed with an eight-foot fence of stout and fine wire mesh. Entrance to this yard was by a rugged gate of tough oak which rumour said was always locked and to which Belle alone had the key.

The cellar of the house, too, was always kept locked except at hog-butcherer season. At these times a stray neighbour or two had happened to call when Belle was in the cellar, her sleeves rolled up, wielding knife and cleaver like the best man Mr. Swift or Mr. Armour ever had.

The cellar was admirably rigged for such work. It contained a long heavy table of hardwood, twelve inches thick, and a large tub for scalding purposes. In the ceiling over the tub was a hook and pulley. Leather strips along the wall held a professional assortment of fine butcher's implements.

The lull in the stream of callers—if lull there was—came to an end with the arrival of Mr. Ole Budsberg, a native of Norway but long a citizen of Iola, Wisconsin. Belle met him at the station in her own buggy. The loving couple had long since exchanged photographs, as is the happy custom in mail-order matrimonial circles, and they had no trouble recognizing each other.

Mr. Ole Budsberg was a middle-aged man. He had done very well with certain logging jobs in the white pine of Wisconsin and had saved his money. With him to La Porte he brought two thousand dollars in cash. This was, as one might guess, for the purpose of raising that apparently immutable mortgage on the forty-eight acres of the Widow Gunness.

Mr. Budsberg arrived in the early spring. And he hasn't been seen since.

Things became rather slow on the farm until the next year, which opened very auspiciously indeed when Mr. Andrew K. Helgelein arrived in January and was made welcome by the charming chatelaine of what soon was to be known as Abattoir Acres. Mr. Helgelein was a native of Norway, but for years past he had been living near South Dakota, where he successfully raised wheat.

Mr. Helgelein came with the most honourable intentions of matrimony. In his big wallet he carried no less than three thousand dollars in cash, with which to—but never mind. What had fetched him was obviously a series of letters, the last one of which happily has survived to give a good sample of Belle's literary style and general technique, and it was inadvertently but fortunately left at his South Dakota home by Mr. Helgelein :

To the Dearest Friend in the World: No woman in the world is happier than I am. I know that you are now to come to me and be my own . . .

Think how we will enjoy each other's company. You, the sweetest man in the whole world. I think of you constantly. When I hear your name mentioned, and this is when one of the dear children speaks of you or I hear myself humming it with the words of an old love song, it is beautiful music to my ears.

My heart beats in wild rapture for you. My Andrew, I love you. Come prepared to stay for ever.

And, by God, he did.

Now affairs at the farm departed from their usual humdrum quiet. Ray Lamphere, the hired man, had a frightful quarrel with Belle. He, like many another poor man, had fallen in love with her and he was jealous of the latest star boarder, Helgelein. In a terrible temper he packed up his belongings and left. In La Porte he told friends that Belle owed him back wages. He said he knew enough about Belle to make her pay him not only his wages but to keep his mouth shut, too.

Trouble also assailed Belle from another quarter. She got a letter from Mr. Asle Helgelein, a substantial citizen of South Dakota, who wanted to know what had become of his brother. Belle wrote in reply that Andrew had gone away, doubtless on a visit to his native Norway. To this whimsy Asle Helgelein answered that he was positive his brother had done no such thing.

Now we get a real sample of how Belle met a challenge of this sort. She sat right down and wrote Asle that she wished he would come to La Porte to help her in a search for Andrew!

But for once in her life Belle Gunness was worried. Or so she seemed to the local attorney, whom she went to consult. She told him she was mortally afraid of Ray Lamphere, the ex-hired man. He had threatened to kill her, she said. He had promised to burn her house around her ears. In view of these things hanging over her she wanted to make her will.

The attorney drew up a will and she signed it. It left her estate to her children, but in case the children did not survive her, the estate was to go to a Norwegian children's home, a sort of orphanage, in Chicago.

Early next morning the Gunness home was in flames. It burned to the ground. Only the hired man, one Joe Maxon, escaped, and he said he barely made it. Noise of the flames licking at his room had awakened him, he said, and he jumped out of his upstairs window in his underwear. He vowed that just before jumping he had shouted loudly to wake Mrs. Gunness and the

children but had received no reply. They had been in the house when he went to bed.

When the embers had cooled slightly, searchers found four bodies. Three were readily identified as those of Lucy and Myrtle Sorenson, Belle's daughters, and of Philip Gunness, her son. The other corpse was the headless body of a woman. All four were found on a mattress in the cellar, underneath the charred remains of the pride of Belle's parlour, the fine upright piano.

The sheriff was called. He viewed the scene and arrested Ray Lamphere, the farm hand who had been doing so much talking about Mrs. Gunness.

Lamphere was indicted for murder; and a charge of arson was left, as you might say, hanging over him, just in case the other charge wasn't sufficient. The victim named in the murder charge was of course Mrs. Gunness. But—and the doubts began piling up—*was* the headless body that of Mrs. Gunness?

A neighbouring farmer, who had known Mrs. Gunness over a period of six years, viewed the headless corpse and said, without qualification, no, it wasn't that of the hefty widow. It wasn't tall enough, it wasn't big enough, and, well, it just didn't look like her. Another farmer who had often called at the mystery place to do ploughing and other work was just as positive.

And presently, as in all such cases of doubt, there came forward those witnesses who are apparently present, in swarming numbers, when any skulduggery has come to light. Half a dozen persons volunteered the information that they had seen Mrs. Gunness driving a woman to the farm on the night of the fire. Descriptions of this mysterious party varied from "slim" to "fairly stout." All agreed she had been "a dark woman."

What the harassed authorities needed was a head for the corpse. Search of the outbuildings and of the near-by swamp revealed nothing by way of a head. The sheriff was prepared to call it a day, to go ahead with the prosecution of the farm hand, Lamphere, for murder of Mrs. Gunness; and doubtless that is exactly what would have happened had it not been for the appearance on the scene of Asle Helgelein of South Dakota.

This was the brother of Andrew, the man Belle had reported to Asle as on his happy way to Norway. Asle had not known of the Gunness fire until his arrival at La Porte. He had come simply to find his brother, and he went to the sheriff with his suspicions.

The sheriff didn't seem very interested, but Asle was persistent and the sheriff finally agreed to make another inspection of the premises. In the high-fenced garden, the gate to which had to be broken by the police, were noted several soft depressions in the

ground . . . The deputies took spades and started digging.

The first layers under the soft earth were rubbish—old tins, bottles, and so forth—but suddenly a digger came up with a good fat sack. In it was a body well hacked but still in fair condition, everything considered. Helgelein looked closely at the remains. "That's Andy," he said.

The deputies now dug with a right good will. Before sundown that day they had uncovered the remains of at least four more bodies. One of these was identified as that of Jennie Olson, the girl who "had gone to California." One of the others was of a tall man with a dark moustache. The two others were of children.

Next day yielded four more bodies. On the third day only one body was found. That made a total of ten. If the four in the cellar were added, the grand total was fourteen—an impressive number for so small a farm.

The remains of several *other* bodies were mere fragments—fingers and other small bones for which comparative skulls and trunks were missing. As physicians attempted to sort the hundreds of spare parts, the heavy table and the vat in the Guinness cellar took on a possible new meaning that made strong men shudder. Had that vat been used for purposes other than the scalding of hogs? One couldn't know, but police and physicians now looked at the cleavers found in the ashes with new interest.

With Belle's private boneyard apparently exhausted, police felt that the investigation was completed—finished. They hadn't reckoned with the growing public rumour about that headless corpse, and its possible connection with the mystery woman seen with Belle in her buggy on the night of the fire. The headless corpse, said local opinion, was that of a woman the crafty Belle had imported to the farm for just such a purpose. Belle herself was safe elsewhere, somewhere . . .

One of the last direct links between Belle Guinness and the present day is an old, old woman confined in a Hospital for the Insane in Indiana. She has been a patient there for years and is one of the characters of the institution. She worked at Belle's place for several months and is not adverse to talking about it.

The favourite question asked this old woman is, "What did Belle Guinness do with all those men?" And the invariable reply accompanied by a truly horrible leer is, "She fed 'em to the hawgs."

If Belle got away, as many believe, she'd be getting on by now. But should I happen on a farmhouse in some back-country place and the proprietor is a husky old woman who kills her own hogs, I'll be on my way—no matter the road or the weather.

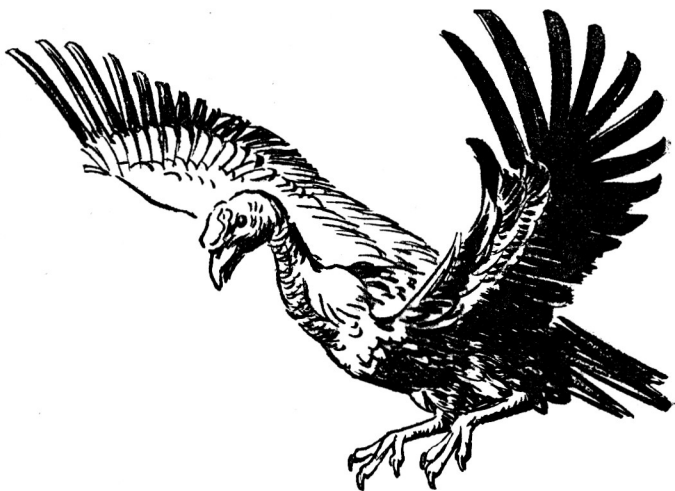
We know him as Michael Innes, creator of witty, urbane sleuth Appleby. But J. I. M. Stewart—a Scot, father of five children—thinks of himself as a lecturer in English who every now and then writes a book. Erudite, modest, he lives a quiet scholarly life—but owns that in the event of an emergency he'd hope to be competent, like Appleby! Oxford don and mystery writer, sometimes the two roles meet . . . He once reviewed the baffling case of Hamlet, and managed to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that "Fortinbras did it!"

LESSON IN ANATOMY

By MICHAEL INNES

ALREADY the anatomy theatre was crowded with students: tier upon tier of faces pallid beneath the clear shadowless light cast by the one elaborate lamp, large as a giant cart-wheel, near the ceiling. The place gleamed with an aggressive cleanliness; the smell of formalin pervaded it; its centre was a faintly sinister vacancy—the spot to which would presently be wheeled the focal object of the occasion.

At Nessfield University Professor Finlay's final lecture was one of the events of the year. He was always an excellent teacher. For three terms he discoursed lucidly from his dais or tirelessly prowled his dissecting-rooms, encouraging young men and women who had hitherto dismembered only dogfish and frogs to address themselves with resolution to human legs, arms, and torsos. The Department of Anatomy was large; these objects lay about it in a dispersed profusion; Finlay moved among them now with gravity and now with a whimsical charm which did a good deal to humanize his macabre environment. It was only once a year that he yielded to his taste for the dramatic.



The result was the final lecture. And the final lecture was among the few academic activities of Nessfield sufficiently abounding in human appeal to be regularly featured in the local Press. Perhaps the account had become a little stereotyped with the years, and always there was virtually the same photograph showing the "popular professor" surrounded by wreaths, crosses, and other floral tributes.

Innumerable citizens of Nessfield who had never been inside the doors of their local university looked forward to this annual report, and laid it down with the comfortable conviction that all was well with the pursuit of learning in the district. Their professors were still professors—eccentric, erudite, and amiable. Their students were still, as students should be, giving much of their thought to the perpetration of elaborate, tasteless, and sometimes dangerous practical jokes.

For the lecture was at once a festival, a rag, and a genuine display of virtuosity. Instead of disjointed limbs and isolated organs there was a whole new cadaver for the occasion. And upon this privileged corpse Finlay rapidly demonstrated certain historical developments of his science to an audience in part attentive and in part concerned with lowering skeletons from the rafters, releasing various improbable living creatures—lemurs and echidnas and opossums—to roam the benches, or contriving even quainter jokes. On one famous occasion the corpse itself

had been got at, and at the first touch of the professor's scalpel had awakened to an inferno of noise presently accounted for by the discovery that its inside consisted chiefly of alarm clocks.

Nor were these diversions and surprises all one-sided, since Finlay himself, entering into the spirit of the occasion, had more than once been known to forestall his students with some extravagance of his own. It was true that this had happened more rarely of recent years, and by some it was suspected that this complacent scholar had grown a little out of taste with the rôle. But the affair remained entirely good-humoured; it was, in its own queer way, an approved social occasion. High University authorities sometimes took distinguished visitors along, and there was quite a number of strangers on the present occasion.

The popular professor had entered through the glass-panelled double doors which gave directly upon the dissecting-table. Finlay was florid and very fat; his white gown was spotlessly laundered; a high cap of the same material would have given him the appearance of a generously self-dieted chef. He advanced to the low rail that separated him from the first tier of spectators and started to make some preliminary remarks. What these actually were, or how they were designed to conclude, he had probably forgotten years ago, for this was the point at which the first interruption traditionally occurred. And, sure enough, no sooner had Finlay opened his mouth than three young men near the back of the theatre stood up and delivered themselves of a fanfare of trumpets.

Finlay appeared altogether surprised—he possessed, as has been stated, a dramatic sense—and this was the signal for the greater part of those present to rise in their seats and sing *For he's a jolly good fellow*. Flowers—single blooms, for the present—began to float through the air and fall about the feet of the professor. A bell began to toll.

“*Never ask for whom the bell tolls,*” said a deep voice from somewhere near the professor's left hand. And the whole student body responded in a deep chant: “*It tolls for THEE.*”

And now there was a more urgent bell—one that clattered up and down some adjacent corridor to the accompaniment of tramping feet and the sound as of a passing tumbrel. “*Bring out your dead,*” cried the deep voice. And the chant was taken up all round the theatre. “*Bring out your DEAD!*”

This was the signal for the entrance of Albert, Professor Finlay's dissecting-room attendant. Albert was perhaps the only person in Nessfield who uncompromisingly disapproved of the last lecture and all that went with it—perhaps because, as an ex-policeman, he felt bound to hold disorder in discountenance.

The severely aloof expression on the face of Albert as he wheeled in the cadaver was one of the highlights of the affair—nor on this occasion did it by any means fail of its effect. Indeed, Albert appeared to be more than commonly upset. A severe frown lay across his ample and unintelligent countenance. He held his six-foot-three sternly erect; behind his vast leather apron his bosom discernibly heaved with manly emotion.

Albert wheeled in the body—distinguishable as a wisp of ill-nourished humanity beneath the tarpaulin that covered it—and Finlay raised his right hand as if to bespeak attention. The result was a sudden squawk and the flap of heavy wings near the ceiling. Somebody had released a vulture. The ominous bird blundered twice round the theatre, and then settled composedly on a rafter. It craned its scrawny neck and fixed a beady eye on the body.

Professor Finlay smiled benevolently; at the same time he produced a handkerchief and rapidly mopped his forehead. To several people, old stagers, it came that the eminent anatomist was uneasy this year. The vulture was a little bit steep, after all.

There was a great deal of noise. One group of students was doggedly and pointlessly singing a sea chanty; others were perpetrating or preparing to perpetrate sundry jokes of a varying degree of effectiveness. Then Finlay raised not one hand but two, and there was instant silence. He took a step backwards amid the flowers which lay around him; carefully removed a couple of forget-me-nots from his hair; gave a quick nod to Albert; and began to explain what he proposed to do.

Albert stepped to the body and pulled back the tarpaulin.

“And ever,” said a voice from the audience, “at my back I hear the rattle of dry bones and chuckle spread from ear to ear.”

It was an apt enough sally. The cadaver seemed to be mostly bones already—the bones of an elderly, withered man—and its most prominent feature was a ghastly fixed grin which exposed two long rows of gleamingly white and utterly incongruous-seeming teeth. From somewhere high up in the theatre there was a little sigh followed by a slumping sound. A robust and football-playing youth had fainted. Quite a number of people, as if moved by a mysterious or chameleon-like sympathy, were rapidly approximating to the complexion of the grisly object displayed before them.

But there was nothing unexpected in all this. Finlay, knowing that custom allowed him perhaps another five minutes of sober attention at this point, continued his remarks. The cadaver before the class was exactly as it would be had it come before a

similar class four hundred years ago. The present anatomy lesson was essentially a piece of historical reconstruction. His hearers would recall that in one of Rembrandt's paintings depicting such a subject—

For perhaps a couple of minutes the practised talk flowed on. The audience was quite silent. Finlay paused for a moment to recall a date. In the resulting complete hush there was a sharp click, rather like the lifting of a latch. A girl screamed. Every eye in the theatre was on the cadaver. For its lower jaw had sagged abruptly open, and the teeth, which were plainly dentures, had half-extruded themselves from the gaping mouth, rather as if pushed outwards by some spasm within.

Such things do happen. There is a celebrated story of just such startling behaviour on the part of the body of the philosopher Schopenhauer. And Finlay, perceiving that his audience was markedly upset, perhaps debated endeavouring to rally them with just this learned and curious anecdote. But, even as he paused, the cadaver had acted again. Abruptly the jaws closed like a powerful vice, the lips and cheeks sagged; it was to be concluded that this wretched remnant of humanity had swallowed its last meal.

For a moment something like panic hovered over the anatomy theatre. Another footballer fainted; a girl laughed hysterically; two men in the back row, having all the appearance of case-hardened physicians, looked at each other in consternation and bolted from the building. Finlay, with a puzzled look on his face, again glanced backwards at the cadaver. Then he nodded abruptly to Albert, who replaced the tarpaulin. Presumably, after this queer upset, he judged it best to interpose a little more composing historical talk before getting down to business.

He was saying something about the anatomical sketches of Leonardo da Vinci. Again he glanced back at the cadaver. Suddenly the lights went out. The theatre was in darkness.

For some moments nobody thought of an accident. Finlay often had recourse to an epidiascope or lantern, and the trend of his talk led people to suppose that something of the sort was in train now. Presently, however, it became plain that there was a hitch—and at this the audience broke into every kind of vociferation. Above the uproar the vulture could be heard overhead, vastly agitated. Various objects were being pitched about the theatre. There was a strong scent of lilies.

Albert's voice made itself heard, cursing medical students, cursing the University of Nessfield, cursing Professor Finlay's final lecture. From the progress of this commination it was possible to infer that he was groping his way towards the switches.

There was a click, and once more the white shadowless light flooded the theatre.

Everything was as it had been—save in two particulars. Most of the wreaths and crosses which had been designed for the end of the lecture had proved missiles too tempting to ignore in that interval of darkness; they had been lobbed into the centre of the theatre and lay there about the floor, except for two which had actually landed on the shrouded cadaver.

And Finlay had disappeared.

The audience was bewildered and a little apprehensive. Had the failure of the lighting really been an accident? Or was the popular professor obligingly coming forward with one of his increasingly rare and prized pranks? The audience sat tight, awaiting developments. Albert, returning from the switchboard, impatiently kicked a wreath of lilies from his path. The audience, resenting this display of nervous irritation, cat-called and booed. Then a voice from one of the higher benches called out boisterously: "The corpse has caught the dropsy!"

"It's a-swelling," cried another voice—that of a devotee of Dickens—"It's a-swelling visibly before my eyes."

And something had certainly happened to the meagre body beneath its covering; it was as if during the darkness it had been inflated by a gigantic pump.

With a final curse Albert sprang forward and pulled back the tarpaulin. What lay beneath was the body of Professor Finlay, quite dead. The original cadaver was gone.

The vulture swooped hopefully from its rafter.

"Publicity?" said Detective Inspector John Appleby. "I'm afraid you can scarcely expect anything else. Or perhaps it would be better to say notoriety. Nothing remotely like it has happened in England for years."

Sir David Owens, Nessfield's very Welsh Vice-Chancellor, passed a hand dejectedly through his flowing white hair and softly groaned. "A scandal!" he said. "A scandal—look you, Mr. Appleby—that peggars description. There must be investigations. There must be arrests. Already there are reporters from the pig papers. This morning I have been photographed." Sir David paused and glanced across the room at the handsome portrait of himself which hung above the fireplace. "This morning," he repeated, momentarily comforted, "I have been photographed, look you, five or six times." But then he shook his head. "In the anatomy theatre!" he said. "And on the one day of the year when there is these unseemly pehaviours. And a pody vanishes. And there is fultures—fultures, Mr. Appleby!"

"One vulture." Dr. Holroyd, Nessfield's Professor of Human Physiology, spoke as if this comparative paucity of birds of prey represented one of the bright spots of the affair. "Only one vulture, and apparently abstracted by a group of students from the Zoo. The Director rang up as soon as he saw the first report. He might be described as an angry man."

Appleby brought out a notebook. "What we are looking for," he said, "is angry men. Perhaps you know of someone whose feelings of anger towards the late Professor Finlay at times approached the murderous?"

Sir David Owens looked at Dr. Holroyd, and Dr. Holroyd looked at Sir David Owens. And it appeared to Appleby that the demeanour of each was embarrassed. "Of course," he added, "I don't mean mere passing irritations between colleagues."

"There is frictions," said Sir David carefully. "Always in a university there is frictions. And frictions produce heat. There was pad frictions between Finlay and Dr. Holroyd here. There was personalities, I am sorry to say. For years there has been most fexatious personalities." Sir David, who at all times preserved an appearance of the most massive benevolence, glanced at his colleague with an eye in which there was a nasty glint. "Dr. Holroyd is Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, look you. It is why I have asked him to meet you now. And last week at a meeting there was a most disgraceful scene. It was a meeting of the Committee for Lavatories."

"Dear me!" said Appleby. Universities, he was thinking, must have changed considerably since his day.

"Were there to be more lavatories in the Physiology Puilding? Finlay said he would rather put in a path."

"A path?" said Appleby, perplexed.

"A path, with hot and cold laid on, and an efficient shower. Finlay said that in his opinion Dr. Holroyd padly needed a path."

"And did Dr. Holroyd retaliate?"

"I am sorry to say that he did, Mr. Appleby. He said that if he had his way Finlay's own path would be a formalin one. Which is what they keep the cadavers in, Mr. Appleby."

Dr. Holroyd shifted uneasily on his chair. "It was unfortunate," he admitted.

"It was unacademic," said Sir David severely. "There is no other word for it, Dr. Holroyd."

"I am afraid it was. And most deplorably public. Whereas your own quarrel with Finlay, Sir David, had been a discreetly unobtrusive matter." Dr. Holroyd smiled with sudden frank malice. "And over private, not University, affairs. In fact, over a woman. Or was it several women?"

"These," said Appleby rather hastily, "are matters which it may be unnecessary to take up. May I ask, Sir David, your own whereabouts at the time of the fatality?"

"I was in this room, Mr. Appleby, reading Plato. Even Vice-Chancellors are entitled to read Plato at times, and I had given orders not to be disturbed."

"I see. And I take it that nobody interrupted you, and that you might have left the room for a time without being observed?"

Sir David gloomily nodded.

"And you, Dr. Holroyd?"

