

EDGAR WALLACE

mystery magazine

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**EDGAR
WALLACE**

The Ghost of
Down Hill

**ARTHUR
KENT**

Night of
the Hi-jack

**VERN
HANSEN**

Savage Death

**MARTIN
THOMAS**

Harvest of
Homicide

★

**TRUE
CRIME**

The Man who
Paid to Die





EDGAR WALLACE

Born London, 1875

Died Hollywood, 1932

He knew wealth and poverty, yet had
walked with kings and kept his bearing.

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Her blood froze and her knees gave under her, for out there, standing in the moonlight against the snowy background, was a figure in the sombre habit of a monk . . .

*The Man Who Wanted
Pass-Books*

IT was, of course, a coincidence that Margot Panton was the guest of Mrs. John Staines on the night of the visitation. It was equally a coincidence that she later tra-



THE GHOST OF

This novelette was originally published in a Reader's Library edition in 1929. Copies are now virtually impossible to obtain and our typescript was prepared from a microfilm of the volume in The British Museum.

The story is vintage Wallace in the finest traditions of the British Thriller. We think you will agree that, in characteristic Wallace manner, it makes as exciting and compelling reading today as it did three and a half decades ago.

velled down to Arthurton by the 4.57 in the same railway compartment as Jeremiah Jowlett. And yet it was as natural that she should break her journey in London to accept the hospitality of her old nurse, as it was that Jeremiah and she should be fellow passengers, for they travelled by the only fast train, which Jerry always took, unless he was away from London or was working late, amassing evidence against some malefactor. Jerry was a barrister and had a desk in the office of the Public Prosecutor.

"My dear," said Martha

Staines in genuine admiration, "I should never have known you!"

Margot raised her tea cup in warning.

"Don't tell me I'm growing pretty, Martha!" she said solemnly. "Ever since I can remember I have been growing pretty and have never quite grown."

"Well, you've got there now, Margot."

Martha Staines shook her head and sighed.

The girl's mother had died eight months earlier, leaving her orphan child in the guardianship of an absent brother-in-law. Martha recalled the sad, thin face of the woman she had served for so many years, and those happy days at Royston when Margot

DOWN HILL

had been the most angelic of babies.

"Your uncle is back then, Margot?"

The girl nodded, a gleam of amusement in her eyes.

"It is rather fun having a guardian you cannot find!" she said.

"I wonder what he will do with me when the travel fever comes on him again?"

Martha shook her head. She was a stout, good-looking woman of forty-five and her prosperity had neither spoiled her humour nor her manners.

"Where has he been this time?" she asked.

Margot took a letter from her bag and consulted it.

"The Upper Amazon," she said. "I'll read you the letter:

'Dear Margot,

I was grieved to learn on my return that my poor sister had passed away. By the letters which I found waiting from your lawyers I see that I am appointed your guardian. I hope you will not find Arthurton a bore. I am rather an old fogey and am interested in very little outside of geology and spiritual-

ism, but you shall be your own mistress. I shall expect you on Tuesday evening.

Your loving uncle,
James Stuart.' ”

“Spiritualism,” said Martha thoughtfully. “That sounds lively.”

The girl laughed and put down her cup upon the table. She was at an age when even the supernatural phenomena of life were amusing.

Mr. Staines came in a few minutes later. He was a bluff man, red and jovial of face and stout of build. He brought with him a faint fragrance of pine, and the dust of the saw-mill lay like powder on his boots.

“It’s a lovely part of the country you’re going to, Miss Panton,” he said, as he stirred his tea. “I know it very well. What is your uncle’s name?”

“Stuart,” said the girl. “James Stuart.”

He nodded.

“I know his house, too; a big place at the foot of the hill with a lovely garden – in the proper season. It will be well under snow now.”

He scratched his chin.

“Yes, I remember him, a very close gentleman. He had the name of being a little eccentric, if you don’t mind my saying so, miss.”

“He’s a spiritualist, John,” said Martha.

“A spiritualist, eh?” Mr. Staines chuckled.