"I went to poor Finlay's final lecture and sat near the back. But the whole stupid affair disgusted me, and I came away—only a few minutes, it seems, before the lights went out. I composed myself by taking a quiet walk along the canal. It was quite deserted."

"I see. And now about the manner of Finlay's death. I understand that you have inspected the body and realize that he was killed by the thrust of a fine dagger from behind? The deed was accomplished in what must have been almost complete darkness. Would you say that it required—or at least that it suggests—something like the professional knowledge of another anatomist or medical man?"

Holroyd was pale. "It certainly didn't strike me as the blind thrust of an amateur. But perhaps there are particularly desperate criminals who are skilled in such things."

"Possibly so." Appleby glanced from Holroyd to Sir David. "But is either of you aware of Finlay's having any connections or interests which might bring upon him the violence of such people? No? Then I think we must be very sceptical about anything of the sort. To kill a man in extremely risky circumstances, simply for the pleasure of laying the body on his own dissecting-table before his own students, is something outside my experience of professional crime. It is much more like some eccentric act of private vengeance. And one conceived by a theatrical mind."

Once more Sir David Owens looked at Dr. Holroyd, and Dr. Holroyd looked at Sir David Owens. "Finlay himself," said Sir David, "had something theatrical about him. Otherwise, look you, he would not have let himself become the central figure in this pig yearly joke." He paused. "Now, Dr. Holroyd here is not theatrical. He is *pad* tempered. He is morose. He is under-pred. But theatrical he is not."

"And no more is Sir David." Holroyd seemed positively touched by the character sketch of himself just offered. "He is a bit of a humbug, of course—all philosophers are. And he is not a good man, since it is impossible for a Vice-Chancellor to

be that. Perhaps he is even something of a *poseur*. If compelled to characterize him freely"—and Holroyd got comfortably to his feet—"I should describe him as Goethe described Milton's *Paradise Lost*." Holroyd moved towards the door, and as he did so paused to view Sir David's portrait. "Fair outside but rotten inwardly," he quoted thoughtfully. "But of positive theatrical instinct I would be inclined to say that Sir David is tolerably free. Good afternoon."

There was a moment's silence. Sir David Owens' fixed expression of benevolence had never wavered. "Pad passions," he said. "Look you, Mr. Appleby, there is pad passions in that man."

Albert was pottering gloomily among his cadaver-racks. His massive frame gave a jump as Appleby entered; it was clear that he was not in full possession of that placid repose which expolicemen should enjoy.

Appleby looked round with brisk interest. "Nice place you have here. Everything convenient and nicely thought out."

The first expression on Albert's face had been strongly disapproving. But at this he perceptibly relaxed. "Ball-bearing," he said huskily. "Handles them like lambs." He pushed back a steel shutter and proudly drew out a rack and its contents. "Nicely developed gal," he said appreciatively. "Capital pelvis for child-bearing, she was going to have. Now, if you'll just step over here I can show you one or two uncommonly interesting lower limbs."

"Thank you—another time." Appleby, though not unaccustomed to such places, had no aspirations towards connoisseurship. "I want your own story of what happened this morning."

"Yes, sir." From old professional habit Albert straightened up and stood at attention. "As you'll know, there's always been this bad be'aviour at the final lecture, so there was nothing out of the way in that. But then the lights went out, and they started throwing things, and something 'it me 'ard on the shins."

"Hard?" said Appleby. "I doubt if that could have been anything thrown from the theatre."

"No more do I." Albert was emphatic. "It was someone came in through the doors the moment the lights went out and got me down with a regular Rugby tackle. Fair winded I was, and lost my bearings as well."

"So it was some little time before you managed to get to the switch, which is just outside the swing-doors. And in that time Professor Finlay was killed and substituted for the cadaver, and

the cadaver was got clean away. Would you say that was a one-man job?"

"No, sir, I would not. Though—mind you—that body 'ad only to be carried across a corridor and into the courtyard. Anyone can 'ave a car waiting there, so the rest would be easy."

Appleby nodded. "The killing of Finlay, and the laying him out like that, may have been a piece of sheer macabre drama, possibly conceived and executed by a lunatic—or even by an apparently sane man with some specific obsession regarding corpses. But can you see any reason why such a person should actually carry off the original corpse? It meant saddling himself with an uncommonly awkward piece of evidence."

"You can't ever tell what madmen will do. And as for corpses, there are more people than you would reckon what 'as uncommon queer interest in them at times." And Albert shook his head. "I seen things," he added.

"No doubt you have. But have you seen anything that might be considered as leading up to this shocking affair?"

Albert hesitated. "Well, sir, in this line wot I come down to since they retired me it's not always possible to up'old the law. In fact, it's sometimes necessary to circumvent it, like. For, as the late professor was given to remarking, science must be served." Albert paused and tapped his cadaver-racks. "Served with these 'ere. And of late we've been uncommon short. And there's no doubt that now and then him and me was stretching a point."

"Good heavens!" Appleby was genuinely alarmed. "This affair is bad enough already. You don't mean to say that it's going to lead to some further scandal about body-snatching?"

"Nothing like that, sir." But as he said this Albert looked doubtful. "Nothing *quite* like that. They comes from institutions, you know. And nowadays they 'as to be got to sign papers. It's a matter of tact. Sometimes relatives comes along afterwards and says there been too much tact by a long way. It's not always easy to know just how much tact you can turn on. There's no denying but we've 'ad one or two awkwardnesses this year. And it's my belief as 'ow this sad affair is just another awkwardness—but more violent like than the others."

"It was violent, all right." Appleby had turned and led the way into the deserted theatre. Flowers still strewed it. There was a mingled smell of lilies and formalin, and overhead the single great lamp was like a vast all-seeing eye.

"The professor was killed and laid out like that, sir, as an act of revenge by some barmy and outraged relation. And the cadaver was carried off by that same relation as what you might call an act of piety."

"Well, it's an idea." Appleby was strolling about, measuring distances with his eye. "But what about this particular body? *Had* it outraged any pious relations?"

"It only come in yesterday. Quite unprepared it was to be, you see—the same as hanatomists 'ad them in the sixteenth century. And it was after it'd come in that somebody tried to break into the cadaver-racks. Last night, they did—and not a doubt of it. If this whole part of the building, sir, weren't well-nigh like a strong-room they'd have done it, too. And when the late professor 'eard of it 'e was as worried as I was. Awkwardnesses we've 'ad. But body-snatching in reverse, as you might say, was a new one on us both."

"So you think that the outraged and pious relation had an earlier shot, in the programme for which murder was not included? I think it's about time we hunted him up."

Albert looked sorely perplexed. "And so it would be—if we knew where to find him. But it almost seems as if there never was a cadaver with less in the way of relations than this one wot 'as caused all the trouble. A fair ideal cadaver it seemed to be. You don't think now—" Albert was frankly inconsequent "—that it might 'ave been an accident? You don't think it might 'ave been one of them young varmint's jokes gone a bit wrong?"

"I do not."

"But listen, sir." Albert was suddenly urgent. "Suppose there was a plan like this. The lights was to be put out and a great horrid dagger thrust into the cadaver. That would be quite like one of their jokes, believe me. For on would go the lights again and folk would get a pretty nasty shock. But now suppose—just suppose, sir—that when the lights were put out for that there purpose there came into the professor's head the notion of a joke of his own. He would change places with the cadaver—"

"But the man wasn't mad!" Appleby was staring at the late Professor Finlay's assistant in astonishment. "Anything so grotesque—"

"He done queer things before now." Albert was suddenly stubborn. "And that would mean that the varmint thinking to stick the dagger in the cadaver would stick it in the late professor instead."

"I see." Appleby was looking at Albert with serious admiration; the fellow didn't look very bright—nevertheless his days in the Force should have been spent in the detective branch. "It's a better theory than we've had yet, I'm bound to say. But it leaves out two things: the disappearance of the original body, and the fact that Finlay was stabbed from behind. For if he did substitute himself for the body it would have been in the

same position—supine, and not prone. And, anyway, we must have all the information about the cadaver that we can get.”

The cadaver, it appeared, had at least possessed a name: James Cass. He had also possessed a nationality, for his seaman's papers declared him to be a citizen of the United States, and that his next-of-kin was a certain Martha Cass, with an indecipherable address in Seattle, Washington. For some years he had been sailing pretty constantly in freighters between England and America. Anybody less likely to bring down upon the Anatomy Department of Nessfield University the vengeance of outraged and pious relations it would have been difficult to conceive.

He had come off his ship and was making his way to an unknown lodging when he had been knocked down by a tram and taken to the casualty ward of Nessfield Infirmary. There he had been visited by the watchful Albert, who had surreptitiously presented him with a flask of gin, receiving in exchange Cass's signature to a document bequeathing his remains for the purposes of medical science. Cass had then died, and his body had been delivered at the Anatomy School.

And after that, somebody had ruthlessly killed Professor Finlay and then carried James Cass's body away again.

For a few minutes Appleby worked with a stop-watch. Then he turned once more to Albert. “At the moment,” he said, “Cass himself appears to be something of a dead end. So now, let us take the lecture. You were a witness—and a trained police witness, which is an uncommonly fortunate thing. I want you to give me every detail you can—down to the least squawk or flutter by that damned vulture.”

Albert was gratified, and did as he was bid. Appleby listened, absorbed. Only once a flicker passed over his features. But when Albert was finished he had some questions to ask.

“There was the audience,” he said, “if audience is the right name for it. Apparently all sorts of people were accustomed to turn up?”

“All manner of unlikely and unsuitable folk.” Albert looked disgusted. “Though most of them would be medical, one way or another. I couldn't put a name to a good many, but there was Dr. Holroyd, whom you'll have met, sir; he's our Professor of Human Physiology. Went away early, he did; and looking mighty disgusted, too. Then there was Dr. Wesselmann, the lecturer in Prosthetics—an alien, he is, and not been in Nessfield many years. He brought a friend I never had sight of before. And out they went too.”

“Well, that's interesting. Can you recall anyone else?”

"I don't know that I can, sir. Except of course our Vice-Chancellor, Sir David Owens."

Appleby jumped. "Owens! But he swore to me that—"

Albert smiled indulgently. "Bless you, that's his regular way. Did you ever know a Welshman who could let a day pass without a bit of 'armless deceit, like?"

"There may be something in that."

"'E don't think it dignified, as you might say, to attend the final lecture openly. But more often than not he's up there at the far doorway, peering in at the fun. Well, this time 'e 'ad more than 'e bargained for."

"No doubt he had." Appleby paused and glanced quickly round the empty theatre. "Just step to a telephone, will you, and ask Dr. Holroyd to come over here."

Albert did as he was asked, and presently the physiologist came nervously in. "Is another interview really necessary?" he demanded. "I have a most important—"

"We shall hope not to detain you long." Appleby's voice was dry rather than reassuring. "It is merely that I want you to assist me in a reconstruction of the crime."

Holroyd flushed. "And may I ask by what right you ask me to take part in such foolery?"

Appleby suddenly smiled. "None, sir—none at all. I merely wanted a trained mind—and one with a pronounced instinct to get at the truth of a problem when it arises. I was sure you would be glad to help."

"Perhaps I am. Anyway, go ahead."

"Then I should be obliged if you would be the murderer. Perhaps I should say the first murderer, for it seems likely enough that there was at least one accomplice. You have no objection to so disagreeable a part?"

Holroyd shrugged his shoulders. "Naturally, I have none whatever. But I fear I must be coached in it and given my cues."

Once more Appleby brought out his stop-watch. "Albert," he said briskly, "shall be the cadaver, and I shall be Finlay standing in front of it. Your business is to enter by the back, switch off the light, step into the theatre and there pretend to stab me. I shall fall to the floor. You must then dislodge Albert, hoist me into his place and cover me with the tarpaulin. Then you must get hold of Albert by the legs or shoulders and haul him from the theatre."

"And all this in the dark? It seems a bit of a programme."

Appleby nodded. "I agree with you. But we shall at least discover if it is at all possible by one man in the time available. So are you ready?"

"One moment, sir." Albert, about to assume the passive part of the late James Cass, sat up abruptly. "You seem to have missed me out. Me as I was, that is to say."

"Quite true." Appleby looked at him thoughtfully. "We are short of a stand-in for you as you were this morning. But I shall stop being Finlay's body and turn on the lights again myself. So go ahead."

Albert lay down and drew the tarpaulin over his head. Holroyd slipped out. Appleby advanced as if to address an audience.

"Now," he said.

And Appleby talked. Being thorough, he made such anatomical observations as his ignorance allowed. Once he glanced round at the corpse, and out of the corner of his eye glimpsed Holroyd beyond the glass-panelled door, his hand already going up to flick at the switch. A moment later the theatre was in darkness, and seconds after that Appleby felt a sharp tap beneath the shoulder-blade. He pitched to the floor, pressing his stop-watch as he did so. Various heaving sounds followed as Holroyd got the portly Albert off the table; then Appleby felt himself seized in surprisingly strong arms and hoisted up in Albert's place. Next came a shuffle and a scrape as Holroyd, panting heavily now, dragged the inert Albert from the theatre.

Appleby waited for a couple of seconds, threw back the tarpaulin and lowered himself to the floor. Then he groped his way through the door, flicked on the light and looked at his watch.

"And the audience," he said, "is now sitting back and waiting—until presently somebody points out that the cadaver is the wrong size. Thank you very much. The reconstruction has been more instructive than I hoped."

He turned to Holroyd. "I am still inclined to think that it has the appearance of being the work of two men. And yet you managed it pretty well on schedule when single-handed. Never a fumble and just the right lift. You might almost have been practising it."

Holroyd frowned. "Yachting," he said briefly "—and particularly at night. It makes one handy."

And Albert looked with sudden suspicion at Nessfield's Professor of Human Physiology. "Yachting?" he asked. "Now, would that have put you in the way of acquaintance with many seafaring men?"

Of James Cass, that luckless waif who would be a seafarer no longer, Appleby learned little more that afternoon. The cargo vessel from which he had disembarked was already at sea again, and a couple of days must elapse before any line could be tapped

there. But a little research did produce one elderly seaman who had recently made several voyages with him, and from this witness two facts emerged. There was nothing out of the way about Cass—except that he was a man distinctly on the simple side. Cass had been suggestible, Appleby gathered; so much so as to have been slightly a butt among his fellows. And Appleby asked a question: had the dead man appeared to have any regular engagement or preoccupation when he came into port? The answer to this was definitive. Within a couple of hours, Appleby felt, the file dealing with this queer mystery of the anatomy theatre would be virtually closed for good.

Another fifteen minutes found him mounting the staircase of one of Nessfield's most superior blocks of professional chambers. The building was gloomy, and when Appleby was overtaken by a hurrying form it was a second before he recognized that he was again in the presence of Dr. Holroyd.

"Just a moment." Appleby laid a hand on the other's arm. "May I ask if this coincidence extends to our both aiming at the third floor?"

Holroyd was startled, but made no reply. They mounted the final flight side by side and in silence. Appleby rang a bell before a door with a handsome brass plate. After a perceptible delay the door was opened by a decidedly flurried nurse, who showed the two men into a sombre waiting-room. "I don't think," she said, "that you have an appointment? And as an emergency has just arisen I am afraid there is no chance of seeing Dr.—"

She stopped at an exclamation from Appleby. Hunched in a corner of the waiting-room was a figure whose face was almost entirely swathed in a voluminous silk muffler. But there was no mistaking that flowing silver hair. "Sir David!" exclaimed Appleby. "This is really a most remarkable rendezvous."

Sir David Owens groaned. "My chaw," he said. "It is one pig ache, look you."

Holroyd laughed nervously. "Shakespeare was demonstrably right. There was never yet philosopher could bear the toothache patiently—nor Vice-Chancellor either."

But Appleby paid no attention; he was listening keenly to something else. From beyond a door on the right came sound of hurried, heavy movement. Appleby strode across and turned the handle. He flung back the door and found himself looking into the dentists' surgery. "Dr. Wesselmann," he said.

The answer was an angry shout from a bullet-headed man in a white coat. "How dare you intrude in this way!" he cried. "My colleague and myself are confronted with a serious emergency. Be so good as to withdraw at once."

Appleby stood his ground and surveyed the room; Holroyd stepped close behind him. The dentist's chair was empty, but on a surgical couch nearby lay a patient covered with a light rug. Over this figure another white-coated man was bending, and appeared to be holding an oxygen-mask over its face.

And Nessfield's lecturer in Prosthetics seemed to find further explanations necessary. "A patient," he said rapidly, "with an unsuspected reaction to intravenous barbiturates. Oxygen has to be administered, and the position is critical. So be so good—"

Appleby leapt forward and sent the white-coated holder of the oxygen-mask spinning; he flung back the rug. There could be no doubt that what was revealed was James Cass's body. And since lying on Professor Finlay's dissecting-table it had sustained a great gash in the throat. It had never been very pleasant to look at. It was ghastly now.

Wesselmann's hand darted to his pocket; Holroyd leapt on him with his yachtsman's litheness, and the alien dentist went down heavily on the floor. The second man showed no fight as he was handcuffed. Appleby looked curiously at Holroyd. "So you saw," he asked, "how the land lay?"

"In my purely amateur fashion I suppose I did. And I think I finished on schedule once again."

Appleby laughed. "Your intervention saved me from something decidedly nasty at the hands of Nessfield's authority on false teeth. By the way, would you look round for the teeth in question? And then we can have in Sir David—seeing he is so conveniently in attendance—and say an explanatory word."

"I got the hang of it," said Appleby, "when we did a very rough-and-ready reconstruction of the crime. For when, while playing Finlay's part, I glanced round at the cadaver, I found myself catching a glimpse of Dr. Holroyd here when he was obligingly playing First Murderer and turning off the lights. There was a glass panel in the door, and through this he was perfectly visible. I saw at once why Finlay had been killed. It was merely because he had seen, *and recognized*, somebody who was about to plunge the theatre in darkness for some nefarious, but not necessarily murderous, end. What did this person want? There could be only one answer: the body of James Cass. Already he had tried to get it in the night, but the house-breaking involved had proved too difficult."

The benevolent features of Sir David Owens were shadowed by perplexity. "But why, Mr. Appleby, should this man want such a pody?"

"I shall come to that in a moment. But first keep simply to this: that the body had to be stolen even at great hazard; that when glimpsed and recognized by Finlay the potential thief was sufficiently ruthless to silence him with a dagger secreted for such an emergency—and was also sufficiently quick-witted to exploit this extemporaneous murder to his own advantage.

"If he had simply bolted with Cass's body and left that of Finlay the hunt would, of course, have been up the moment somebody turned the lights on. By rapidly substituting one body for the other on the dissecting-table, he contrived the appearance first of some more or less natural momentary absence of Finlay from the theatre, and secondly the suggestion of some possible joke which kept the audience wary and quiet for some seconds longer. All this gave additional time for his getaway. And—yet again—the substitution had great potential value as a disguise. By suggesting some maniacal act of private vengeance it masked the purely practical—and the professionally criminal—nature of the crime.

"And now, what did we know of Cass? We knew that he was a seaman; that he travelled more or less regularly between England and America; that he was knocked down and presently died shortly after landing; and that he was a simple-minded fellow, easily open to persuasion. And we also knew this: that he had a set of rather incongruously magnificent false teeth; that in the anatomy theatre these first protruded themselves, then by some muscular spasm appeared to lodge themselves in the throat, the jaw closing like a vice.

"And we also knew that, hard upon this, a certain Dr. Wesselmann, an alien comparatively little known in Nessfield and actually a specialist in false teeth, hurried from the theatre accompanied by a companion. When I also learned from a seaman who had sailed with Cass that he was often concerned about his teeth and would hurry off to a dentist as soon as he reached shore, I saw that the case was virtually complete."

"And would be wholly so when you recovered Cass's body and got hold of these." Holroyd came forward as he spoke, carrying two dental plates on an enamel tray. "Sir David, what would you say about Cass's teeth?"

Nessfield's Vice-Chancellor had removed the muffler from about his jaw; the excitement of the hunt had for the moment banished the pain which had driven him to Wesselmann's rooms. He inspected the dentures carefully—and then spoke the inevitable word. "They are pig," he said decisively.

"Exactly so. And now, look." Holroyd gave a deft twist to a molar; the denture which he was holding fell apart; in the

hollow of each gleaming tooth there could be discerned a minute oiled-silk package.

"What they contain," said Appleby, "is probably papers covered with a microscopic writing. I had thought perhaps of uncut diamonds. But now I am pretty sure that what we have run to earth is espionage. What one might call the Unwitting Intermediary represents one of the first principles of that perpetually fantastic game at its higher levels. Have a messenger who has no notion that he is a messenger, and you at once supply yourself with the sort of insulating device between cell and cell that gives spies a comforting feeling of security. Cass has been such a device. And it was one perfectly easy to operate.

"He had merely to be persuaded that his false teeth were always likely to give him trouble, and that he must regularly consult (at an obligingly low fee) this dentist at one end and that dentist at the other—and the thing was practically foolproof. Only Wesselmann and his friends failed to reckon on sudden death, and much less on Cass's signing away his body—dentures and all—to an anatomy school." Appleby paused. "And now, gentlemen, that concludes the affair. So what shall we call it?"

Holroyd smiled. "Call it the Cass Case. You couldn't get anything more compendious than that."

But Sir David Owens shook his beautiful silver locks. "No!" he said authoritatively. "It shall be called *Lesson in Anatomy*. The infestation has been most interesting, Mr. Appleby. And now let us go. For the photographers, look you, are waiting."



FULL FATHOM FIVE



THIS is the story just as I heard it the other evening—a ghost story told me as true. It seems that one chilly October night in the first decade of the present century, two sisters were motoring along a Cape Cod road, when their car broke down just before midnight, and would go no further. This was in an era when such mishaps were both commoner and more hopeless than they are today.

For these two, there was no chance of help until another car might chance to come by in the morning and give them a tow. Of a lodging for the night there was no hope, except a gaunt, unlighted frame house which, with a clump of pine trees beside it, stood black in the moonlight, across a neglected stretch of frost-hardened lawn.

They yanked at its ancient bell-pull, but only a faint tinkle within made answer. They banged despairingly on the door panel only to awaken what at first they thought was an echo, and then identified as a shutter responding antiphonally with the help of a nipping wind. This shutter was around the corner, and the ground-floor window behind it was broken and unfastened.

There was enough moonlight to show that the room within was a deserted library, with a few books left on the sagging shelves and a few pieces of dilapidated furniture still standing where some departing family had left them, long before. The sweep of the flashlight which one of the women had brought with her showed them that on the uncarpeted floor the dust lay thick and trackless, as if no one had trod there in many a day.

They decided to bring their blankets in from the car and

Alexander Woollcott, who died in 1943, was the original Man Who Came to Dinner. Rotund, irascible, fabulous, a waspish wit, he had an enormous circle of friends (among them Harpo Marx and Dorothy Parker) in spite of his penchant for telling the truth, however unpalatable. Once he commented on a poor play, "The scenery was beautiful but the actors got in front of it." He wrote ten plays, acted in two, helped countless young artists and authors, and will be remembered for While Rome Burns.

By ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT



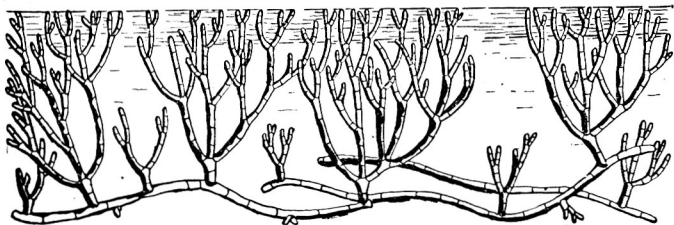
stretch out there on the floor until daylight, none too comfortable, perhaps, but at least sheltered from that salt and cutting wind.

It was while they were lying there, trying to get to sleep, while, indeed, they had drifted halfway across the borderland, that they saw—each confirming the other's fear by a convulsive grip of the hand—standing at the empty fireplace, as if trying to dry himself by a fire that was not there, the wraithlike figure of a sailor, come dripping from the sea.

After an endless moment, in which neither woman breathed, one of them somehow found the strength to call out, "Who's there?"

The challenge shattered the intolerable silence, and at the sound, muttering a little—they said afterwards that it was something between a groan and a whimper—the misty figure seemed to dissolve. They strained their eyes, but could see nothing between themselves and the battered mantelpiece.

Then, telling themselves (and, as one does, half believing it)



that they had been dreaming, they tried again to sleep, and indeed did sleep until a patch of shuttered sunlight striped the morning floor. As they sat up and blinked at the gritty realism of the forsaken room, they would, I think, have laughed at their shared illusion of the night before, had it not been for something at which one of the sisters pointed with a kind of gasp.

There, in the still undisturbed dust, on the spot in front of the fireplace where the apparition had seemed to stand, was a patch of water, a little circular pool that had issued from no crack in the floor nor, as far as they could see, fallen from any point in the innocent ceiling. Near it in the surrounding dust was no footprint—their own or any other's—and in it was a piece of green that looked like seaweed. One of the women bent down and put her finger to the water, then lifted it to her tongue. The water was salty.

After that the sisters scuttled out and sat in their car, until a passer-by gave them a tow to the nearest village. In its tavern at breakfast they gossiped with the proprietress about the empty house among the pine trees down the road. Oh, yes, it had been just that way for a score of years or more. Folks did say the place was spooky, haunted by a son of the family who, driven out by his father, had shipped before the mast and been drowned at sea.

Some said the family had moved away because they could not stand the things they heard and saw at night.

A year later, one of the sisters told the story at a dinner party in New York. In the pause that followed a man across the table leaned forward.

"My dear lady," he said, with a smile, "I happen to be the curator of a museum where they are doing a good deal of work on submarine vegetation. In your place, I never would have left that house without taking the bit of seaweed with me."

"Of course you wouldn't," she answered tartly, "and neither did I."

It seems she had lifted it out of the water and dried it a little by pressing it against a window pane. Then she had carried it off in her pocket-book, as a souvenir. As far as she knew, it was still in an envelope in a little drawer of her desk at home. If she could find it, would he like to see it? He would. Next morning she sent it around by messenger, and a few days later it came back with a note.

"You were right," the note said, "this is seaweed. Furthermore, it may interest you to learn that it is of a rare variety which, as far as we know, grows only on dead bodies."

Born in London in 1901, John Collier is married to an American, has rusticated on a Hampshire farm, lived in Oxfordshire and in Virginia, U.S.A. Started his career by writing poetry, but published his first novel, His Monkey Wife, when he was twenty-nine. Sophisticated, with an impish smile, he likes gardening, shooting and sailing. Writes with a wicked brand of satirical fantasy, and one of his favourite literary characters is the devil!

DOWN TO EARTH

By JOHN COLLIER

A YOUNG man entered the office of a well-known psychiatrist, whom he addressed as follows: "Doctor, save me!"

"By all means," responded the mind specialist suavely. "After all, that is what I am here for."

"But you can't," cried the young man distractedly. "You can't! Nothing can save me!"

"At all events," said the psychiatrist soothingly, "it will do no harm to talk it over."

With that he waved his hands a little, smiled with a somewhat ingratiating expression, and before he knew it the young man was seated in a deep armchair, with his face to the light, pouring out his story.

"My name," said he, "is Charles Rotifer. I am employed in the office of an accountant, who occupies the top storey of this skyscraper. I am twenty-eight years of age, single, engaged to be married. My fiancée is the best and dearest girl in the world, beautiful as an angel, and with lovely golden hair. I mention this because it is relevant to my story."

"It is indeed," said the psychiatrist. "Gold is the symbol of

money. Have you a retentive attitude towards money? For example, you say you are employed in an office. Have you saved anything considerable out of your salary?"

"Yes, I have," replied the young man. "I've saved quite a bit."

"Please continue, Mr. Rotifer," said the psychiatrist benevolently. "You were speaking of your fiancée. Later on I shall have to ask you one or two rather intimate questions on that subject."

"And I will answer them," returned the young man. "There is nothing in our relationship that needs to be concealed—at all events from a psychologist. All is complete harmony between us, and there is nothing about her that I could wish altered, except perhaps her little habit of gesturing rather too freely as she speaks."

"I will make a note of that," said the other, scribbling on his pad.

"It is not of the least importance," said the young man. "I hardly know why I mentioned it, except to indicate how perfect she is. But, Doctor, thirty-eight nights ago I dreamed a dream."

"Thirty-eight, indeed!" observed the mind doctor, jotting down the figure. "Tell me frankly, when you were an infant, did you by any chance have a nurse, a teacher or a female relative on whom perhaps you might have had a little fixation, who happened to be thirty-eight years of age?"

"No, Doctor," said the young man, "but there are thirty-nine floors in this skyscraper."

The psychiatrist gave him a penetrating glance. "And does the form and height of this building suggest anything to you?"

"All I know," said the young man obstinately, "is that I dreamed I was outside the window of our office at the top, in the air, falling."

"Falling!" said the psychiatrist, raising his eyebrows. "And what were your sensations at that moment?"

"I was calm," replied the young man. "I imagine I was falling at the normal rate, but my mind seemed to work very fast. I had leisure to reflect, to look around me. The view was superb. In a moment I had reached the ornamental stonework which separates our windows from those immediately below. Then I woke up."

"And that simple, harmless, perfectly ordinary little dream has been preying on your mind?" asked the psychiatrist in a jocular tone. "Well, my dear sir . . ."

"Wait a moment," said his visitor. "On the following night

I dreamed the same dream, or rather, a continuation of it. There I was, spread-eagled in mid air—like this—passing the ornamental stonework, looking into the window of the floor below, which is also occupied by our firm. I saw my friend, Don Straker, of our tax department, bending over his desk. He looked up. He saw me. His face took on an expression of the utmost astonishment. He made a movement as if to rise from his seat, no doubt to rush to the window. But compared with mine, his movements were indescribably slow. I remember thinking, ‘He will be too late.’ Then I dropped below his window, and down to the dividing line between that floor and the next. As I did so, I woke up.”

“Well,” said the brain doctor, “what have we here? The dream of one night is resumed on the night following. That is a very ordinary occurrence.”

“Possibly,” said the young man. “However, on the next night, there I was, having just passed the dividing line between that floor and the floor below. I had slipped into a recumbent posture, with one leg slightly raised, like this.”

“Yes, yes,” said the psychiatrist, “I see. It is not necessary to demonstrate. You nearly knocked over my ash tray.”

“I’m sorry,” said the young man. “I’m afraid I have picked up the habit from Maisie. Maisie is my fiancée. When she wants to say how she did a thing, she just shows you. She acts it out. It was the night she told me how she slipped and fell on the icy pavement on Seventy-second Street that we became engaged. Well, as I say, there I was, falling past another floor, looking about me in all directions. The hills of New Jersey looked magnificent. A high-flying pigeon coasted in my direction, and regarded me with a roundeye, devoid of any expression whatsoever. Then he banked and sheered off. I could see the people in the street below, or rather their hats, jammed as closely as black pebbles on a beach. Even as I looked, one or two of these black pebbles suddenly turned white. I realized I was attracting attention.”

“Tell me this,” said the psychiatrist. “You seem to have had a good deal of time for thought. Did you recollect why you were falling; whether you had thrown yourself, or slipped, or what?”

“Doctor, I really don’t know,” said the young man. “Not unless my last dream, which I had last night, sheds any light on the matter. Most of the time I was just looking round, falling faster all the time, of course, but thinking faster to make up for it. Naturally I tried to think of subjects of importance, seeing it was my last opportunity. Between the seventeenth and the sixteenth

floors, for example, I thought a lot about democracy and the world crisis. It seemed to me that where most people are making a big mistake is . . . ”

“ Perhaps for the moment we had better keep to the experience itself,” said the brain doctor.

“ Well,” said the young man, “ at the fifteenth floor I looked in at the window, and really I never believed such things happened! Not in offices, anyway. And Doctor, next day I paid a visit to the fifteenth floor here, just out of curiosity. And those offices are occupied by a theatrical agent. Doctor, don’t you think that confirms my dream? ”

“ Calm yourself,” said the psychiatrist. “ The names of all the firms in this building are listed on the wall directory on the ground floor. You no doubt retained an unconscious memory which you adroitly fitted into your dream.”

“ Well, after that,” said the young man, “ I began to look down a good deal more. I’d take just a quick glance into each window as I passed, but mostly I was looking downwards. By this time there were big patches of white among the dark, pebble-like hats below. In fact, pretty soon they were clearly distinguishable as hats and faces. I saw two taxis swerve towards one another and collide. A woman’s scream drifted up out of the confused murmur below. I felt I agreed with her.

“ I was in a reclining posture, and already I felt an anticipatory pain in the parts that would touch the ground first. So I turned face downwards—like this—but that was horrible. So I put my feet down, but then they hurt. I tried to fall head first, to end it sooner, but that didn’t satisfy me. I kept on twisting and turning—like this.”

“ Please relax,” said the psychiatrist. “ There is no need to demonstrate.”

“ I’m sorry,” said the young man. “ I picked up the habit from Maisie.”

“ Sit down,” said the psychiatrist, “ and continue.”

“ Last night,” said the young man despairingly, “ was the thirty-eighth night.”

“ Then,” said the psychiatrist, “ you must have got down to this level, for this office is on the mezzanine floor.”

“ I was,” cried the young man. “ And I was outside this very window, descending at terrific speed. I looked in. Doctor, I saw you! As clearly as I see you now! ”

“ Mr. Rotifer,” replied the psychiatrist with a modest smile, “ I very frequently figure in my patients’ dreams.”

“ But I wasn’t your patient then,” said the young man. “ I didn’t even know you existed. I didn’t know till this morning,

when I came to see who occupied this office. Oh, Doctor, I was so relieved to find you were not a theatrical agent! ”

“ And why were you relieved? ” asked the specialist blandly.

“ Because you were not alone. In my dream, I mean. A young woman was with you. A young woman with beautiful golden hair. And she was sitting on your knee, Doctor, and her arms were round your neck. I felt certain it was another theatrical agency. And then I thought, ‘ That is very beautiful golden hair. It is like my Maisie’s hair. ’ At that moment you both looked towards the window. It was she! Maisie! My own Maisie! ”

The psychiatrist laughed very heartily.

“ My dear sir, ” said he, “ you may set your mind entirely at rest. ”

“ All the same, ” said the young man, “ this morning, in the office, I have been a prey to an unbearable curiosity, an almost irresistible urge to jump, just to see what I should see. ”

“ You would have had the mortification, ” said the psychiatrist, “ of seeing that there were no grounds whatever for your rash act. Your fiancée is not a patient of mine; therefore she could not have had one of those harmless little transferences, as we call them, which have been known to lead to ardent behaviour on the part of the subject. Besides, our profession has its ethics, and nothing ever happens in the office. No, my dear sir, what you have described to me is a relatively simple condition, a recurrent dream, a little neurotic compulsion—nothing that cannot be cured in time. If you can visit me three or four times a week, I am confident that a very few years will show a decided improvement. ”

“ But Doctor, ” cried the young man in despair, “ I am due to hit the ground at any moment! ”

“ But only in a dream, ” said the psychiatrist reassuringly. “ Be sure to remember it clearly, and note particularly if you bounce. Meanwhile, return to your office, carry on with your work, and worry as little as possible. ”

“ I will try to do so, ” said the young man. “ But really you are astonishingly like yourself as I saw you in my dream, even to that little pearl tie-pin. ”

“ That, ” said the psychiatrist, as he bowed him smilingly out, “ was a gift from a very well-known lady, who was always falling in her dreams. ”

So saying, he closed the door behind his visitor, who departed shaking his head in obstinate melancholy.

The psychiatrist then seated himself at his desk and placed the tips of his fingers together, as psychiatrists always do while they

are pondering over how much a new patient may be good for.

His meditation was interrupted by his secretary, who thrust her head in at the door. "Miss Mimling to see you," she said. "Her appointment is at two-thirty."

"Show her in," said the psychiatrist, and rose to greet the new entrant, who proved to be a young woman with the appearance of a rather wild mouse, upon whose head someone had let fall a liberal splash of peroxide.

She was in a very agitated state.

"Oh, Doctor," she said, "I just *had* to telephone you, for when I saw your name in the book, of course I knew it was you. I saw your name on the door. In my dream, Doctor. In my dream."

"Let us talk it over very quietly," said the healer of souls, trying to manoeuvre her into the deep armchair. She was fidgety, however, and perched herself upon the corner of his desk.

"I don't know if you think there is anything *in* dreams," she said. "But this was such an extraordinary one."

"I dreamed I came up to your door, and there was your name on it, just as it is out there. That's how it was I came to look you up in the telephone book, and there it was again. So I felt I just had to come and see you."

"Well, I dreamed I came into your office, and I was sitting here on the desk, just like this, talking to you, and all of a sudden—of course I know it was only a dream—I felt a feeling—well, really I hardly know how to tell you. It seemed to me as if you were my father, my big brother, and a boy I once knew called Herman Myers all rolled into one. I don't know how I could feel like that, even in a dream, for I am engaged to a young man I love with all my conscious mind, and I thought with my unconscious, too. Oh, it's awful of me!"

"My dear young lady," purred the psychiatrist, "this is nothing more or less than the phenomenon of transference. It is something which can happen to anybody, and usually it does."

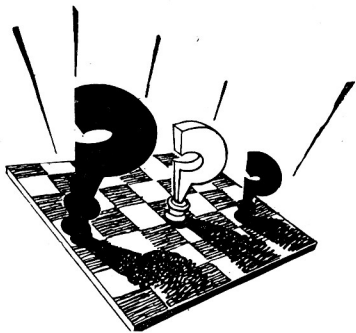
"Yes," said she, "but it made me transfer myself to your knee and put my arms around your neck like this."

"Now, now!" murmured the psychiatrist gently. "I'm afraid you are acting out a neurotic impulse."

"I always act things out," she said. "They say it makes me the life and soul of a party. But, Doctor, then I happened to look out of the window, like this, and . . ."

"Wow! There he is! There he was! It was Charlie! Oh, what a terrible look he gave us as he went by!"

CHALLENGE TO THE READER



MY name is Martin—Captain Dave Martin of the rocket ship *Icarus*. I'm sending this message with the crew: they'll get back all right. It's a gamble whether I will.

It's gambling, actually, that's been my ruin. We'd got into the habit on the way over: how else can you keep sane, month after month, cooped up in the box of a space-ship? What we didn't bargain for was a race of Martians with gambling fever!

We were having a quiet game of poker in a thicket of trees. No sign of Martians. Just trees, lots of them, with spidery branches like antennae, and round fruits like eyes. We didn't notice at first that it was getting dark. Then we saw it wasn't: it was the trees that were moving. Crowding round us, watching the game.

When we recovered we showed them rummy. We taught them cribbage and vingt-et-un, and they showed us the only game they knew—a sort of draughts, a hundred men each side . . . When the time came to turn the ship home they wouldn't let me go.

I've got used to the Martians now, but I'd hate to stay for keeps. I knew what would appeal. "Make it a fifty-fifty chance," I said.

So they got out their draughtsmen and they put them in heaps on two big plates—fifty red checkers and fifty white on each. "We're blindfolding you," they said. "You pick a red one, you go with your friends. You pick a white one, you stay right here."

"I'll make a proposition," I said. "Let me redistribute the checkers before you blindfold me. How can it affect the issue? There'll still be a hundred red ones and a hundred white, the fifty-fifty chance. I shan't be able to see them, or the plates either!"

They said it was O.K., and now it's up to me.

Well, I'm home again! Perhaps I was lucky, but I did improve my chances. What would you have done? SUSPENSE will present Five Guineas for the best suggestion received by September 26. Send your entry on a postcard to Suspense (Comp.), 3, Pilgrim Street, London E.C.4.

The Editor's decision will be final, and we regret this competition cannot be open to our overseas readers.

Fiftyish, lives in California, writes short stories, film and television scripts, Gilbert Wright is the inventor of a successful device which "permits people whose larynxes have been removed to talk," though he makes no profit out of this . . . He knows how to chill the blood, too!

ROOM OF DARK

By GILBERT WRIGHT

IN my country when two fellows become angry enough to kill the other because of a lady, or some matter, it is the custom to arrange a duel. From such a duel as we arrange, the trouble between these two fellows will be settled, believe me.

The committee for duels prepares a house of one room so that, on the closing of the door, the room is dark. Fine sand, without little stones, is spread over the floor to the depth of a span. The bare feet of a man make not the smallest sound walking on such a floor.

The two fellows are made naked. Each has his knife, nothing more. The committee puts one fellow in a corner of the room and across from him, in that corner, the other fellow. And in one of the other two corners the committee puts a live rattlesnake of good size. The committee retires, the door is shut quickly, the duel now begins.

Outside, the people wait for the half of one minute. If the winner has not come out by that time, the committee piles empty oil cans against the door completely over the top. The people now go about their affairs because it may be many hours, even two or three days, before the winner opens the door and makes the cans crash down. The crashing down of the cans will be heard, day or night, all over the village and the people may now go to see which fellow has come out.

If it should happen that the duel is over in the half of one minute it will be because one of the fellows rushed. You see, on



the closing of the door there will be a very short time when you still have the image of your enemy in the mind's eye. You can rush straight across the room to his position and perhaps finish him. But you must act very fast before the image goes. Both fellows could rush, but I have not heard of it.

Most often the rush is not made and so the cans are piled up. The duel is now an affair of patience, great care and much thought. Each fellow seeks to find the other without making his own presence known. One smart fellow may think of a method to work a trick on the other, but if the trick is not completely successful it will be the smart fellow who remains behind in the Room of Dark.

Much will depend upon the control of the mind because, after some hours in complete dark, the mind can grow unreliable and a fellow may do something foolish and so inform his enemy of his position. Because of the thirst and the growing bad air, after three days one of the fellows is pretty sure to lose control. He may talk to himself, or even sing. And, should this happen, it will not be that fellow who crashes down the cans.

There are reasons for putting the rattlesnake into the Room of Dark. It is of great danger to both men equally, not caring who it might bite. We also believe that the snake will make the fellow who is most afraid even more fearful, and many times, we believe, the snake will prevent a duel. Fellows quick to fight if the snake

were not there may think of a way to settle their quarrel without the duel.

But if the anger of two fellows to kill the other is strong enough they will duel, even if more than one snake would be put into the room.

Such an anger was between Damundo and Pito. Both these fellows were my cousins because, in our village, if a fellow is not your brother he is certain to be your cousin.

Damundo is a cousin not liked by me and others. He is more than thirty, dark, strong and rough, much hair, and a moustache that he trims like a lady's little eyebrow. Damundo has the strong belief that he is a great victor over men and girls. In this, there is truth.

Five times in not two years he has duelled and each time it was he who crashed down the cans. Never did he receive even a small wound and the times of his winnings were never more than an hour, often less. A thing unheard of in history! He brags that only cowards take the time of two or three days. Ridiculous! Damundo gets hungry! Damundo misses his girl! Every year he goes working on a ship for two months, and on his return from foreign places he brings presents of bracelets, necklaces, shining chains to hang from the waist, ribbons, combs, sweets, lipsticks, perfumes and other delights.

Pito is a cousin much liked by me and others. He is slim and has a moustache of first growth which he does not yet trim or it would be gone. Pito is three years older than me and the feeling has come upon him that he is no longer a boy. His voice has become deep, but is not yet dependable to remain so. Several girls of our village notice him, but when we all go out upon the beach at low tide to gather the harvest of the shore, Pito digs with Angia and their hands meet together under the sand. Angia is some younger than Pito and has much charm. She smiles softly and does not scream and produce silly laughing like some girls.

This day Pito and Angia and I dug together. Damundo came, looking down at Angia. We did not show we knew that he was there, but dug, putting the small clams into our one basket.

Damundo dropped a little bottle of shining glass and gold into the sand before Angia's hands. She looked at it, but did not look up. She then dug to one side of the little bottle. We dug, putting the clams into our one basket.

Damundo squatted. He took up the bottle and twisted out the stopper. There was a strong, sweet smell; the smell of some foreign flower. Damundo held the little bottle close to Angia.

We stopped digging and sat back from our knees because something would now happen. Angia took the bottle and put back the stopper. Then she gave it to Pito.

Pito stood. Damundo stood. Pito offered him back the little bottle and Damundo struck it from his hand. He said, "I, Damundo, gave that foreign perfume to Angia for a present, little boy."

"I give the presents to Angia," said Pito. "I, only." His voice began very deep, but went suddenly like a young boy's. Pito's face was red with shame, but he stood looking Damundo hard in the eyes. Damundo laughed and laughed at Pito. He laughed loud and others around us who were digging looked.

Damundo stopped laughing, his face now strong with anger. "So," he said, "so you think to give the presents to Angia. Only you! Listen, little boy, I will tell you something. Angia has come to the notice of a *man*!"

"I am that man," said Pito, and his voice remained deep.

Pito's mother came hurrying and scolding as if she did not know of the growing trouble. Pito should go to hunt the cow. She took his arm and pulled. "Make haste, my child."

Pito shook away her hand, looking straight at Damundo.

Damundo stepped close to Pito and placed his hand on Angia's shoulder. "So," he said to Pito, "so you are that man?"

And Pito was. He spat into Damundo's face.

Then, as was the custom, a friend of Damundo's led him one way and I, being Pito's friend, led him another way. Angia stood where we had dug, looking down at the little bottle shining in the sand. She put down her hand for it.

I and some of my family were at the house of Pito. I began to sharpen his knife, a thing at which I am good.

Not much was said and the duel, which would begin next day at noon, was not talked of. We had come to be with Pito and his people to show friendship.

Then came Pito's father with three old uncles. Each, long ago, had been winner in a duel and it was hoped that Pito might learn a little from them. You see, it is not right to ask a young man who has crashed down the cans how he did his winning. He may have to fight again and so does not want his method known. But with old men, they will not fight again.

"When the door is shut, Pito," said old Uncle Chaco, who is thin and trembles, "squat down quickly in your corner. Hold your knife point up, thus. If Damundo rushes, the image in his mind will see you standing. He will strike too high. Then you may rise into him."

Old Uncle Cantu, who is blind, said strongly, "No, Pito, you must leave an image of more deception. As the door closes, move the left foot. Damundo will think you are stepping out of your corner. He will rush to the left of it, but you will remain in your corner. You can get him when he arrives."

"Damundo will not rush," said old Uncle Juan who speaks thick because the right side of his mouth does not move. "Damundo has never rushed."

"But he will do something very soon," said old Uncle Chaco. "He is known for the short times of his winnings. He will not lessen his reputation by delay. Not Damundo."

"Then, if he does not rush," said old Uncle Cantu, "he will come along the wall. He will count his steps by placing the heel and toe together. There are fifteen of such steps to each wall of the room. He will come quickly and without sound. When the count of his steps brings him to where he thinks you to be, Pito, he will strike."

"But because Pito moved his left foot," said old Uncle Chaco, "Damundo will expect him to be a little out of his corner to the left. He will strike at that count. You, Pito, will hear nothing but you may feel the little fan of air stirred up by his empty blow. Strike in the direction of the air. To the right of it, my boy."

"Do not forget the snake," said old Uncle Cantu. "Damundo will not come by way of the corner where the snake was put down."

"Never delude yourself, Pito," said old Uncle Juan, "that you know *what* Damundo will do. It is good to leave an image of deception, but how can you know you have left it? The door might close so quickly that the movement of your foot will not be seen by Damundo. My advice to you is to stay close to the wall at all times. Then you will at least know where something is. That will be a comfort."

"What!" said old Uncle Chaco, trembling greatly. "Stay close to the wall? Oh, no! The snake will come along the wall. He will go all the way around the room keeping close to the wall. He seeks a hole through which he may escape. The snake will meet you if you stay close to the wall, Pito. Then he will rattle and Damundo will know your position."

"To see, any eye must have some light," said old Uncle Cantu. "The snake will rattle, not because he sees you, Pito; but because he feels the heat from your naked body. This frightens him and the trembling of his tail sends forth the rattle. At any time you hear the rattle you will know that either you or Damundo is close to the snake."

"This need not be so," said old Uncle Juan. "Lie down,

Pito, your feet against the wall and your body into the room. You will know where you are, with your feet against the wall. Now cover your feet, legs, and all but the chest and arms with sand. When the snake comes along the wall he will crawl over you without rattling. The heat of your body will not come through the sand. And, should Damundo be close by, the snake will rattle at him."

"More can be done with sand," said old Uncle Chaco. "Mound the sand against one ear. It will happen that if Damundo moves by stepping, crawling or in any manner, he will disturb the grains of sand under his weight. These grains will pass on the disturbance to other grains and they to still other grains so that the disturbance will come to the grains mounded over your ear. You will know that Damundo moves."

"But not *where* he moves," said old Uncle Cantu. "To discover Damundo's direction both ears must be mounded over with sand."

"With both ears in the sand," said old Uncle Juan, "you will not hear the rattle of the snake. His tail is in the air and does not disturb grains of sand. The rattle may bring you information of importance, Pito. Surely, do not cover both ears with sand."

"It is important, Pito," said old Uncle Chaco, "to keep account of the time. This may be done by the sound of the village, cows asking to be milked at sundown, dogs howling at moonrise, roosters calling at dawn. In this way, my winning was helped. After the second calling of the cows I thought it reasonable to try to deceive my enemy by sounds of sleep. I came back along the wall a little way from my corner and, facing the corner, cupped my hand around my mouth and against the wall, leaving a small opening to direct the sound. I made sounds of sleep, not too often, not too loud. The sounds echoed from the opposite wall of my corner. My enemy came to stab there, his knee brushed me. I had no confusion in placing my knife."

"On the second day," said old Uncle Juan, "my enemy began to talk to me in whispers. He said that we were fools. That the trouble between us was not of the importance to cost the life of either. He proposed that we go along the walls, find the door and crash down the cans together. I did not accept his proposal, neither did I altogether reject it. In this way we came to the door and I had my success. I have often wondered if he made his proposal with honest intent."

"Never believe," said old Uncle Cantu, "that the snake must rattle before he strikes. Always, if you move, keep the body low. More heat will go to the snake and he will rattle the sooner. If you move standing, the snake may feel the small, quick heat of

your stepping foot and strike before he has time to grow fearful and rattle. I believe it was thus that I came to crash down the cans. Never did I hear the snake rattle, but at the first calling of the roosters I began to hear the dying of my enemy. After some hours these sounds ceased. I came out of the Room of Dark because I no longer had an enemy."

The old uncles thought for a time, thinking if more could be said. By now I had made Pito's knife very sharp with the stone and with the leather. I honed it upon my palm. I looked to see if Pito had received confidence from the wisdom of the uncles. I could not see that he had.

"If the duel should continue to the time of the bad air," said old Uncle Cantu, "stand tall and lift the face. There will be better air above than below."

"You are young, Pito, and therefore supple," said old Uncle Chaco. "Still, do not remain long without some small movement of the limbs. The knee joints give snaps of sound if allowed to become set."

"If it happens that you make some such sound," said old Uncle Juan, "move quickly from the place where you made it."

"The boy is young," said old Uncle Cantu. "He has not defiled his body by smoke and drink and the numberless dissipations of Damundo. Pito's senses are alert and clear. In this he has great advantage."

After a long thinking old Uncle Chaco said, "Five times has this Damundo won. Never with a wound. Never with more time than an hour."

"Damundo," said old Uncle Cantu, "is a foolish and reckless man. Too much confidence. In addition, he has had much luck."

"To have had such luck," said old Uncle Juan, "seems beyond the possible."

"But if not luck, what then?" said old Uncle Cantu.

"A method," said old Uncle Juan. "Damundo has a method of perfection."

After this, the old uncles said nothing, not thinking of more to say. Old Uncle Juan went to sleep a little.

Pito looked to me and we stood and walked away together. I gave him his knife and he whistled at its sharpness. Indeed, I can sharpen a knife. I had twice seen the knife of Damundo, an evil, foreign thing with a jewelled handle and a hooked blade. I told Pito I believed that Damundo would not strike down with such a knife, but rip up with the hook. Also, to cheer Pito—and this was true—I said that his knife was longer than Damundo's. By a finger's breadth at least. I was certain of it.

Pito smiled a little. "Of one thing we may be sure, good friend of mine, you have made my knife sharper than any knife in the world."

We came to the tall tree by the village well. Many times I have climbed this tree with Pito. From the high branches one can see the tops of the mountains that rise from the far edge of the sea.

"Pito," I said, "do you truly feel yourself to be a man?"

He was angry. "Did I not show it upon the beach?" On the last word his voice changed into the voice of a young boy. Ashamed, Pito ran off.

By noon the committee had prepared the room. The sun was bright and shone fully on the house and all who desired went in and closed the door to inspect if the room was truly dark. Two sparks of sun were seen in the roof and a boy was sent with soft mud to the top of the house.

All came out, saying that the room was now truly dark. A fellow had come with a rattlesnake of good size in a sack. A member of the committee shook the sack roughly. The snake rattled well.

Damundo stood with two friends at the north of the door. He was laughing and talking, so all could hear. He said that he would be glad to go into the Room of Dark. It was cool there, away from the sun. He would take a nap, because he had drunk much the night before. After awakening, he would take a moment for the business of the day, and then crash down the cans. Damundo had plans for the evening.

Pito and his friends stood to the south of the door as was the custom. None of us talked one word.

Angia came, beautiful in her best dress. Naturally, she had not been seen by anyone since Pito had insulted Damundo on the beach. She had remained in her house, as was the custom. But now, it was also the custom that she must come and look long at Pito and then go and look long at Damundo also.

When she came to Pito she did not come very close. She stood looking at him. And it was as though she had put something in her face for him to understand. There was something there to see, if one knew. I did not. She did not smile. Then she went to Damundo.

Her back was towards us and her face could not be seen as she looked at him. Damundo suddenly smiled big and put both his hands on her shoulders. And she put both her hands on his head. Then she turned and went back to her house.

Damundo called, "Tonight, little one! Do not change your clothes; I like that dress."

We, with Pito, were most sick to the heart. We could not believe what we had seen. On Pito's face was a very strange look. A look of anger, of not believing, of thinking.

For with us, when the man puts his hands on the girl's shoulders and she smooths her hands on his head, it is a greeting of lovers. It means, "I am glad you are here." It can also mean farewell, as when lovers part for a time.

For her to make such a greeting with Pito was expected by all. It was because of his love for her that he was now to fight Damundo. But she had stood back from Pito, then gone to Damundo and made the greeting with him. What thing is a woman! It was bitter to believe what must be believed. Angia, like all of us, thought that Pito would be killed soon. So now, she chose Damundo because it would be he who would come out of the Room of Dark. But what cruelty to let Pito see! Now he must go in with no hope of her, no strength of love to fight with. Pito would be killed for nothing.

Damundo, waving and kissing his hand, went into the room with the committee. Then they came out and put his clothes to the north of the door.

Pito went in, with one smile for his mother and for us. The committee came out and put his clothes to the south of the door.

One man, the head of the committee, now went inside with the snake. Soon he came out and tossed the empty sack aside. He put his hand on the door and called in, "Farewell to one of you." He shut the door.

All waited for the half of one minute. Nothing happened. Then began the piling of the empty cans against the door. But before the cans were halfway, a scream came from the Room of Dark. It was the voice of Pito.

I went away and came to the tree Pito and I had climbed so many times. I looked into the high branches and I swore to the tree that I would kill Damundo. I could kill him when he slept. I could kill him when he lay drunk. I could kill him on a dark path at night. Yes, I would find a way to kill him.

After a time I went back. Damundo had not come out. No one had come out. There had been no more sounds. The cans were now piled fully over the top of the door.

People talked of Pito's scream. Some said that it was a scream of pain. Others were not sure of this. Another boy and I thought that Pito had given more of a yell. A cry of angry hate.

Many people besides Pito's family stayed all night before the door. Angia watched too, but apart from everyone, and no one spoke to her or took notice of her presence.

When morning came, I went with my mother to our house, she to get us something to eat, I to put our cow into the field.

Our house is a little distance from the village, but as I was fastening the wire of the gate I heard the crashing down of the cans.

I ran with all my power, but when I got to the Room of Dark, Pito was already dressed and the committee was examining the method of Damundo.

The handle of his knife was hollow and the jewelled plate at the butt unscrewed. It was in the handle that Damundo kept a light of electricity. The light was no bigger than a thumb, but, in the Room of Dark, strong and blinding. There is no trouble to kill a man if you are behind such a light.

The flashing on of the light had caused Pito to scream out in anger. Then he had reached down quickly and thrown a handful of sand at the light. The sand went into Damundo's eyes. He turned off the light because, being now blinded, the light was of danger to him. Also it was believed that he dropped the light. It was found in another part of the room from where Pito and Damundo at last met.

Of the meeting, Pito had not much to say. The snake had rattled for him, as he thought. He had not moved. The snake went away, not rattling hard. Then suddenly it had rattled loud again. The snake must now be rattling at Damundo. This was all that Pito would say.

"But you were close to the wall, Pito," said old Uncle Juan.

"Your senses were alert and clear," said old Uncle Cantu. "Damundo was close. He moved because of the snake. You heard him."

"It is plain that you were close together and that you knew his direction because of the snake," said old Uncle Chaco. "But how, Pito, could you know just *when* to strike? Just *where* to strike?"

"When I am old, my Uncles," said Pito, "I may speak of how I came to crash down the cans if the occasion is of importance. But that will be many years."

He went to where Angia stood, beautiful with smiles, and only I heard what they said.

"It was long, Angia," said Pito, "before it came to my mind why you made the greeting with him." He brought her hands to his face, then smiled. "You have washed them well."

"Very well, man of this heart."

"Good," said Pito. "The perfume of that foreign flower I never want to smell again."

And they walked away towards the sea.

I'M COMING IN

By JOSEPH N. BELL

WHEN the first flight went out at six forty-five, the Texas sun had just poked its nose over the horizon, and the hundreds of Navy training planes nestling on the ramp looked like grey ghosts in the dim morning light. Mounting the steps to the squadron control tower a few minutes earlier, I had noticed a lowering bank of black clouds, far off to the north in the dewy haze. I remember feeling relieved that I wasn't flying that day, but had instead drawn the assignment as tower duty officer. Later, I would have been happy to trade places with almost anyone in the squadron.

Perhaps, as I looked over the early-morning weather report, I was thinking of my own cadet days and of how little I knew about the planes I flew then. A "norther"—one of those vicious Texas storms which sweep in so often with little warning and batter an area with driving rain, howling wind and biting cold—was due later in the day. Flying conditions were expected to be very bad by afternoon; but now the sun was climbing in the sky, a few fleecy clouds were scuttling by, and the EVERYTHING OUT sign was underlined on the flight schedule board.

Only a few minutes after the last planes had headed out to practise formation flying or landings at remote practice fields, a revised weather report came in. The norther was moving much faster than had been expected; it would now hit in mid-morning. A look outside to the north confirmed the emergency. The bank of black clouds which had looked so far away in the pre-dawn light now loomed ominously in the near distance, bearing down on us with the malevolence that only a pilot can see in approaching bad weather.

I was reaching for the phone to ask permission to recall our planes when it jingled of its own accord. The commanding officer was on the other end. "Call 'em back," he told me succinctly.

I passed the word to the tower radio operator and he began to

repeat into his transmitter: "Attention all Baker Flight planes. Return to base immediately."

The planes came piling back to the field for about fifteen minutes; then the ranks of the landing aircraft began to thin.

The clouds were almost on us, thick, black and low-flying. The planes coming in now were obviously all piloted by cadets, judging by the long, slow, cautious approaches they were making. The man at my side was checking the numbers of the landing aircraft against a schedule sheet.

"How many still out?" I asked him.

He ran down the list. "About fifteen."

I picked up the radio transmitter: "All Baker Flight planes not now on the ground: do not attempt to return to the main base. We are weathered in here. Put down at the nearest practice field and report your position. All Baker Flight planes still in the air, acknowledge."

We peered anxiously into the gloom. Two planes were coming in. Three more were circling the field, flying well under the five hundred feet traffic-circle altitude because the overcast was now solid just a few hundred feet above the ground. The five planes landed without mishap; then an uneasy quiet descended.

I asked for another check and was told there were nine planes unaccounted for. I repeated my radio message several times, and then we waited.



At last we began to hear from them. Three cadets and an instructor—a whole practice formation—had landed on one of our outlying fields and were safe. That left five. Two cadets then reported they were down together on another practice field. Three still unaccounted for: two cadets and an officer instructor. I began calling them individually by name and number, and the instructor answered promptly.

"I'm above the overcast," he said, "on my way in. The overcast isn't very thick—maybe a few hundred feet. I'll make it all right."

Then, as we were to learn later, he pushed his earphones towards the top of his head to rest his ears—and there they remained until he landed. He never heard the drama that followed.

Two aviation cadets: fate unknown. Our cadets were in basic training, flying heavy planes for the first time. None had yet received training in instrument flying, but we were fast approaching instrument conditions. We continued to call the missing cadets. It seemed like an eternity, but it couldn't have been more than five minutes later when one of them answered. He had landed in a ploughed field and washed out his landing gear. But he wasn't badly hurt—just a few scratches. I told him to stand by his plane until we picked him up.

That left one.

Another slice of eternity, then—happily—we heard from him too. When his voice came in distinctly on the tower radio, there was an audible catching of breath behind me. For the first time, I realized that a dozen or more of the older instructors—returned from their flights—had climbed to the tower to watch and listen. Their thoughts, like mine, were not contained by the glass walls of the tower; they had taken wing and joined with that one lonely beginner who was somewhere in the mist over strange territory in a strange aeroplane.

His voice was almost plaintive as he said, "Baker Flight tower, this is Three-two-three. Can you hear me? Over."

The commanding officer picked up the transmitter and said: "We hear you loud and clear, Three-two-three. Where are you?"

A pause. Then, apologetically, "I don't know. I'm above the overcast and I can't see the ground."

The occupants of the tower looked at one another wordlessly.

"Give us your last known position, Three-two-three," said the skipper.

"I was practising landings at Field Twenty-one. I took off, found myself in fog and just kept climbing. I broke through in a

minute or so, but then there were nothing but clouds under me. That was about ten minutes ago. I've been trying to find a hole in them ever since."

"Make a tight circle right where you are," the skipper told him, "and wait for instructions."

He fidgeted with the transmitter and looked at the rest of us. No word had been spoken when the executive officer burst into the tower.

"I think I hear a plane somewhere over the field," he told us.

We threw open several windows and listened intently. Very faintly we heard the unmistakable sound of an aircraft engine.

"Three-two-three," said the skipper, his voice tinged with excitement, "put your engine in full low pitch and gun it. We think we can hear you near the field."

The silence was almost painful; then we heard the louder throb of a labouring engine, repeated.

"O.K., Three-two-three, we've located you. Continue to circle. How much fuel have you got?"

Another pause, then, "About fifteen or twenty minutes, sir."

The C.O.'s thumb released the microphone cut-on and he chewed his lip speculatively. More to himself than to us, he said, "That isn't time enough to send somebody out to look for him. Couldn't do much anyway. Tough to teach a boy instrument flying in five minutes from another plane—if we could find him."

He clicked the transmitter on and off several times; then said into it, rather slowly and very distinctly, "This is the squadron commander. I want you to listen very carefully and think about this before you give me an answer. The overcast here is about three hundred feet off the ground. We understand that it's about five to eight hundred feet thick right now. There's no chance of finding a hole in it. This stuff is all over South Texas, and it isn't going to get any better. To fly through it, you'd have to use your instruments. You haven't much room underneath, so your let-down would have to be slow and easy, and you've never done any instrument flying. I can try to tell you what to do, but letting down through this soup would be a tough job for an experienced pilot with instrument training. I recommend that you climb to two thousand feet, trim up your plane, set it on a heading of east and bale out. Now you think it over for a minute. And keep in that tight circle."

There was scarcely any hesitation. "I'll try to bring it down, sir," the cadet voice said tightly.

The skipper pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, mopped his face, loosened his tie and sat down before the transmitter.

Behind me, almost inaudibly, I heard a voice say, "That boy's my student."

The skipper looked up and asked the instructor who had spoken, "Is he a good pilot?"

The instructor half shrugged and spread his palms out and down. "Average, maybe a little above. He's a big kid, kind of quiet, tries hard—too hard, sometimes. He was studying to be an engineer," he added irrelevantly, "knows the engine inside out. He can think too. I wish he could fly as well as he can tell you what makes the thing work."

The skipper had listened intently, but now he turned back to the transmitter. I remember thinking, *God, help him to say the right thing*. I knew how lonely it could feel up there with nothing but clouds below, and the vital question of how far under those clouds the ground lay gnawing at you incessantly, magnifying the lost feeling that your last bond with earthly things had been severed for ever. It was the loneliest feeling in the world.

I felt a tremendous bond with that boy in the plane, whose voice quavered a little now as he said, "What do I do first, sir?"

"What does your altimeter say?"

"It reads fifteen hundred feet. The clouds look about five hundred feet below me."

The skipper's voice was incisive now. "Turn to a heading of three hundred and sixty degrees and climb another five hundred feet. Then fly straight and level at an air speed of one hundred knots. When you get squared away there, throttle back, holding the same air speed, until you're letting down about two hundred feet a minute. You can check your rate of descent on an instrument just above your right knee. Memorize the attitude of the plane, the instruments, everything—because that's the way you'll want it to be when you're in the soup. Practise it where you can see what you're doing, and ask questions. O.K.?"

"I've got it, sir. I'll try it."

Out of the window the noise of the motor seemed to be fainter.

"Make a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn," said the skipper. "How's it going?"

The voice was faltering a little more now. "I think I know what to do; I just hope I can do it. Let me practise a few more times."

Five minutes ticked interminably by. The officers in the tower shifted from one foot to the other. The C.O. perspired. And Three-two-three practised and asked questions.

Finally the skipper said into the transmitter, "Right, we'll have to get on with it. Want to change your mind about the parachute? They never fail."

The cadet voice became incisive. "No, sir, I'm ready now."

"O.K. Climb up well above the overcast and get your instruments and your rate of let-down set. Then just keep all those things constant when you hit the soup. Remember, your stick controls your air speed. If it starts to build up, ease back on the stick. But try to keep your air speed right at a hundred knots. Don't make any violent corrections or get panicky when you don't have a reference point. Don't look around you and don't trust your senses. Just keep your eyes on the instruments and keep them steady where you want them. Ready?"

"Yes, sir."

The skipper swallowed, made a false start, cleared his throat and started again. "Here we go. We can hear the plane clearly now. Hold your present heading and trim up your plane for the let-down. Tell me when you've started letting down, but don't try to talk to me after you hit the overcast. Just concentrate on your instruments then."

"I'm coming down," said the familiar cadet voice, now strangely calm. "My instruments seem to be O.K. I'll be in the overcast in about thirty seconds. Stay with me, sir."

If the instruments were right and he held his rate of descent constant, he should break through in three to four minutes in a very gentle glide. The skipper kept talking, cajoling, explaining, encouraging. The silence from the other end was ominous. The skipper covered the transmitter and made a sweeping gesture with his free hand.

"Keep a lookout in every direction. If you spot him breaking through, yell—quick."

Then back to the transmitter. Time hung suspended in an eight-hundred-foot bank of clouds. I had the feeling that every man present, in his own way, was up there with this kid, willing him what to do. I know that's what I was doing. So that only a repeated, concerted, happy shout penetrated my consciousness. "There he is! He's broken through!"

In the haze in the middle distance was a plane.

"We can see you!" the skipper shouted into the transmitter; then, abashed, he modulated his tone to a businesslike pitch. "Take a heading of two hundred and seventy and come on in. You're headed into the wind and down the right runway. The field is clear. Acknowledge."

He put the transmitter down, grinning with relief. But, strangely, there was no answer. The plane, clearly visible now, was approaching the end of the runway. He came in, nose cocked high, and touched down perfectly. I could see a hand wave from the cockpit as the plane reached the middle of the

runway. The professional perfection of the landing and the almost casual wave of the hand suddenly chilled me and set my insides to churning. As the plane turned to taxi in, we could see for the first time the number on its side.

The skipper clutched the schedule sheet with a look of overwhelming horror. I didn't have to look at the schedule. The plane that had just landed was the missing instructor's. Outside, there was no sound.

"So help me," cried the skipper, "I've crashed him out in the middle of nowhere!"

He stood, looking down at the taxi-ing plane as if by sheer desire he could change the number on its side. The silence in the tower was intense.

Then the executive officer said quietly, "Let's get some officers out to Field Twenty-one. We can keep under the stuff, and maybe we can find him."

He threw an arm over the skipper's shoulder and we started to file from the room, when suddenly, wonderfully, that same soft voice came with shattering clarity over the squadron radio.

"Say, sir," it said, "you landed me at the wrong field. I broke through all right, like you said, and I saw a runway and I got down O.K. But once I got down, I saw it was the wrong place. This looks like one of our practice fields. What should I do now?"

The skipper's eyes were at once sad and grateful. He handed the transmitter to me without a word and walked wearily out of the room. There was an audible letting out of breath behind me.

I picked up the transmitter. "Just stay where you are, Three-two-three!" I said. "For Pete's sake, just stay where you are!"



GUILT-EDGED

*He who is ridden by a conscience
Worries about a lot of nonscience ;
He without benefit of scruples
His fun and income soon quadruples.*

OGDEN NASH

A. A. Milne had a gift for comedy with a touch of fantasy and a gentle philosophy all his own—though the Winnie-the-Pooh books were described as Imperialist warmongering literature behind the Iron Curtain! He started writing crime stories after reading Sherlock Holmes, whose unnerving deductions seemed not so much brilliant as downright lucky! Writing murder stories, he reckoned, must be easy . . .

NEARLY PERFECT

By A. A. MILNE

“KINDNESS doesn’t always pay,” said Coleby, “and I can tell you a very sad story that proves it.”

“Kindness is its own reward,” I said. I knew that somebody else would say it if I didn’t.

“The reward in this case was the hangman’s rope. Which is what I was saying.”

“Is it a murder story?”

“Very much so.”

“Good.”

“What was the name of the kind gentleman?” asked Sylvia.

“Julian Crayne.”

“And he was hanged?”

“Very unfairly, or so he thought. And if you will listen to the story instead of asking silly questions, you can say whether you agree with him.”

“How old was he?”

“About thirty.”

“Good-looking?”

“Not after he was hanged. Do you want to hear this story, or don’t you?”

“ Yes! ” said everybody.
So Coleby told us the story.

Julian Crayne (he said) was an unpleasantly smooth young man who lived in the country with his Uncle Marius. He should have been working, but he disliked work. He disliked the country, too, but a suggestion that Julian should help the export drive in London—with the aid of a handsome allowance from Marius—met with an unenthusiastic response even when Julian threw in an offer to come down regularly for weekends and bring some of his friends with him. Marius didn't particularly like his nephew, but he liked having him about.

Rich, elderly bachelors often become bores, and bores prefer to have somebody at hand who cannot escape. Marius did not intend to let Julian escape. To have nobody to talk to through the week, and then to have a houseful of rowdy young people at the weekend, none of whom wanted to listen to him, was not his idea of pleasure. He had the power over his nephew that money gives, and he preferred to use it.

“ It will all come to you when I die, my boy,” he said, “ and until then you won't grudge a sick old man the pleasure of your company.”

“ Of course not,” said Julian. “ It was only that I was afraid you were getting tired of me.”

If Marius had really been a sick old man, any loving nephew such as Julian might have been content to wait. But Marius was a sound sixty-five, and in that very morning's newspaper there had been talk of somebody at Runcorn who had just celebrated his hundred-and-fifth birthday. Julian didn't know where Runcorn was, but he could add forty years to his own age, and ask himself what the devil would be the use of this money at seventy; whereas now, with a hundred and fifty thousand pounds in the bank and all life to come—Well, you can see for yourself how the thing would look to him.

I don't know if any of you have ever wondered about how to murder an uncle—an uncle whose heir and only relation you are. As we all know, the motives for murder are many. Revenge, passion, gain, fear, or simply the fact that you have seen the fellow's horrible face in the paper so often that you feel it to be almost a duty to eliminate it. The only person I have ever wanted to murder is—Well, I won't mention names, because I may do it yet. But the point is that the police, in their stolid, unimaginative way, always look first for the money motive, and if the money motive is there, you are practically in the bag.

So you see the very difficult position in which Julian was

placed. He lived alone with his uncle, he was his uncle's heir, and his uncle was a very rich man. However subtly he planned, the dead weight of that hundred and fifty thousand pounds was against him.

Any other man might push Marius into the river, and confidently wait for a verdict of accidental death; but not Julian. Any other man might place a tablet of some untraceable poison in the soda-mint bottle, and look for a certificate of "Death from Natural Causes;" but not Julian. Any other man might tie a string across the top step of the attic stairs—But I need not go on. You see, as Julian saw, how terribly unfair it was. He used to lie awake night after night thinking how unfair it was, and how delightfully easy it would be if it weren't for that hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

The trouble was that he had nobody in whom to confide. He wished now, and for the first time, that he were married. With a loving wife to help him, how blithely they could have pursued, hand in hand, the search for the foolproof plan. What a stimulant to his brain would have been some gentle, fair-haired creature of the intelligence of the average policeman, who would point out the flaws and voice the suspicions the plan might raise. In such a delicate matter as this, two heads were better than one, even if the other head did nothing but listen with its mouth slightly ajar.

Unfortunately, the only person available was his uncle.

What he had to find—alone, if so it must be—was an alternative suspect to himself; somebody, in the eyes of the police, with an equally good motive. But what other motive could there be for getting rid of such an estimable man as Marius Crayne? A bore, yes; but would the average Inspector recognize boredom as a reasonable motive? Even if he did, it would merely be an additional motive for Julian.

There was, of course, the possibility of "framing" somebody, a thing they were always doing in detective stories. But the only person in a position to be framed was old John Coppard, the gardener, and the number of footprints, fingerprints, blunt instruments, and blood-stained handkerchiefs with the initials J.C. on them that would be necessary to offset the absence of motive was more than Julian cared to contemplate.

I have said that Uncle Marius was a bore. Bores can be divided into two classes: those who have their own particular subject, and those who don't need a subject. Marius was in the former, and less offensive class.

Shortly before his retirement (he was in the tea business), he

had brought off a remarkable double. He had filled in his first football-pool form "just to see how it went," distributing the numbers and the crosses in an impartial spirit, and had posted it "just for fun." He followed this up by taking over a lottery ticket from a temporarily embarrassed but rather intimidating gentleman whom he had met on a train. The result being what it was, Marius was convinced that he had a flair—as he put it, "a nose for things." So when he found that through the long winter evenings—and, indeed, during most of the day—there was nothing to do in the country but read detective stories, it soon became obvious to him that he had a nose for crime.

Well, it was this nose poor Julian had had to face. It was bad enough, whenever a real crime was being exploited in the papers, to listen to his uncle's assurance that once again Scotland Yard was at fault, as it was obviously the mother-in-law who had put the arsenic in the gooseberry tart; it was much more boring when the murder had taken place in the current detective story, and Marius was following up a confused synopsis of the first half with his own analysis of the clues.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, this fellow—I forget his name for a moment—Carmichael, something like that—had met the girl, Doris—I mean Phyllis—had met Phyllis accidentally in Paris some years before—well, a year or two, the exact time doesn't matter—it was just that she and this fellow, what did I call him, Arbuthnot . . . ?"

And it was at just such a moment as this that Julian was suddenly inspired.

"You know, Uncle Marius," he said, "you ought to write a detective story."

Marius laughed self-consciously, and said he didn't know about that.

"Of course you could! You're just the man. You've got a flair for that sort of thing, and you wouldn't make the silly mistakes all these other fellows make."

"Oh, I dare say I should be all right with the deduction and induction and so on—that's what I'm really interested in—but I've never thought of myself as a writer. There's a bit of a knack to it, you know. More in your line than mine, I should have thought."

"Uncle, you've said it!" cried Julian. "We'll write it together. Two heads are better than one. We can talk it over every evening and criticize each other's suggestions. What do you say?"

Marius was delighted with the idea. So, of course, was Julian. He had found his collaborator.

Give me a drink, somebody.

Yes (went on Coleby, wiping his mouth), I know what you are expecting. Half of you are telling yourselves that, ironically enough, it was Uncle who thought of the foolproof plan for murder that Nephew put into execution; and the rest of you are thinking what much more fun it would be if Nephew thought of the plan, and, somewhat to his surprise, Uncle put it into execution.

Actually, it didn't happen quite like that.

Marius, when it came to the point, had nothing much to contribute. But he knew what he liked. For him, one murder in a book was no longer enough. There must be two, the first one preferably at a country house party, with plenty of suspects. Then, at a moment when he is temporarily baffled, the Inspector receives a letter inviting him to a secret rendezvous at midnight, where the writer will be waiting to give him important information. He arrives to find a dying man, who is just able to gasp out "Horace" (or was it Hoxton?) before expiring in his arms. The murderer has struck again!

"You see the idea, my boy? It removes any doubt in the reader's mind that the first death was accidental, and provides the detective with a second set of clues. By collating the two sets—"

"You mean," asked Julian, "that it would be taken for granted that the murderer was the same in the two cases?"

"Well, of course, my dear boy, of course!" said Marius, surprised at the question. "What else? The poacher, or whoever it was, had witnessed the first murder but had foolishly given some hint of his knowledge to others—possibly in the bar of the local public house. Naturally the murderer has to eliminate him before the information can be passed on to the police."

"Naturally," said Julian thoughtfully. "Yes . . . Exactly . . . You know"—and he smiled at his uncle—"I think something might be done on those lines."

For there, he told himself happily, was a foolproof plan. First, commit a completely motiveless murder, of which he could not possibly be suspected. Then, which would be easy, encourage Uncle Marius to poke his "nose for things" into the case, convince him that he and he alone had found the solution, and persuade him to make an appointment with the local Inspector. And then, just before the Inspector arrives, "strike again." It was, as he was accustomed to say when posing as an ex-fighter pilot in Piccadilly bars, a piece of cake.

It may seem to some of you that in taking on this second murder Julian was adding both to his difficulties and his moral responsibility.

But you must remember that through all these months of doubt he had been obsessed by one thing only, the intolerable burden of motive, so that suddenly to be rid of it, and to be faced with a completely motiveless killing, gave him an exhilarating sense of freedom in which nothing could go wrong. He had long been feeling that such a murder would be easy. He was now persuaded that it would be blameless.

The victim practically selected himself, and artistically, Julian liked to think, was one of whom Uncle Marius would have approved.

A mile or two away at Birch Hall lived an elderly gentleman by the name of Corphew. Not only was he surrounded by greedy relations of both sexes, but in his younger days he had lived a somewhat mysterious life in the East. It did not outrage credibility to suppose that, as an innocent young man, he might have been mixed up in some Secret Society, or, as a more experienced one, might have robbed some temple of its most precious jewel.

Though no dark men had been seen loitering in the neighbourhood lately, it was common knowledge that Sir George had a great deal of money to leave and was continually altering or threatening to alter his will; and in short, his situation fulfilled all the conditions Uncle Marius demanded of a good detective story.

At the moment Julian had no personal acquaintance with Sir George. Though, of course, they would have to be in some sort of touch with each other at the end, his first idea was to remain discreetly outside the family circle. Later reflection, however, told him that in this case he would qualify as one of those mysterious strangers who were occasionally an alternative object of suspicion for the police—quite effectively, because Julian was of a dark, even swarthy, complexion.

It would be better, he felt, to be recognized as a friendly acquaintance; obviously harmless, obviously with nothing to gain, even something to lose, by Sir George's death.

In making this acquaintance with his victim, Julian was favoured by fortune. Rejecting his usual method of approach to a stranger (an offer to sell him some shares in an oil well in British Columbia), he was presenting himself at the Hall as the special representative of a paper interested in Eastern affairs, when he heard a cry for help from a little coppice that bordered the drive. Sir George, it seemed, had tripped over a root and sprained his ankle.

With the utmost good will, Julian carried him up to the house. When he left an hour later, it was with a promise to drop in on a

bedridden Sir George the next day, and play a game of chess with him.

Julian was no great chess player, but he was sufficiently intimate with the pieces to allow Sir George the constant pleasure of beating him. Between games, he learned all he could of his host's habits and the family's members.

There seemed to him to be several admirable candidates for chief suspect, particularly a younger brother of sinister aspect called Eustace, who had convinced himself that he was to be the principal legatee. Indeed, the possibility of framing Eustace did occur to him, but he remembered in time that a second framing for the murder of Marius would then be necessary, and might easily be impracticable. Let them sort it out. The more suspects the better.

Any morbid expectations you may now have of a detailed account of the murder of Sir George Corphew will not be satisfied.

It is enough to say that it involved the conventional blunt instrument, and took place at a time when at least some of the family would not be likely to have an alibi. Julian was not at this time an experienced murderer, and he would have been the first to admit that he had been a little careless about footprints, fingerprints, and cigarette ashes. But as he would never be associated with the murder, this did not matter.

All went as he had anticipated. A London solicitor had produced a will in which all the family was heavily involved, and the Inspector had busied himself with their alibis, making it clear that he regarded each one with the liveliest suspicion. Moreover, Uncle Marius was delighted to pursue his own line of investigation, which, after hovering for a moment round the Vicar, was now rapidly leading to a denunciation of an undergardener called Spratt.

"Don't put anything on paper," said Julian kindly. "It might be dangerous. Ring up the Inspector, and ask him to come in and see you tonight. Then you can tell him all about it."

"That's a good idea, my boy," said Marius. "That's what I'll do."

But, as it happened, the Inspector was already on his way. A local solicitor had turned up with a new will, made only a few days before.

"In return for his kindness in playing chess with an old man," as he put it, Sir George had made Julian Crayne his sole legatee.

THE TRESPASSERS

By NIGEL KNEALE

THE estate agent kept an uncomfortable silence until we reached his car. "Frankly, I wish you hadn't got wind of that," he said. "Don't know how you did; I thought I had the whole thing carefully disposed of. Please get in."

He pulled his door shut and frowned. "It put me in a rather awkward spot. I suppose I'd better tell you all I know about that case, or you'd be suspecting me of heaven-knows-what kind of chicanery in your own deal."

As we set off to see the property I was interested in, he shifted the cigarette to the side of his mouth. "It's quite a distance, so I can tell you on the way there," he said. "We'll pass the very spot, as a matter of fact, and you can see it for yourself. Such as there is to see . . ."

It was way back before the war, the estate agent said. At the height of the building boom. You remember how it was: ribbon development in full blast everywhere; speculative builders sticking things up almost overnight. Though at least you could get a house when you wanted it in those days.

I've always been careful what I handle, I want you to understand that. Then one day I was handed a packet of coast-road bungalows, for letting. Put up by one of these gone-tomorrow firms, and bought by a local man. I can't say I exactly jumped for joy, but for once the things looked all right—and business is inclined to be business.

The desirable residence you heard about stood at the end of the row. Actually, it seemed to have the best site. On a sort of natural platform, as it were, raised above road level and looking straight out over the sea.

Like all the rest, it had a simple layout—two bedrooms, lounge, living-room, kitchen, bathroom. Red tiled roof, roughcast walls. Ornamental portico, garden strip all round. Sufficiently far from town, but with all conveniences.

It was taken by a man named Pritchard. He was a cinema

★ Quiet, thirty-six-year-old Nigel Kneale, creator of spine-freezing Quatermass, conjures up his bugaboos and monsters within the four walls of a small Kensington flat. A belief in spooks no doubt helps: "We Manxmen all believe in the Little People . . ." First experiment in congealing the blood was an adaptation of an American science fiction story for T.V. But that was plain, simple horror: he feels more at home with the weirder terrors of Thingness!



projectionist, I think. Wife, a boy of ten or so, and a rather younger daughter. Oh—and a dog, one of those black, lop-eared animals. They christened the place "Minuke," M-I-N-U-K-E . . . My Nook. Yes, that's what I thought too. And not even the miserable excuse of its being phonetically correct.

Well, at the start everything seemed quite jolly. The Pritchards settled in and busied themselves with rearing a privet hedge and shoving flowers in. They'd paid the first quarter in advance, and as far as I was concerned were out of the picture for a bit.

Then about a fortnight after they'd moved in, I had a telephone call from Mrs. P. to say there was something odd about the kitchen tap. Apparently the thing had happened twice. The first time was when her sister was visiting them, and tried to fill the kettle: no water would come through for a long time, then suddenly it squirted violently and almost soaked the woman.

I gather the Pritchards hadn't really believed this—thought she was trying to find fault with their little nest. It had never happened before, and she couldn't make it happen again.

Then about a week later it did. With Mrs. Pritchard this time. After her husband had examined the tap and could find nothing wrong with it, he decided the water supply must be faulty, so they got on to me.

I went round personally, as it was the first complaint from any of these bungalows. The tap seemed normal and I remember asking if the schoolboy son could have been experimenting with their main stopcock, when Mrs. Pritchard, who had been fiddling with the tap, suddenly said, "Quick, look at this! It's off now!" They were quite cocky about its happening when I was there.

It really was odd. I turned the tap to the limit, but—not a drop! Not even the sort of gasping gurgle you hear when the supply is turned off at the main. After a couple of minutes, though, it came on. Water shot out with, I should say, about ten times normal force, as if it had been held under pressure. Then gradually it died down and ran steadily.

Both children were in the room with us until we all dodged out of the door to escape a soaking; so they couldn't have been up to any tricks. I promised the Pritchards to have the pipes checked. Before returning to town, I called at the next two bungalows in the row: neither of the tenants had had any trouble at all with the water. I thought that localized it, at least.

When I reached my office there was a telephone message waiting from Pritchard. I rang him back and he was obviously annoyed. "Look here," he said, "not ten minutes after you left, we've had something else happen! The wall of the large bedroom's cracked from top to bottom. Big pieces of plaster fell, and the bed's in a terrible mess." And then he said, "You wouldn't have got me in a jerry-built place like this if I'd known!"

I had plasterers on the job next morning, and the whole water supply to "Minuke" under examination. For about three days there was peace. The tap behaved itself, and absolutely nothing was found to be wrong.

I was annoyed at what seemed to have been unnecessary expenditure. It looked as if the Pritchards were going to be difficult—and I've had my share of that type: fault-finding cranks occasionally carry eccentricity to the extent of a little private destruction, to prove their point. I was on the watch from now on.

Then it came again.

Pritchard rang me at my home, before nine in the morning. His voice sounded a bit shaky.

"For God's sake can you come round here right away?" he said. "Tell you about it when you get here." And then he said, almost fiercely, but quietly and close to the mouthpiece, "There's something damned queer about this place!" Dramatizing is a typical feature of all cranks, I thought, but particularly the little mousy kind, like Pritchard.

I went to "Minuke" and found that Mrs. Pritchard was in bed, in a state of collapse. The doctor had given her a sleeping dose.

Pritchard told me a tale that was chiefly remarkable for the expression on his face as he told it.

I don't know if you're familiar with the layout of that type of bungalow. The living-room is in the front of the house, with the kitchen behind it. To get from one to the other you have to use the little hallway, through two doors. But for convenience at meal-times there's a serving-hatch in the wall. A small wooden door slides up and down over the hatch-opening.

"The wife was just passing a big plate of bacon and eggs through from the kitchen," Pritchard told me, "when the hatch door came down on her wrists. I saw it and I heard her yell. I thought the cord must've snapped, so I said, 'All right, all right!' and went to pull it up, because it's only a light wooden frame." Pritchard was a funny colour, and as far as I could judge it was genuine.

"Do you know, it wouldn't come! I got my fingers under it and heaved, but it might have weighed two hundredweight. Once it gave an inch or so, and then pressed harder. That was it—it was pressing down! I heard the wife groan. I said, 'Hold on!' and nipped round through the hall. When I got into the kitchen she was on the floor, fainted.

"And the hatch door was hitched up as right as ninepence. That gave me a turn!" He sat down, quite deflated: it didn't appear to be put on. Still, ordinary neurotics can be almost as troublesome as out-and-out cranks.

I tested the hatch gingerly. The cords were sound and it ran easily.

"Possibly a bit stiff at times, being new," I said. "They're apt to jam if you're rough with them." And then, "By the way, just what were you hinting on the phone?"

He looked at me. It was warm sunlight outside, with a bus passing. Normal enough to take the mike out of Frankenstein's monster. "Never mind," he said, and gave a sheepish half-grin. "Bit of—well, funny construction in this house, though, eh?"

I'm afraid I was rather outspoken with him. Apart from any

nonsense about a month-old bungalow being haunted, I was determined to clamp down on this "jerry-building" talk. Perhaps I was beginning to have doubts myself.

I wrote straight off to the building company when I'd managed to trace them—they were busy developing an arterial road three counties away. I dare say my letter was on the insinuating side: I think I asked if they had any record of difficulties in the construction of this bungalow.

At any rate, I got a sniffy reply by return, stating that the matter was out of their hands: in addition, their records were not available for discussion. Blind alley.

Meanwhile, things at "Minuke" had worsened to a really frightening degree. I dreaded the phone ringing. One morning the two Pritchards senior awoke to find that nearly all the bedroom furniture had been moved around, including the bed they had been sleeping in. They had felt absolutely nothing. Food became suddenly and revoltingly decomposed. All the chimney pots had come down, not just into the garden, but on the far side of the high road, except one that appeared, pulverized, on the living-room floor.

I managed to find a local man who had been employed during the erection of the bungalows—he had worked only on the foundations of "Minuke," but what he had to say was interesting.

They had found the going slow because of striking a layer of enormous flat stones, apparently trimmed slate, but as the site was otherwise excellent they pressed on, using the stone as foundation where it fitted in with the plan, and laying down rubble where it didn't.

The concrete skin over the rubble—my ears burned when I heard about that, I can tell you—this wretched so-called concrete had cracked, or shattered, several times. Which wasn't entirely surprising, if it had been laid as he described. The flat stones, he said, had not been seriously disturbed. A workmate had referred to them as "a giant's grave," so it was possibly an old burial mound. Norse, perhaps—those are fairly common along this coast—or even very much older.

Apart from this—I'm no diehard sceptic, I may as well confess—I was beginning to admit modest theories about a poltergeist. There were two young children in the house, and the lore has it that kids are often unconsciously connected with phenomena of that sort, though usually adolescents. Still, in the real-estate profession you have to be careful, and if I could see the Pritchards safely off the premises without airing these possibilities, it might be kindest to the bungalow's future.

I went to "Minuke" the same afternoon.

It was certainly turning out an odd nook. I found a departing policeman on the doorstep. That morning the back door had been burst in by a hundredweight or so of soil, and Mrs. Pritchard was trying to convince herself that a practical joker had it in for them. The policeman had taken some notes, and was giving vague advice about "civil action," which showed that he was out of his depth.

Pritchard looked very tired, almost ill. "I've got leave from my job to look after the children," he said, when we were alone. I thought he was wise. He had given his wife's illness as the reason, and I was glad of that.

"I don't believe in—unnatural happenings," he said.

I agreed with him, non-committally.

"But I'm afraid of what ideas the kids might get. They're both at impressionable ages, y'know."

I recognized the symptoms without disappointment. "You mean, you'd rather move elsewhere," I said.

He nodded. "I like the district, mind you. But what I—"

There was a report like a gun in the very room.

I found myself with both arms up to cover my face. There were tiny splinters everywhere, and a dust of fibre in the air. The door had exploded. Literally.

To hark back to constructional details, it was one of those light, hollow frame-and-plywood jobs. As you'll know, it takes considerable force to splinter plywood: and this was in tiny fragments. The oddest thing was that we had felt no blast effect.

In the next room I heard their dog howling. Pritchard was as stiff as a poker.

"I felt it!" he said. "I felt this lot coming. I've got to knowing when something's likely to happen. It's all around!"

Of course I began to imagine I'd sensed something too, but I doubt if I really had; my shock came with the crash. Mrs. Pritchard was in the doorway by this time with the kids behind her. He motioned them out and grabbed my arm.

"The thing is," he whispered, "that I can still feel it, stronger than ever! Look, will you stay at home tonight, in case I need—well, in case things get worse? I can phone you."

On my way back I called at the town library and managed to get hold of a volume on supernatural possession and what-not. Yes, I was committed now. But the library didn't specialize in that line, and when I opened the book at home, I found it was very little help. "Vampires of South-Eastern Europe" kind of stuff.

I came across references to something called an "elemental," which I took to be a good deal more vicious and destructive than

any poltergeist. A thoroughly nasty form of manifestation, if it existed. Those Norse gravestones were fitting into the picture uncomfortably well; it was fashionable in those days to be buried with all the trimmings, human sacrifices and even more unmentionable attractions.

But I read on. After half a chapter on zombies and Rumanian werewolves, the whole thing seemed so fantastic that I settled down with a whisky, and began to work out methods of exploding somebody's door as a practical joke. Even a totally certifiable joker would be likelier than vampires.

When the phone rang I was hardly prepared for it.

It was a confused, distant voice, gabbling desperately, but I recognized it as Pritchard. "For God's sake, don't lose a second! Get here—it's all hell on earth! Can't you hear it? My God, I'm going crazy!" And in the background I thought I was able to hear something. A sort of bubbling, shushing "wah-wah" noise. Indescribable. But you hear some odd sounds on telephones at any time.

"Yes," I said, "I'll come immediately. Why don't you all leave—" But the line had gone dead.

Probably I've never moved faster. I scrambled out to the car with untied shoes flopping, though I remembered to grab a heavy stick in the hall—whatever use it might be. I drove like fury, heart belting, straight to "Minuke," expecting to see heaven knows what.

But everything looked still and normal there. The moon was up and I could see the whole place clearly. Curtained lights in the windows. Not a sound.

I rang. After a moment Pritchard opened the door. He was quiet and seemed almost surprised to see me.

I pushed inside. "Well?" I said. "What's happened?"

"Not a thing, so far," he said. "That's why I didn't expect—"

I felt suddenly angry. "Look here," I said, "what are you playing at? Seems to me that any hoaxing round here begins a lot nearer home than you'd have me believe!" Then the penny dropped. I saw by the fright in his face that he knew something had gone wrong. That was the most horrible, sickening moment of the whole affair for me.

"Didn't you ring?" I said.

And he shook his head.

I've been in some tight spots. But there was always some concrete, actual business in hand to screw the mind safely down to. I suppose panic is when the sub-conscious breaks loose and everything in your head dashes screaming out. It was only just in

time that I found a touch of the concrete and actual. A child's paintbox on the floor, very watery.

"The children," I said. "Where are they?"

"Wife's just putting the little 'un to bed. She's been restless tonight: just wouldn't go, crying and difficult. Arthur's in the bathroom. Look here, what's happened?"

I told him, making it as short and matter of fact as I could. He looked ghastly. "Better get them dressed and out of here right away," I said. "Make some excuse, not to alarm them."

He'd gone before I finished speaking.

I smoked hard, trying to build up the idea of a hoax in my mind. After all, it could have been. But I knew it wasn't.

Everything looked cosy and normal. Clock ticking. Fire red and mellow. Half-empty cocoa mug on the table. The sound of the sea from beyond the road.

I went through to the kitchen. The dog was there, looking up from its sleeping-basket under the sink. "Good dog," I said, and it wagged its tail.

Pritchard came in from the hall. He jumped when he saw me.

"Getting nervy!" he said. "They won't be long. I don't know where we can go if we—well, if we have to—to leave tonight—"

"My car's outside," I told him. "I'll fix you up. Look here, did you ever hear things? Odd noises?" I hadn't told him that part of the telephone call.

He looked at me so oddly I thought he was going to collapse.

"I don't know," he said. "Can you? At this moment?"

I listened. "No," I said. "The clock on the shelf. The sea. Nothing else. No."

"The sea," he said, barely whispering. "But you can't hear the sea in this kitchen!"

He was close to me in an instant. Absolutely terrified. "Yes, I have heard this before! I think we all have. I said it was the sea, so as not to frighten them. But it isn't! And I recognized it when I came in here just now. That's what made me start. It's getting louder: it does that."

He was right. Like slow breathing. It seemed to emanate from inside the walls, not at a particular spot, but everywhere. We went into the hall, then the front room: it was the same there. Mixed with it now was a sort of thin crying.

"That's Nellie," Pritchard said. "The dog. She always whimpers when it's on—too scared to howl. My God, I've never heard it as loud as this before!"

"Hurry them up, will you!" I almost shouted. He went.

The "breathing" was ghastly. Slobbering. Stertorous, I

think the term is. And faster. Oh, yes, I recognized it. The background music to the phone message. My skin was pure ice.

"Come along!" I yelled. I switched on the little radio to drown the noise. The old National Programme, as it was in those days, for late dance music. Believe it or not, what came through that loudspeaker was the same vile sighing noise, at double the volume. And when I tried to switch off, it stayed the same.

The whole bungalow was trembling. The Pritchards came running in, she carrying the little girl. "Get them into the car," I shouted. We heard glass smashing somewhere.

Above our heads there was an almighty thump. Plaster showered down.

Halfway out of the door the little girl screamed, "Nellie! Where's Nellie? Nellie, Nellie!"

"The dog!" Pritchard moaned. "Oh, curse it!" He dragged them outside.

I dived for the kitchen, where I'd seen the animal. Plaster was springing out of the walls in painful showers. In the kitchen I found water everywhere, one tap squirting like a fire-hose and the other missing, the water belching across the window from a torn end of pipe.

"Nellie!" I called.

Then I saw the dog. It was lying near the oven, quite stiff. Round its neck was twisted a piece of painted piping with the other tap on the end.

Sheer funk got me then.

The ground was moving under me. I bolted down the hall, nearly bumped into Pritchard. I yelled and shoved. I could actually feel the house at my back.

We got outside. The noise was like a dreadful snoring, with rumbles and crashes thrown in. One of the lights went out. "Nellie's run away," I said, and we all got into the car, the kids bawling. I started up. People were coming out of the other bungalows—they're pretty far apart and the din was just beginning to make itself felt.

Pritchard mumbled, "We can stop now. Think it'd be safe to go back and grab some of the furniture?" Just as if he was at a fire—but I don't think he knew what he was doing.

"Daddy—look!" screeched the boy.

We saw it. The chimney of "Minuke" was going up in a horrible way. In the moonlight it seemed to grow, quite slowly, to about sixty feet, like a giant crooked finger. And then it burst. I heard bricks thumping down. Somewhere somebody screamed.

There was a sudden glare like an ungodly great lightning flash. Of course we were dazzled, but I thought I saw the whole of "Minuke" fall suddenly and instantaneously flat, like a swatted fly. I probably did, because that's what happened, anyway.

There isn't much more to tell.

Nobody was really hurt, and we were able to put down the whole thing to a serious electrical fault. Main fuses had blown throughout the whole district, which helped this theory out.

There wasn't much recognizably left of "Minuke." But some of the bits were rather unusual. Knots in pipes, for instance—I buried what was left of the dog myself. Wood and brick cleanly sliced. Small quantities of completely powdered metal. The bath had been squashed flat, like tin foil. In fact Pritchard was lucky to land the insurance money for his furniture.

My professional problem, of course, remained. The plot where the wretched place had stood. I managed to persuade the owner it wasn't ideal for building on. Incidentally, lifting those stones might reveal something to somebody some day—but not to me, thank you!

I think my eventual solution showed a touch of wit: I let it very cheaply as a scrap-metal dump.

I know I've never been able to make any sense out of it. I hate telling you all this stuff, because it must make me seem either a simpleton or a charlatan. In so far as there's any circumstantial evidence in looking at the place, you can see it in a moment or two. Here's the coast road . . .

The car pulled up at a bare spot beyond a sparse line of bungalows. The space was marked by a straggling, tufty square of privet bushes. Inside I could see a tangle of rusting iron: springs, a car chassis, oil drums.

"The hedge keeps it from being too unsightly," said the estate agent, as we crossed to it. "See—the remains of the gate."

A few half-rotten slats dangled from an upright. One still bore part of a chrome-plated name. "MI—" and, a little farther on, "K."

"Nothing worth seeing now," he said. I peered inside. "Not that there ever was much—Look out!"

I felt a violent push. In the same instant something zipped past my head and crashed against the car behind. "My God! Went right at you!" gasped the agent.

It had shattered a window of the car and gone through the open door opposite. We found it in the road beyond, sizzling on the tarmac.

A heavy steel nut, white-hot.

She was a danger to him now and there was no time to lose . . .

HIDE MY EYES

By MARGERY ALLINGHAM

WHEN Mrs. Polly Tassie—a mum if ever there was one—invited her young niece Annabelle to stay, she cherished match-making designs on behalf of Gerry Hawker, a protégé who needed a steadying hand. In the face of her love Gerry had defrauded her, but believing him incapable of serious crime she had taken no action, asking her old solicitor friend Matthew Phillipson to talk to him.

Meanwhile Annabelle's friend Richard Waterfield had kept a slightly suspicious watch as she arrived at Polly's home, a house and curio museum in a London square named Garden Green. Seeing Gerry leave the house after Annabelle's arrival he had been curious enough to follow, and the two became acquainted at a barber's shop where Gerry was known as Major Chad-Horder. They were still together in the late afternoon, when Gerry contrived to falsify the time, left Richard on a pretext at the Tenniel Hotel, and made his way to Phillipson's office. There he shot the old man and took his wallet.

The police in the meantime were watching Garden Green. Evidence gathered by Superintendent Luke had linked the district with a recent series of dreadful crimes, including the murder of a pawnbroker at his office near Goff's Place. An old-fashioned country bus had been seen there on the night of the murder, an elderly couple apparently asleep inside. A constable on duty in Garden Green had suggested that the two figures were dummies from Mrs. Tassie's curio museum—and the dummies were now missing.

Meanwhile a chance encounter with an acquaintance on his way back to the Tenniel Hotel had spoilt Gerry's carefully-prepared alibi. His quick brain had contrived another, but later that night, examining the letters from Phillipson's wallet, he realized that Polly had known of his meeting with the dead solicitor. Gerry knew he would have to do something about Polly . . .

At the Tenniel Hotel Richard was waiting . . .

The story continues

"If 'e should come back I'll give 'im your message if you say so," the waiter at the Tenniel said. "But I shouldn't leave no message. I shouldn't say you waited no hour for 'im. You've just met 'im today, 'ave you?"

"Well yes, I have, as a matter of fact." Richard was exasperated. "Have you seen him before?"

The waiter looked round and lowered his voice, "'E come in yesterday, just walked round." There seemed to be some deep significance in this statement. "'E cased the place," he said. "Cased it. Don't you know that word, sir?"

The explanation, so obvious as soon as it was pointed out to him, startled rather than astonished him. An alibi!

"'E left 'ere twenty-five minutes after five," the waiter remarked.

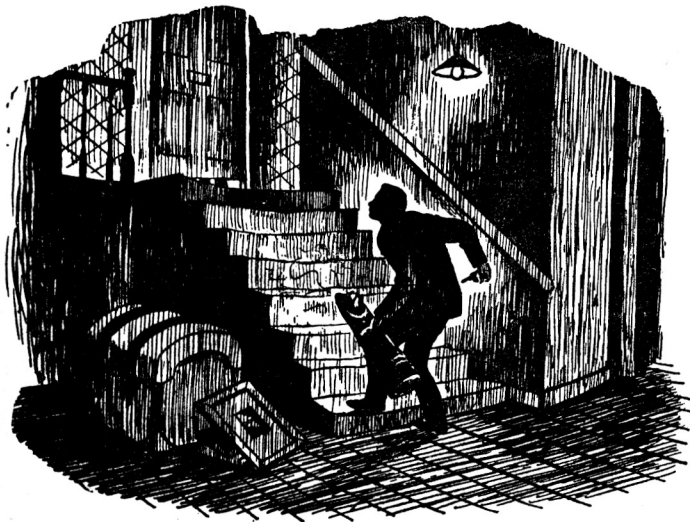
"How do you know?" Richard recalled the wristwatch held out for his inspection, and the repeated insistence that the time was a quarter to six.

The waiter's grey face split into a gap-toothed smile and he jerked his thumb towards the tall archway in the wall behind them.

"I 'ear the glasses," he explained. "Bar opens 'alf past five."

"I see." Richard ran an absent-minded finger round his collar. "Why didn't he come back?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? Maybe things don't go too well. Maybe 'e jus' runs into someone 'oo knows 'im. Forget 'im. You don't know 'im no more."



Richard laughed. Had it not been for the one uncomfortable fact that Gerry had appeared so remarkably at home in the house which had swallowed Annabelle, the advice would have suited him perfectly. As it was, he paid the bill, assured the old man of his gratitude, and went along to the row of telephone boxes.

To his relief he found Mrs. Tassie's number without any difficulty. Annabelle was fetched immediately and as he heard her burbling over the wire, his heart jumped.

"The Aunt's all right," she assured him in reply to his question. "She's an old poppet, Richard, just rather lonely, I expect."

"Can I come round and see you?"

"Not tonight. We're going to the pictures. It's the char's day off and we're eating out."

"Very well." He was trying not to sound disappointed. He could see that amazing new beauty of hers as vividly as if her face were before him. "Listen," he commanded briskly. "Before you go, tell me who is the man, thirtyish, fair, tall, slightly boiled eyes, face haggard-handsome. . ."

"In a sort of trench coat?"

"That's the chap. Know who he is?"

"Yes. Gerry Hawker."

"Horder?"

"No, Hawker. H-a-w-k-e-r. He's a pet of Aunt Polly's."

"Is he? Does he live there?"

"Here? No, of course not. He's just someone she's known and treated as a sort of son for years. She's as romantic as a valentine. I fancy she was hoping to get me off with him."

"Oh God, don't do that."

"Of course not. Don't be silly. But I think that was the idea."

"I see," he said slowly. "Do you expect him back?"

"I don't know. Why, what is all this? What's the matter?"

"Nothing much." Richard's face was hot with anxiety. "However, if you do see him do *not* mention my name, that's really vital. Do you understand?"

"This is all very mysterious and sounds exciting. What do you know about this man Gerry? I'm fascinated."

"I'm not," he said bitterly. "Never mind about him now. I'll ring you tomorrow."

He hung up and stood looking at the silent instrument. As far as he could see, the position was more than awkward and he was not at all sure what he ought to do about it. He had found out almost nothing. As he stood hesitating he suddenly remembered the starting handle he had seen in Gerry's car, and the label upon it. He could see the words clearly in his mind's eye. Hawker. Rolf's Dump.

He went out to the street and asked the way from a young constable, who went to considerable trouble to look it up.

"It's some distance, sir," he announced after study. "East, right round by the Regent's Canal. If I were you I should take a Number Seven bus to Liverpool Street and ask again. Are you

sure you want to go there?" He bent a little to show the page in the street guide. "That's it, Rolf's Dump. There's miles of it, see? All along the canal. It won't be what you might call very salubrious this time of night."

Richard grinned. "I'm afraid I must get there," he said. "Thank you very much. Do you happen to know what sort of place it is?"

"I think you'll find it's parcels of scrap, all owned by different dealers and waiting there for resale. The stuff would come and go by barge, I should say. No trouble at all, sir. Goodnight."

Richard walked on towards the bus stop, hoping he was not making a fool of himself. He realized he was taking a very long chance, but he decided to press on.

Two and a half hours later, with considerable difficulty and against the earnest advice of everybody who had directed him, he had discovered the Dump. It lay, dark and uninviting far beyond the East End, on the other side of a fifteen-foot barrier made partly of board and partly of wire, lining one side of the road on which he walked. For ten minutes now he had seen no living soul, and nothing which looked faintly like a door into the enclosure.

He stumbled on, cursing himself for an idiot, until unexpectedly he came upon a much broader road running at right angles to his own and leading into the Dump itself. The way was barred by a pair of stout doors.

For a moment he thought he was defeated until he discovered a small postern built into the left-hand door. It opened to his touch and he was about to step forward when a terrier, tethered just inside, sprang up barking hysterically and a voice, also uncannily near, let out a stream of comment equally violent.

"What d'yer want?" it demanded finally.

"Mr. Hawker." Richard was too startled to invent. The name had been in his mind and he uttered it.

"Orl right." The voice was lowered and had become conversational. "Shut up, Jack! Down, boy. 'E ain't 'ere, I don't think," it continued. "I didn't 'ear 'im come in yet."

The nightwatchman was still a voice in the dark so far as Richard was concerned, although by now he was standing only a few feet away from him.

Richard took two coins silently from his pocket and let the light fall upon their broad silver faces. There was no response. The voice continued to grumble.

"If you don't know where the shed is, I can't show you. I've 'ad plenty of trouble down 'ere already tonight," it said. "The police 'ave been 'ere all day over on the other side of the estate. You would think a gang of labourers could load a ton or two of empty oil drums on to a barge without interfering with what they found be'ind them, wouldn't you?"

"What did they find?" Richard felt in his pocket for a third coin. Again there was no movement as he displayed it, but as he

placed it with the others the chink sounded and response was immediate.

"I don't know if you can see me sitting 'ere, sir." The voice was many shades warmer. "Wait, just a minute." There was a scuffle and a bright light appeared, revealing a little old man sitting in a sentry-box which was entirely composed of old wooden wheels. From under the peak of his cap, which he wore pulled down far on his head, a pair of spectacles with the thickest of lenses peered at Richard hopefully.

The young man offered him the money and almost dropped it. The hand which came out so eagerly missed his own, and there was a moment of confusion before the coins were safely transferred. The man was virtually blind and not admitting it, a discovery which explained a great deal.

"It was because the engine was all right, you see, sir." The old man's tone was confidential.

"The engine?" said Richard, completely at sea.

"The engine of the bus, sir. It started up at once, although it had been there for three years, they say."

Richard did not understand in the least. The nightwatchman tried again. "It was the loaders what found it out," he said hoarsely. "When they went to lunch they 'ad to talk about it in the boozier. One word in a pub and down come the flippin' police, anxious not to miss anything useful."

But Richard was no reader of murder cases and was unaware of any police search for a bus. His interest was solely in Gerry.

"Does Mr. Hawker work here?" he inquired at last.

"Only in 'is shed, private like. 'E don't own anythin' stored 'ere. 'E tunes up racin' cars down 'ere, or limousines." The watchman sounded admiring but vague, and it occurred to Richard that since he had not the evidence of his own eyes, his information could only come from one source. "Sometimes 'e works 'ere at night. O' course I'm only 'ere at night meself. 'E's a feller you can take to, ain't 'e?"

It became clear that this was about as far as they were going to get. Richard turned away to look down the moonlit track which wandered through the nightmare landscape.

"Perhaps I'd better go on down to the shed."

"It ain't far down there. It's in a holler, he tells me. When 'e comes in I'll tell 'im you're there."

Richard thanked him without deep enthusiasm and went off, grateful for the moonlight. Without it the Dump, which was eerie enough in any case, must have been a place of terror.

He strode on doggedly; at any rate he would find out all he could about Mr. Gerry Hawker before he next saw Annabelle.

He came on the shed unexpectedly, and circled it, stamping through the tall twitch grass which grew sparsely on the uneven ground. There was a great deal of rubbish about, he noticed, bricks and old cans and pipes lying in the weeds, and all picked out bright and misshapen in the icy light.

The old-fashioned thumb-latch on the small door lifted, but either a bolt or a padlock secured it inside. He put his shoulder to the peeling painted surface and it gave at once.

The first thing Richard saw, in a shaft of moonlight, was a collection of dusty rubbish of a kind found in most motor workshops. There were tins there, and bottles, a pail on its side, part of a pump, a ball of crumpled paper, a set of rods, and among them, lying open, with its lining pulled out, a white plastic handbag.

Why he should have found the sight of it so sinister Richard never knew, but as he stared at it his heart moved uncomfortably. It looked so fresh, so very unused, and yet so completely ravaged, lying there in the bright moonlight.

He stumbled over something on the floor. He had no torch with him, but with the help of his lighter he discovered that it was a flat slab of polished marble. There were two wooden wine boxes, of the type which Gerry had been carrying round in his Lagonda, lying beside it. Each contained a quantity of ordinary bricks.

He found an inspection lamp lying on a bench, pressed the switch without much hope, and was startled by his success. Not only did the wire-caged lamp light up, but a hanging bulb in the roof sprang into life. He was in a curious barn of a place, much older than he had supposed from its appearance outside. The floor was made of stamped earth, with here and there a patch of brickwork or the ringed flag marking a well-head. A petrol engine, stripped and glistening with oil, stood blocked up on one side of the centre area.

Richard was frightened. The realization shook him. There was something indescribably awful about the smell of the place, something worse than dirt or vermin or the prickling stink of acid. The fact that the shed was lit up and its skylight visible across the dump did not worry him. He was not afraid of Gerry. He thought he was a crook and wanted proof of it, but it had not crossed his mind that his crimes might extend beyond theft in some small form.

Gripping the lamp he went into a further room. The flex attached to the inspection lamp was only just long enough to reach the entrance, and as he turned the lamp towards the far corner he stood transfixed, his skin crawling.

Two old people sitting close together were perched on a plank between two barrels. They did not move. Only the old woman's eyes, which were glassy and bright under a bonnet trimmed with beads, seemed to meet his own.

Richard panicked. The lamp dropped out of his hand, and he ran blindly across the shed and pitched himself out of the door.

As the clear air enveloped him he pulled up, struggling with himself, aware that he must force himself to go back. He was so torn by the conflict that he did not see the two shadows bearing down upon him, and the grip on his arms took him by surprise.

"Now then, now then." The time-honoured police warning was warmly human in the nightmare.

"In there . . ." Richard did not recognize his own voice. "In there. In the corner in the farther room. Two old people just sitting there."

"Are they, by God?" The voice of Superintendent Charles Luke spoke out of the blackness, and his top-heavy form, kite-shaped and powerful, went crashing into the shed.

At the end of the film Polly, who had been several worlds away, turned with a start and smiled at Annabelle.

"Did you enjoy it?" Polly asked.

"Yes, I did. It was so pretty, wasn't it? Awfully silly, though. I mean, fancy not facing it."

"Facing it?" Polly seemed appalled. "What made you say that?"

Annabelle began to laugh. "You wicked old thing, you've been to sleep."

"Not really. I was thinking." Polly picked up her bag briskly. "We'll go along to Mrs. Dominique's for dinner. While I'm there I want to make a telephone call."

"This is terrific fun, Aunt Polly. Who is Mrs. Dominique?"

"Sybylle? Oh, a very old friend of mine. She started this restaurant, the Grotto, just after the First World War. It's been one of the very best of the Soho places ever since."

They were in a taxi now, and Annabelle's murmur held a note of timidity. "Aunt Polly, I don't want to be a beastly expense."

"Well, you're not, girl. I want to see Sybylle."

The Grotto, which had been a favourite restaurant of two generations of discriminating London eaters, was not very large. Its atmosphere was as warm and private as the dining-room in an old-fashioned family house.

In the middle of the wall, at the far end, stood a little cash desk, where Sybylle Dominique sat, keeping an eye on everything.

She was a very small woman, slight and dark-skinned, with a faint moustache, intelligent eyes and unnaturally black hair cut close to her head and worn with a fringe. There were several good diamonds on the small hands.

She looked up as they appeared, and bowed as formally as if Mrs. Tassie was a recent acquaintance. It was a much colder welcome than Annabelle had expected, but gradually she began to recognize the formality for what it was: the fact that everybody concerned knew each other remarkably well made no difference at all to the ritual.

After the meal had been ordered, Polly introduced her niece to the tall sad-eyed maître who turned out to be Peter Dominique, the son of the owner.

"You will go and talk to Mamma, won't you, Polly?" he said earnestly, after shaking hands. "Will you have your coffee in the office with her, perhaps?"

"Yes, I will, Peter, please. I'd like that. But first I must make a telephone call."

"Not before the meal?" He was hurt and shocked. "See, the soup is here. You can telephone from the office when you join Mamma."

Polly glanced at the small enamel pocket watch in her bag. She drank her consommé as quickly as its heat would permit and obviously did not taste it at all.

"You won't mind staying here, will you?" she said to Annabelle. "I want to talk to Sybylle. She's my oldest woman friend, and she's got a very good head. If you live alone as I do you can start imagining all sorts of silly rubbish, until you're terrified of your own shadow."

Annabelle was silent, feeling a little like a puppy which after being a considerable success has suddenly ceased to amuse. Polly was thinking about her no longer, and when the meal was nearly over and Annabelle's ice arrived, she rose to her feet.

In the tiny green-walled office behind the cash-desk, Sybylle Dominique stretched up like a kitten on her toes to take her old friend's face between her hands.

"Ah, my Polly, how good it is to see you. You look like hell, dearest, complete hell. What is the matter, eh? Come and sit down, and tell me all about it."

The two elderly women in their good black clothes sat down together, and there was a pause while a waiter brought them coffee and little glasses.

"I've been watching you," Mrs. Dominique said. "The girl is quite remarkably beautiful, but how old is she?"

"Eighteen."

"Oh, but that is no good at all." Mrs. Dominique spoke flatly. "Have you seen Gerry?"

"Only for a minute or two this morning."

Mrs. Dominique poured the black coffee, and dropped a hand on her old friend's knee.

"Why do you want him to marry?" she demanded. "You like him, and you don't really know this girl. I should make my will in favour of the person I liked best, and forget it."

"Yes." Polly was not listening. "I must telephone Matt Phillipson. I want to get hold of him before he goes to bed."

"Plenty of time. He stays at his club until half past eleven these days."

"Sybylle." Polly turned towards her. "Sybylle, do you remember, quite a long time ago, Gerry and me and some gloves?"

"I remember you suddenly brought out a terrible police picture of a single glove which you'd cut out of the paper. You pushed it over to him and said, 'Aren't those like the gloves I gave you?' And he turned on you as if you'd bitten him." She slid a tiny arm through the other woman's own and squeezed her. "It wasn't very tactful, dear," she said, laughing. "It was something a murderer had left behind."

"Oh no, Sybylle, no!"

"What's happened, Polly? What is it? Come on, out with it."

"Nothing. Honestly, Sybylle." She was making a great effort, forcing herself to meet the inquiring eyes. "Just some silly man who appears to be a detective called, and asked me in a roundabout way if I'd ever bought a pair of men's gloves to give away as a present . . ."

Mrs. Dominique sat looking at her anxiously, true apprehension appearing for the first time on her small face.

"Now you ought to ring up Matt, dear," she said. "He's a real true friend, that man. You can trust him." She went out of the office in her precise, dignified way.

Polly took up the telephone and dialled a number. After a minute or so a voice answered her and her face cleared.

"Hullo, Mrs. Harper. Is Mr. Phillipson in yet? Hullo? Hullo, my dear, what is it? Mrs. Harper, what's the matter? This is Mrs. Tassie. He—*what*? Oh, where? Where? In his office tonight? Shot? Oh no, *no, no, no*!"

Mr. Campion, who was standing next to Charlie Luke in the darkness of Rolf's Dump, thought he had never seen anything so macabre in his life as the two model figures they had arranged in the bus. The single interior light made a faint pool of yellow in the black and silver world, and glimpsed through the front window they were unexpectedly convincing.

"Right," Luke finally said. "Now I think we'll have the principal witness, Sergeant."

"O.K., sir. Shan't be a jiffy. He's outside in the car."

"I should have waited for Donne." Luke's confidential murmur buzzed in Mr. Campion's ear. "The bus murder was in his manor and he did the original homework. He'll be along soon, but they've just come in for another showy homicide up there. Some old legal eagle got himself written off in Minton Terrace this afternoon."

He turned his head quickly as a murmur of voices reached them.

"Now for the witness who saw the bus in Goff's Place," he muttered. "Hold your breath."

A yard or so behind them a strong cockney voice, villainously refined, said distinctly, "Oh yase." Nobody spoke, and he repeated it. "Yase. That's them all right and that's the bus. I'd know it anywhere, anywhere I'd know it." The speaker then moved closer, paused, and presently made a remark which in the circumstances was absolutely terrifying. "The old lady's awake now, I see. Of course she was sleeping when I seen her before, in Goff's Place."

"Half a moment, sir." There was a muttered consultation near the bus, and presently the sergeant appeared inside it and moved the head of the figure nearest the window very slightly, so that the eyes were in shadow. The effect on the witness was violent. He swore abruptly and unprintably, and in an entirely different accent now that the refinement was absent.

"Now *that* I did not know," he said at last, and his tone would have carried conviction even in the Old Bailey. "That's got me, that 'as, right in the wind. Images! 'Strewth, you wouldn't believe it, would yer?" There was a long pause and he suddenly said, "'Ere, what about. . . ?"

"Sergeant, you'll see to this, will you?" said Luke hastily.

He led Mr. Champion back to the shed.

"Old Mrs. Tassie says she threw those figures out of her museum." Luke hesitated. "*She* was on the level though, I thought, didn't you? She knew nothing."

Mr. Champion did not commit himself. He was saved from the necessity by the appearance of the local Inspector from the Canal Lane Station, a compact bustling man called Kinder.

"About young Richard Waterfield, Superintendent," he began. "He's made a full statement, and his proofs of identity are all right. He's a decent kid from a good and influential sort of home, and my instinct is to let him go. He says he spent the day with the man who owns the shed, and began to think he was a crook who was trying to use him to alibi some job between half past five and six. Waterfield may just fancy himself as a detective."

"Same like me," Luke said cheerfully. "Do what you think best, chum. All I want is that when I need him I can have him brought in on a dog lead. I'm expecting Chief Inspector Donne from Tailor Street, by the way. I shall be obliged if he could be told to look for me down here. On the strength of an identification from one bird-headed grill-room hand, I am going to take this shed apart if it costs me my ticket."

The door at the back of the shed was still open, and as they came in Sam May, one of Luke's own men, emerged from the shadow. "There's one or two objects of interest about, sir," he began. "Will you step down here for a minute? Mind the bit of marble as you come."

He led them through to where the figures had been found. A second detective constable was waiting for them. He carried a powerful torch and was directing its beam at a well-head, set in the worn bricks of the floor.

"Is there anything down there?" Luke asked.

"Not a lot, sir. It might be crude oil, to look at it, and Gawd knows how deep it is. It's sludge of some sort, that's certain."

"Huh. Anything else?"

"Nothing conclusive. There are four empty carboys which at one time have contained sulphuric acid, just outside. We found two galvanized tanks in the shed, and there's a stirrup-pump among the junk under the work bench."

"Of course, we're not chemists," murmured the optimistic May in the background. "Give the forensic boys half an hour in here and there's no telling what they might be able to find."

"What else have you rooted up, Samuel?" Luke said.

"Not a lot yet. But there's one or two hopeful things about. Take a look at this, sir."

He pointed to a block of small drawers in rough oil-stained wood, and pulled them out one after another.

Mr. Campion, who was watching, felt a trickle of cold creep down his spine. In one drawer, instead of the expected gritty miscellany of nuts, staples, rings, washers, screw-hooks and eyelets which filled the rest, there was a new cheap lipstick, a complete set of studs, a quantity of steel hairgrips for use on grey hair, a nail file and pair of tweezers combined, a cheap butterfly brooch, a plastic cigarette holder, a key-ring with a medallion attached, a pen-knife with a Masonic emblem etched on it, and a dozen or so other worthless trifles.

Luke stood looking at the drawer, his shoulders drooping. He was moved and angry, and also frustrated.

"Horribly suggestive, but what does any of it prove?" he said savagely. "Damn all."

"There's this, sir." Sam May produced the remnants of the plastic handbag which Richard had first discovered. Luke shook his head.

"Good multiple-store stuff, son," he said. "Made and sold by the million." He broke off abruptly.

Chief Inspector Henry Donne of Tailor Street came quietly into the room.

"Nice little place you've got here, but unaired," he murmured. "I hear two witnesses have already identified the bus."

"Two?" Luke was pleased. "I can uncross my fingers. I'll get you to take a look at what we've got, Henry, and then, if you agree, we'll get Pong Wallis down from the labs and let them take this place to pieces. I've got a chap waiting for the owner at his home address now. The bloke has no idea that we're on to him."

Donne glanced round the shed again. "What connects the man who owns this outfit with the bus?" he inquired.

"The two figures. They were found here. We've got a very interesting statement from the youngster who came here. He is under the impression that he was being used as an alibi, for a period somewhere between five-twenty-five and six this evening. If he's right, the man was up to something about that time in your manor, Henry."

"Mine?"

"Probably. He was based on the Tenniel Hotel. Can you let us have a full list of incidents near there, before the night's out?"

Chief Inspector Donne opened his mouth and closed it again.

"About that time there was a fine drop of homicide going on some four minutes' walk from the Tenniel," he said at last. "A van delivery-man walked into a basement office in Minton Terrace, shot an old solicitor, lifted his wallet, and walked out again. The commissioner heard the shot, but assumed it was the noise made by the box the vanman carried, falling on to the marble floor. What could one put in a wooden wine case so that the row when it hits a marble floor sounds like a gun?"

The idle question died away. His audience, who were looking

at him as if he were something out of science fiction, turned and stared at the marble wash-stand top embedded in the sand, and the wooden boxes and the bricks beside it.

Richard was set down at his Chelsea lodgings by a police car a good fifteen minutes before word came up from Rolf's Dump that he was needed again. But by the time a detective from the Chelsea Division got round to the address, young Mr. Waterfield had left the house once more.

After waiting a discreet few minutes to let the police car get well on its way, he had gone quietly out into the street again and walked across the road to the telephone box at the corner. There was no answer from the number he called, but he was not particularly surprised. Annabelle had said that she and Aunt Polly were going out. His aim was to catch her immediately she came in.

So he strolled on through the deserted late-night streets, calling the number from each group of telephone boxes as he came to them.

He was deeply preoccupied. It had not been easy to keep all mention of Polly's house in Garden Green out of his statement to the police, but he was rewarded by the knowledge that so far, at any rate, Annabelle had not been dragged into anything unpleasant.

By the time he reached the corner of the Park, nearly an hour later, he was used to hearing the telephone bell ringing out in the empty house. But when he reached Park Lane and turned into the first telephone box, the signal he received was the continuous whine which indicates that the line is out of order.

Richard came out of the box frowning. He scarcely hesitated, but set off grimly to walk to Garden Green.

About the same time, on the other side of central London, Sybille Dominique was saying goodnight to Polly.

"Don't worry more than you can help. Take something rather than lie awake," she was murmuring urgently. "That house-keeper of Matt's didn't know a thing. The police hadn't told her. They don't."

"They'd have let her know if it had been suicide or accident," Polly said bluntly.

Sybille Dominique drew a long uneven breath.

"Oh, Polly," she said softly. "Oh, Polly."

"I don't *know* anything, Sybille." Polly's words came painfully. "You understand, dear, don't you?"

"Of course not, my girl, of course not." The tiny crackling voice was full of pity. "Gerry. . ."

"What about Gerry?" Terror flared in Polly's tone, but the whisper was very low.

Sybille's grip on her sleeve tightened. "There's *some* good in that boy or you couldn't love him, dearest," she said . . .

Polly brought Annabelle to say goodnight, and they caught the last Number Fifteen bus from the bottom of Regent Street.

"Annabelle, I want to talk to you." Polly was aware of being brutal. "That is why we've come back by bus. I'm sorry, my dear, but you've got to go home."

There was complete silence for a while, and then the girl said, "Oh. Oh, I see."

It was only too obvious that she did no such thing. Her lovely face wore a mask of blank dismay and her round eyes were full of tears. "Have I done something?"

"No. Circumstances have altered, that's all."

"Oh." There was another long pause and the girl sat up, drawing her hand away and stiffening. "I hope you'll let me come and see you anyhow—sometimes?"

"No, dear, I don't want you to. I want you to go home first thing tomorrow morning, and to put your whole trip up here right out of your mind. I want you to forget that I ever wrote, or that you ever came to see me. I don't want you ever to try to see me again. Is that absolutely clear?"

"But what have I done?"

"Nothing at all. It's entirely my affair. Now let's forget it and enjoy the ride home. Look, that's Selfridges. . ."

They left the bus on the corner of the Barrow Road and went slowly up to the house. The old woman walked heavily and her shoulders were a little bent.

"When we get in," she said, "I want you to go up to my sitting-room, light the gas fire and pull the curtains, and wait for me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to heat some milk. As we drink it I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to be off very early tomorrow. Could you get up at six? . . . Oh, and Annabelle, I don't want you to buy a paper until you get home."

The girl looked at her sharply but she did not ask questions. "Very well," she said.

Polly unlocked the front door and turned on the light.

"Let me get the milk," Annabelle said. She went off to the kitchen.

Polly turned into the tiny room on the right of the hall door, which was practically filled by an old-fashioned roll-top desk with a telephone on it. She took a cheque-book out of her bag and made out a draft to Annabelle for a thousand pounds.

She had put it in an envelope and was rising, when she heard Annabelle pass the door and go upstairs. Her glance fell on the small steel box on the wall into which the telephone cable disappeared. It was a chance in a thousand that she should have noticed it. The cable, which had been wrenched from the box and replaced loosely, came away in her hand. . .

For an instant she looked at it and then, turning abruptly, sped out of the room and up the stairs. As she reached the landing she heard Annabelle's laugh. It was shy but gay, and innocently flattered.

The colour had gone from Mrs. Tassie's lips, but there was no

surprise in her expression by the time she had opened the door and come face to face with the man who had been waiting for her.

Gerry was standing on the hearth rug staring at the girl, the expression of horrified incredulity which had made her laugh still showing in his face. He looked tense and excited. But the thing about him which startled the old woman was that he was without jacket or waistcoat, and the sleeves of his city shirt were rolled up.

As his glance turned slowly towards Polly the sound of the front door buzzer came floating up from the hall, two sharp and determined rings.

Charlie Luke sat on the edge of the police station desk listening to the telephone.

The voice at the other end of the wire belonged to Chief Superintendent Yeo. "Have you picked up Waterfield again yet? Kinder needs his head examined for turning him loose."

"No, not yet. But I don't expect any trouble. We shall see him again any time now."

"I've had another hunch myself."

"What was that?"

"You remember the Kent car dealer?"

"Joseph Pound, found in a chalkpit, pocket-case picked up by a child in Garden Green."

"That's the man. As soon as I read Waterfield's statement something in it rang a bell, and I turned up the widow's deposition. Chad-Horder was the name of one of the holiday swells she and her husband were drinking with in Folkestone the night before the crime. Mind, I still think you're asking too much if you try to link *all* those unsolved cases of yours. Those people Lettice and Reginald Fisher, who may or may not have gone off to South Africa, for instance; I shouldn't waste any more time on them."

"Perhaps you're right, gov'nor, but I've picked up one little thing that reminded me of them. Do you remember that Lettice Fisher's niece said she had sent her aunt a white plastic handbag?"

"Was it a distinctive sort of a bag?"

"No, a chain-store product."

"Then I certainly shouldn't worry about it. The Minton Terrace shooting is your best bet."

"Donne is questioning a girl-friend of Chad-Horder's, an Edna Cater who runs the Midget Club, near Minton Terrace. Chad-Horder called there with young Waterfield this afternoon."

When Yeo hung up Luke went into the next office where Chief Inspector Donne was interviewing Edna. She looked scared but was determined to keep the party sweet.

Luke did not speak for a moment, but waited, looking at her inquisitively, as if he could not make up his mind.

"Well," he said at last, "I hope we're not going to upset you, Miss Cater. Have you ever seen this before?"

He had taken up a brown-paper packet from the desk and now removed the wrappings to reveal the remains of the white handbag.

She glanced at it idly, but suddenly something about it caught her attention and she turned it over and ran a strong white forefinger over a series of small flaws on the lower edge at the front.

"I'm not sure," she said at last, eyeing them cautiously as if she feared a trap. "Is it the one that was in the cottage at Bray that Mr. Chad-Holder rented?"

"What makes you think it's that bag?"

"Those needle-holes in the plastic." She nodded towards the white fold of material. "When I first saw it there were two gilt initials just there."

"What were they?"

"One was an L and the other was an F, I think."

"How can you remember after all that time?"

She looked up, and smiled in a startled way. "I was remembering that I thought it rather—rather *poor*," she said frankly. "Poor for a client's wife. Gerry said they'd paid him pretty well. There was money to burn for a bit."

There was a pause. Luke rose slowly to his feet and stood looking down at her. His face was sombre but not unkind.

"Did you ever wonder what kind of a deal it was with these people?" he said slowly. "Money to burn. Did he get that from commission on a deal with a man whose wife had a cheap plastic handbag like this?"

"What do you mean? What are you saying?"

"How much did he get from them? If it was a lot, was it all they had?"

"But it couldn't have been. They were going away by sea—"

"Did they go? The woman left her handbag."

They were unprepared for her sudden movement. She struggled up out of her chair and stood breathing heavily as if she found it difficult.

"Do you mean . . . *murder*?"

"What makes you say that?"

"I didn't. I . . . Oh, it couldn't be! Oh, my God."

Luke had come round and put a cigarette in her mouth, which he lit.

"We shan't involve you if we can help it," he said, "but you must do all you can. Don't try to shield him."

"Shield . . ." She spoke the word as if she had never heard it before. "Oh no, I couldn't. I couldn't. Not if it's *that*."

Her voice ceased abruptly and she sat staring ahead of her. "You'd better look out if you take him," she said. "He was carrying a gun this afternoon. I felt it when he kissed me."

At that moment a constable slipped quietly into the room.

"Will you come outside, sir?" he murmured. "They've picked up the Lagonda."

A police inspector was telephoning from Mr. Vick's barbers' shop. "A Lagonda, details as previously stated, is drawn up outside the shop here. The boot is unlocked and empty. There are,

however, eight bricks arranged as wedges behind the tyres of the car. The road slopes. There are a number of wooden boxes of varying size in a street nearby. They're with some other junk, waiting for the refuse collection. I shall bring in the barber as soon as he's in a reasonable condition. At the moment he's upstairs, drunk as a lord. He says the car belongs to his dear old friend, Major Chad-Horder, that they've been to see Moggie Moorhen together and have been on the stage with him all the evening. The Major seems to have vanished, but there's a bed made up in the sitting-room."

When he hung up, Luke spoke to Donne with savage satisfaction. "Wherever Chad-Horder's gone, it would appear that he intends to come back, so our chaps can just sit by the hole and watch like pussy. Tell them softly, softly. The Chief Superintendent is very anxious that we don't put any further temptation in his way."

He looked at the map. The barber's shop had been ringed with a crimson marker and he could see at a glance just how near it stood to Garden Green. "Where's Campion?" he asked.

"There's no sign of him yet."

Luke frowned. "Campion wasn't altogether satisfied with the old lady and the pretty girl at the cock-eyed museum," he said presently. "I was. I may be hiding my eyes but I just cannot see either of them involved in anything of this sort. We could go and rout them out of bed." He hesitated. "No, I don't think so," he said. "I don't think so."

A clerk came hurrying up to Luke.

"Mr. Albert Campion is on the telephone, sir. He'd like to speak to you direct if possible."

When Luke came back from the telephone his manner was charged with excitement.

"Campion is on to something. He says he had remembered that the bobby in the Barrow Road spoke of seeing *two* young people in Garden Green this morning. It occurred to him that one of them might have been Waterfield. So he got a description and it tallies. He's now in Edge Street in a callbox and he asks that someone should meet him there. He says Richard Waterfield has just walked up to the front door of Number Seven, Garden Green."

In the upstairs sitting-room of the house in Garden Green there was complete silence after the front door had ceased to ring.

"I'll go." Annabelle set down the tray with the two beakers.

"No." The others spoke together and the man kept his eyes on Polly.

The bell rang again. "Who is it?"

"It must be Miss Rich, my old neighbour. She's come for her magazine."

"Would she come as late as this?"

"Later, if she saw I was up. She can't sleep. I'll just slip this out to her."

She took up a magazine and went out. As the door closed behind her, the patent draught-excluder upon it slid into its copper rim and shut the room away, secret and silent at the back of the house.

Polly moved quickly. She was very frightened and her voice sounded unsteady and alarmed as she swung the front door open.

"Don't ring again, Ellie. I've got it here, dear . . . Who is it?"

The final phrase was whispered as she caught sight of Richard's neat round head silhouetted against the street-lit arch of the porch.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but could I possibly see Annabelle?"

"Who are you?" She was still whispering and he noticed her glance nervously behind her.

"My name is Waterfield. I . . ."

"I remember. She spoke of you."

"I've known Annabelle all her life. I wouldn't have come round so late if the telephone wasn't out of order. I do so want to see her."

"Yes." She was agreeing with him. "Yes. Could you put Annabelle on a train for me?"

"Tonight?"

"As soon as possible."

"Of course." He caught the note of urgency.

"Wait at the foot of the fire-escape and I'll send her down the instant I can. God knows what I'd have done without you."

The door was closing behind her when she thrust it open again.

"You won't make a noise, will you? That's vital." She paused, and he understood that she was struggling with a confidence. Suddenly out it came: "Tell them that whatever they do they're not to rush the house."

This time the door shut firmly behind her.

She had her foot on the staircase before she recollected the magazine still in her hand. She hurried into the office with it, thrust it out of sight in a drawer in the desk, and was back in the hall just in time.

The door at the top of the stairs had opened abruptly.

"Is that you, Aunt Polly?" Annabelle appeared, holding her beaker of milk. "I thought I'd go to bed, if you don't mind. I'm rather tired."

She was frightened. Polly was as aware of it as if the child had stood there screaming her head off. "A very good idea," she said. "Wait a minute."

Gerry was out of sight behind the angle of the door, yet very close to them, only a few feet away.

"I just want to scribble down an address on this while I think of it. I shan't be a minute." As she was speaking she had taken the envelope containing the cheque out of her pocket and now produced a stub of pencil from the handbag on her arm. She began to write while the girl lingered unwillingly beside her.

Go out by fire-escape. Landing window. Richard is down there. Keep quiet.

"There," she said briskly. "Can you read my writing?"

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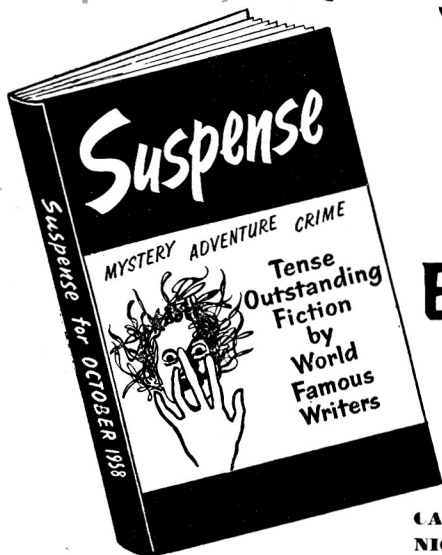
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"Hurry up, Polly, for God's sake." There was an impatient movement in the room. Gerry did not come out, however, and Annabelle glanced at the message. Polly saw her expression change, and caught her quick upward glance and nod of comprehension; then she turned and went up the staircase like an arrow. Just before she disappeared she looked back.

"Goodnight," Polly called. She went into the sitting-room. "What was that about?" she demanded.

He wasted no time by pretending not to understand her.

"Stiff-necked little beast," he said. "I asked her what the hell she was doing here, and she took offence. She took me by surprise, that was all."

"It was you I came to see," he went on. "You're very late."

Polly was listening for any betraying sound from upstairs.

"I'll get us both a drink," Gerry said suddenly.

"No." Polly stepped between him and the door. "I'm going to have my milk. If you want anything I'll get it in a minute. How did you get into the house? I never gave you a key."

"I've had one a long time," he said. "I thought you knew. Sorry, old lady, it never occurred to me that you would mind."

He stood eyeing her. She had frightened him for a moment, but she seemed relaxed and unsuspecting and even, when she glanced at the clock, relieved. He moved towards the tray.

"I'll take this stuff down and bring you some fresh," he said. "It's gone cold and disgusting."

"Oh no!" She was horrified. "Don't you go and take my last pint. It's all I've got for the kid's breakfast in the morning."

"Then I'll re-heat this," he insisted. "Stay where you are and don't be so ruddy obstinate."

He went off with the tray, leaving the door swinging. Polly waited, and then crept across the room to the chair where his coat lay. When at last she found and drew out the heavy gun, it hung awkwardly from fingers that trembled. The problem of where to hide it overwhelmed her. Her glance fell on the big Meissen tureen which stood in the china cabinet beside the window. It took her hardly a moment to unlatch the glass doors, lift the ornate lid, and slide the gun out of sight.

When Gerry came back with the tray, on which there was a glass of Scotch-and-soda as well as the beaker, she could see that something had happened to upset him.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. "Opening the window?"

"No, shutting it. It's cold."

"Shall I light the fire?"

"If you do we mustn't close the door." She stood over him while he put a match to the gas. "Last time the gasman called he warned me it was dangerous. Those things I had put in here stop the draught completely, and the fire can go out."

"I know. You told me." He did not look up and his tone was casual. "Polly, that boiler in the kitchen, does it go out easily?"

"Not unless one tries to burn rubbish in it. It's no good for that." The significance of her own words occurred to her. She drew slowly away. "*You've been trying to burn your jacket. There must have been blood on it.*"

The voice was not like her own at all. A hideous quality of panic had dried it into a whisper.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

She put up a hand to stop him.

"Don't, dear, don't. I tried to ring up Matt tonight. I know."

He remained where he was, kneeling before her chair, and there was a moment of indecision, while he chose the line to take. Finally he took her hand.

"You're making a silly mistake, old girl," he said. "You don't know what you're talking about, and nor do I. Matt doesn't mean anything to me, does he?"

She sat forward and looked into his face to see if he was lying. He met her stare with eyes which just then were like an animal's, without the spark behind them.

"When you look like that there's no one there," she said. "But sometimes when I look into your face, Gerry, I can still see the lively boy that old Freddy and I were so fond of."

"That's right, Polly, while you love me I'm alive and kicking." He was deeply relieved and was laughing. "When you look in my eyes, darling," he said, "d'you know what you see? You see yourself. You're the life in me."

"No, I don't." She spoke with sudden vigour. "I see you, my boy. There's not much that's for ever in you, Gerry, but there's still a man there and not a snake, please God. I'm afraid, though, terribly afraid. Gerry, I know about the gloves. That glove we saw in the paper was your glove, one of the pair I gave you. You shot those people in Church Row."

This time he did not bother to make denials.

"If you knew, you connived, you approved," he said, and added, since even to his own ears the accusation sounded absurd, "you hid your eyes. You're like that. You deceive yourself. Anything goes if it's done by someone you're fond of, that's your creed."

"You're changing the subject. Oh, Gerry, they're going to catch you."

He cocked an eye at her. "They won't, you know." Now that she was reacting as he had thought she might if ever she discovered him, he appeared completely confident. "I'm careful. I never take a risk. I'm so safe it's boring."

She sat listening to him, horrified and absorbed. It was as though, on looking at last at the Gorgon's head, it had indeed turned her to stone. He paused suspiciously, warned by her expression. "What have you remembered, Polly?"

"Listen." She was struggling to control her breathing. "A Superintendent of Police came here today."

"Oh. What did he want?" He spoke lightly and she found his assumed casualness terrifying.

"Some witness was confused about where he had seen two wax figures before, and the local police thought he might have noticed them in our museum."

"Did you tell him I'd taken them?"

"No."

Gerry sat looking at the fire, his eyes round and without expression, his lips parted slightly.

"A chance in eight million," he said softly. "Tenacious clots, aren't they? It won't help them. I may have to alter things a bit, but even if I didn't they couldn't prove a thing."

Polly did not speak at once. She was huddled in her chair. Only her blue eyes were still very bright.

"That night when it rained you sent me the taxi," she said at last. "I knew that in my heart. That country bus with the old wax figures in it—that was the sort of idea *you'd* have, Gerry. I thought that when I first read it, but I shut my eyes to it."

He put a hand on her arm and shook it not without kindness.

"You ruddy silly old thing," he said softly. "Why don't you shut up? It's time for drinks." He handed her the beaker standing on a saucer, and frowned as he saw that some of the milk had spilled over.

"Sorry about that," he said. "The old hand isn't as steady as it ought to be. Drink up. I put some whisky in it."

Polly took the beaker obediently, her glance resting on his face. There was sweat standing out on his forehead and she was relieved to see it. She comforted herself; at least he was alive to it all, still there.

She sipped the milk and made a face, but drank it down as if it were medicine.

"You shouldn't have done that. It's filthy," she said absently. "The kid must have put sugar in as well, or salt perhaps; and the whisky makes it worse. Look, Gerry: sooner or later you're going to need money for lawyers. Well, I've got it. . ."

He made a gesture of blind exasperation, but she persisted.

"Don't look like that, dear. We've got to face things. I'm telling you this because I want you to know I'll see you through. You can't shoot your way out all the time."

She sat looking up at him, the empty beaker on her knee. He remained staring at her, an extraordinary conflict growing in his eyes.

"You'd have given me away," he burst out at last, dropping on the rug before her, putting his arms round her, and peering into her face. "Admit it. You can't hide a thing. Can you?"

Polly closed her eyes tightly and opened them again.

"I can't see you properly," she said. "It's funny. I feel . . . Oh, Gerry! *The milk*. What have you done?"

"Darling, it's all right, it's all right. Don't be frightened. It's only a little. Only enough to put you out."

He was agonized, weeping even. Polly looked very earnestly and stupidly into his face, so close to her own.

"I . . . am the last thing you love," she said thickly, struggling with the drug as its waves broke over her. "If . . . you . . . kill me, Gerry, you will lose contact with . . . your kind. There'll be nothing . . . to keep you alive."

Annabelle came quickly down the fire-escape in the rain. Richard saw her white face in the darkness and heard her sigh as her hand touched his shoulder. She let herself drop gratefully into the arms he held up for her, and returned his squeeze with a whole-heartedness that warmed him with a glow to last a lifetime.

By now it was raining hard. As they came round the arch and huddled under the museum wall, he bent closer to her.

"Was Gerry there?"

"Yes. Waiting for us when we got in. What do you know about him?"

"Not enough. What happened?"

"I don't know. He was just furious to see me. I thought he was going to kill me."

Richard grunted. "I don't think it's quite as sensational as that."

"I do." Annabelle's practical young voice quivered. "Aunt Polly was petrified about something. Richard, I think we ought to tell the police."

"No, we won't do that. I've had one little chat with the police about being on enclosed premises tonight. No, you stand in this doorway and try and keep out of the wet, and I'll go and see if there's a back gate to this place."

He left her standing in the shallow porch of the side door to the museum. As she leaned back against it, it occurred to her that she did not remember Polly locking this door after Superintendent Luke and Mr. Campion had left. She tried the handle cautiously and the door opened. She stood just inside, waiting for Richard.

He came at last and stepped in gratefully beside her. His face was glistening with water.

"Thank goodness for this," he said softly. "We'll have to wait for a bit, I'm afraid. The whole blessed place appears to be surrounded by police."

He could not see her but he felt her shiver in the dark.

"Are they after that man?"

"I expect so. We'd better keep absolutely quiet in here."

"What will they do? Rush the place?"

He did not answer. Polly's final injunction had returned to him.

"How just like Aunt Polly," Annabelle said. "She knew it was going to happen and wanted to keep me out of it, I suppose."

"That's the important thing." Richard seemed to have made up his mind. "We'll shut this door and lie low."

While the two were settling themselves in the museum, Mr. Campion, Superintendent Luke, and Detective Sergeant Picot from the Barrow Road Station stood in the peeling stucco porch

of an empty house across the road. "Shall I walk up to the front door nice and fatherly?" Sergeant Picot said. "We couldn't lose him. We've got the whole place surrounded."

"Sorry, George. We're to take no risk. Those are orders." Luke shook himself to scatter the drops from his coat. "We'll wait and pick him up as he comes out. According to that neighbour, Miss Rich, he still must be inside."

Picot sniffed and nodded. "Is there any suggestion that he's up to mischief now?"

Luke moved uneasily. "It's not very likely he's going to do any harm to the two women we know are with him."

Picot looked towards the silent house and back again. "I thought it was said he had prepared an alibi for this trip," he muttered. "What does he want with an alibi if he's up to no harm?"

"I think he's parking something. The gun, even. This is the place he regards as his bolt hole."

"When you say parking evidence, you don't think he could be in there destroying it, do you, sir?"

Luke stretched himself. "I hope not. We must not have any more killings tonight. My worry is that ruddy boy Waterfield. What was he doing there?"

Mr. Campion coughed. "To my eternal shame, I did not wait to see," he said frankly. "I saw this fellow—obviously Waterfield—striding down Edge Street. I followed him and saw him turn into Number Seven. I had no authority myself, so I doubled back to the nearest phone box and called you."

"Ah," said Luke. "Did he knock and get no answer, or did someone come to the door and send him away? Miss Rich couldn't tell us. Yet something decided him to climb the wall."

"I don't see how anyone can tell what's happening now without taking a dekko," said Picot. "Let me nip round to the street behind this one and get into the garden. I can probably see something through the windows."

"All right." Luke gave way unwillingly. "But frighten Hawker and we've had it."

"I won't frighten him. I'd have to shout to make myself heard against this perishing rain."

He plunged out into the downpour and disappeared in the direction of Edge Street. Luke and Campion waited.

"Hullo, see who this is?" Luke moved forward as Chief Inspector Donne stepped swiftly out of the rain into the porch.

"Something turned up?" Luke asked.

"Yes." Donne emitted a long breath. "The damndest thing. The proprietor of a small restaurant brought in the dead solicitor's wallet. A customer had left it on a table. Just got up and walked away after taking all the money and a couple of letters out of it. The rest was intact."

"Phillipson's wallet? I don't believe it."

"I don't blame you. But his name and address were all over it."

"Can anyone there remember the customer?"

"Oh, it's Hawker all right. The waitress and her mother say they could swear to him. They say he was frightened by a letter he read. Two regular customers say they'd know him too. He gave himself away completely and utterly. He must have had a brainstorm."

Luke began to laugh softly in the moist darkness.

In the room which looked so homely with the old woman sleeping heavily in her chair, Gerry went on with his preparations.

Although convinced that he had all the time in the world, he was trying to hurry but was finding it difficult. His clothes—he had found an old jacket in Polly's spare room—hung upon his stiffening muscles, and there was a sweat on his forehead like a mould. He kept his eyes away from Polly now, turning his head like a sulking child whenever he passed her.

With both door and window sealed, the little chamber was already growing airless and the fire was burning blue and very low. In an hour, perhaps less, he would let the flame die and then the gas, insidious and lethal, could pour into the room.

The tragedy must appear the most natural of accidents. An old woman and her unsuspecting visitor chatting over the fire, unaware that the door had swung shut behind them. Any Coroner's jury, after hearing of the gas official's warning, would bring in misadventure, adding the usual rider drawing public attention to the dangers of imperfect ventilation.

Gerry opened the door and stood listening. He hesitated and glanced over his shoulder towards the room where the soft cushion lay ready on the table. Upstairs the girl was doubtless in her first deep sleep.

He found the improvised plan, made necessary by the accident of Annabelle's visit, somewhat distasteful, and he was reluctant to implement it until the last moment.

At length he picked up his raincoat and felt for the gun in the pocket. Incredible astonishment appeared in his eyes, but cleared at once as he smiled with half-amused exasperation.

He found the weapon at once. He knew exactly where Polly would have hidden it. He opened the glass cupboard, lifted the lid of the tureen and took it out, his mouth twisting suddenly out of control. Then, thrusting the gun in his jacket pocket, he took up the tray and went swiftly down to the kitchen.

He washed the glass, polished it, and set it back in the cupboard. He rinsed the beaker, made it dirty again immediately with some dregs of milk which he found in the saucepan, and replaced it on the tray to take upstairs again.

His next problem was the boiler. The ragged jacket which he had crammed into the top had stopped the draught, and the fire was dead. Cursing, he prised the jacket out again, filled the cavity with firelighters and coke, and relit it. Then he gave his attention to the jacket which lay, a smouldering mass, upon the shining black top of the cooking stove.

He was turning it over when his hand touched something bulky in the inside breast pocket. A sudden stab of apprehension touched his heart, and he put in his hand and drew out a roll of notes and Polly's letters to Matt Phillipson. He had not thought of either of them since he left the café.

He held his breath, realization breaking over him in a wave.

The wallet. Where was it?

The most terrifying thing was that he knew; he knew quite well. He knew he had walked directly out of the café, leaving the leather folder behind him on the table. Only the finest veil of unawareness had hung between him and that suicidal act.

His shoulders were hunched now and all his movements became a little smaller as if he was shrinking into himself. He took up the jacket and some firelighters, and put them into the empty coke hod. His glance travelled slowly across the room to the dark window sprinkled with raindrops, and in that instant his eyes met another pair of eyes looking in.

Sergeant Picot stepped back at once and would have taken his oath on it that he had not been seen.

Gerry gave no sign of alarm but walked on smoothly to the door with the coke hod, and turned out the switch. Then he drew his gun, and with that in his right hand and the scoop containing the smouldering jacket in his left, he paused.

Then he moved very softly into the small square lobby outside the kitchen door. A short flight of stairs directly in front of him led up to the front hall and as he stood at the foot of them his eyes were almost on a level with the floor, so that he could see a narrow ribbon of grey light from the street where the front door did not quite fit its worn step.

As he stood watching an unmistakable shadow passed across this line and back again, so that he knew that a man stood waiting in the porch.

Gerry turned away. Moving very quietly, he pushed open the swing-door leading to the museum.

As he stepped into the airless, aromatic atmosphere he hesitated for a second, his hand tightening round his gun. He thought he had heard a movement somewhere amid the shadows. It did not come again, and he went on.

He had decided that the stove in the museum was the one place where the cremation of the jacket could be accomplished. To avoid bumping into the exhibits he swerved across the parquet towards the dais.

The shadow sitting there seemed to materialize while he stared at it. He stopped, gripping his gun. The shape changed in contour and a blurred white face peered up at him.

"Oh," said Annabelle, her voice shrill in the darkness. "Oh, you've got a revolver!"

In the instant of paralysis while his slowed mind registered the astonishing fact that the girl he intended to silence was here, and not upstairs asleep in her room, a second shadow streaked out of

the blackness and a blow under his wrist sent the weapon spinning out of his grasp. Immediately afterwards a fist crashed into his face.

He struck out savagely, to meet a whirl-wind. Richard plunged into the fight with a reckless belligerence which offset his disadvantage in weight. He was hard-headed and very fit, and he had been growing more and more angry all day.

He hurled himself at Gerry and after a minute or two of hard milling had the extreme satisfaction of feeling him go down with a crash before his right. He fought for Gerry's throat, and twisting his tie round his wrist achieved a stranglehold.

"You pulled a gun on her," he muttered. "A gun! You had the blasted impudence to draw a gun."

Gerry recognized the voice, and the last flimsy shreds of illusion dropped from his eyes.

"You . . . followed me from the Tenniel?"

"I followed you from here to the barber's this morning. I've been to Rolf's Dump and so have the police. They're round this house now, waiting for you to come out. I don't care if they catch you or if they don't, but I won't have Annabelle mixed up in any mucky little scandal."

Gerry did not move. The discovery that Richard regarded him only as some sort of small-time crook arrived like a brief mercy.

He let his body go limp. "All right." He sounded merely sulky.

Richard released him and got up. He stooped and picked up the gun. "Clear out of this building," he said. "I don't care if you go back into the house or not, but I don't want you found in here with us."

Annabelle opened the door into the garden, to let in a great swirling gust of midnight air.

Immediately, from somewhere just behind them, there came the sound of a strange sucking breath, and a sheet of orange flame shot up from the edge of the dais.

As Gerry reeled to his feet the whole of the far end of the museum appeared to catch fire at once.

The explanation was simple. The heat of Gerry's smouldering jacket had melted the wax firelighters he had brought to help it burn and the sudden draught from the garden door had fanned the cloth into flame. The museum was ripe for burning. Even the stuffed beasts, impregnated for many years with a naphtha spray against moth, were dry and tinder-like with age and dust, and they blazed up, flinging sparks up into the roof: and as they fell they started other fires, so that the whole building was as good as lost in the first three minutes.

"Aunt Polly. We must get Aunt Polly!" Annabelle's choking from the doorway reached Richard.

"Get out before you're suffocated!" he gasped, and pushed her into the garden. "Mrs. Tassie is all right. She's in the building next door. Get the door shut," he shouted back to Gerry. "The draught's making it worse in there."

The sound of running feet came thudding towards them. Already the glare from the museum had warned the watchers in the street.

Richard's arm was round Annabelle's shoulders.

"We'll have to see the police," he said to her. "Come on, pretty. We'll go and meet them."

He glanced back at the shadow beside him. "You'd better go in through the kitchen, Gerry, and warn the old lady, hadn't you?" he said fiercely. "Anyway, don't stay here. We don't want to see anything of you again, and I don't want to have to explain this either, so take it with you, please."

Gerry felt a cold weight thrust into his hand. He turned back blindly into the fire, his fingers closing round the gun.

He was just able to cross the few feet of parquet to the swing-door. He burst through and came safely into the cool hall of the little house where all was dark and quiet.

He went down the short flight of steps towards the kitchen and turned back to see the grey streak showing under the front door. For a minute he watched it fixedly and dropped slowly down until he was lying on the stairs, his eyes level with the top step. But the grey line remained unbroken. The watcher had been distracted by the fire. The shadow had gone.

The house was silent as the end of the world. The noises from outside, the shouts and the hollow alarums of the firebells, the police whistles and the stamp of feet were far away from him, as if already they belonged to a place in which he had no claim, and as he lay there on the dark staircase with the gun in his hand, he heard them without interest.

He was nothing, and there was nothing for him.

After a time he put the muzzle of the weapon into his mouth, but although his finger curled round the trigger he did not press it.

The time crept by.

And then, very slowly, and as if he had no strength in his body, he began to climb hand over hand up the main staircase.

It was an hour after dawn.

"Well, that's that, and very satisfactory," Sergeant Picot remarked. "He's a cool one. I hope he gets what's coming to him. That was only done for show, you know, him bringing the woman out. Do you know what he said to me, sir? I said to 'im as I put on the bracelets, I said, 'What made you go back for the old girl?' 'Pon my Sam, he looked me square in the face and spoke as straight as if he was saying his prayers. 'Because I need her,' he said. Serve 'im right if she turns on him when she comes out of hospital and hears what he's been up to."

"She won't." Charlie Luke spoke with utter certainty.

"Then she's a fool," said Picot, "because that chap really is the cold-blooded monster that the papers are going to call him. D'you honestly think she'll stick by him when it all comes out?"

Luke sighed. His vivid face was furrowed with weariness.

"I know it," he said. "*And he knows it.* It's no use you blaming her. She can't help herself. That's Disinterested Love, chum, a force, like nuclear energy. It's an absolute."

Picot shrugged his shoulders. He was disgusted.

He said nothing more, but sat down at the other desk and put on his spectacles. There was a great deal of work to be done.

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★ *The full-length version of this novel, Hide My Eyes by Margery Allingham, is being published by Chatto and Windus on September 24, price 13s. 6d.*



"Oh phooey!"

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