“Well, he’s got plenty of spirits to practise on at Arthurton. Maybe he’ll have a go at the Ghost of Down Hill Farm.”

“That sounds thrilling,” said the girl, wide-eyed. “Do tell me about the Ghost of Down Hill Farm, Mr. Staines.”

“Well, I’ve never seen the ghost myself – mother, I’ll have another cup of tea – but I’ve heard yarns about it,” said Mr. Staines. “In the first place, there isn’t a Down Hill Farm. There used to be about eighty years ago, but it’s built on now, and before that there was a priory, or a monastery, or something. That is where the ghost comes from. As a matter of fact we built the house that stands there now. That’s why I took the trouble to read up the history,” he explained almost apologetically. “That is why I know the dates. In 1348 the country, and the continent too, was visited by a terrible plague which took off half the

inhabitants of England. It broke out in the Priory, being carried to Arthurton by a monk who came from Yorkshire, and when the villagers heard that they had the plague they put a guard round the place and would allow no one to go in or come out. All the monks died except one and he used to come out every night and walk round the building. After a time he died, too. He is the Ghost of Down Hill – they have dropped calling it a farm – and I've met old men who say they've seen him."

"How wonderful!" said the girl ecstatically. "Do you think that he'll walk for me?"

"Well, miss," said John Staines with a twinkle in his eye, "if he wouldn't walk for you, he'd walk for nobody," and his laugh shook the decanters on the sideboard.

Suddenly he became serious and turned to his wife.

"Did I tell you about that case at Eastbourne, mother?" he asked.

"No, my dear, you didn't," said his wife, busy at the table clearing up the tea things.

"Did you ever hear me speak about a man named Wheeler?"

Martha Staines shook her head.

"Well, I have, lots of times," said Staines. "Anyway, it doesn't matter. He's in the surveyor's office at Eastbourne now, but I knew him years ago when he was clerk of the works for one of the biggest architects in the South of England. A very nice fellow."

"Well, what about him?" asked Mrs. Staines.

"Listen to this."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a pair of glasses which he put on, then unfolded the evening paper and after a search:

"An extraordinary happening is reported from Eastbourne. Mr. Joseph Wheeler, of the Borough Surveyor's office, was sitting in his room on Sunday night, the family being at church, when a masked man appeared and, holding up Mr. Wheeler at the point of a revolver, demanded that he should produce his bank-books or any other personal accounts he might have. Fortunately Mr. Wheeler had the books to hand and produced them under protest. The intruder then ordered his victim to stand with his face to the wall whilst he examined the pass-books which had been produced. The examination lasted five minutes at the end of which time the masked man disappeared as suddenly as he had come.'"

"Well now, what do you think of that!" said Mrs. Staines,

properly impressed.

"I thought it was going to be quite exciting," said the girl, disappointed. "He should at least have left a message written in blood!"

She went to bed early that night. She had had a tiring journey and Martha Staines followed her example, leaving her husband to go to his office to work out the day's accounts.

The Staines' house stood at the entrance of one of the timber yards which John Staines, in his affluence, had acquired. A one-storey brick building built in the yard formed the headquarters of his thriving business of Builder and Timber Merchant, and it was to his own office that he repaired to enter the transactions.

He did not hear the door open but he felt a cold draught of air and looked round. A man had entered and was closing the door. Mr. Staines jumped to his feet; for the head of the intruder was enveloped in a monkish cowl and two hard, bright eyes glared at him through the vertical slits cut in the mask. More alarming still was the automatic which he held in his hand.

"Don't shout and don't attempt to get away. Pull down those blinds," ordered the man; and Staines obeyed, drawing down the roller blinds and shutting out all view of the interior from the yard.

"I want your pass-books, bank-books, and private ledgers for the past ten years," said the stranger.

"Look here," began John Staines.

"Look nowhere," snarled the mask. "Do as you are told, damn you!"

Mr. Staines was a wise man and, albeit resentfully, obeyed. He took the little brown-covered books from his safe and stacked them on the table.

"Now stand facing the wall and don't look round," said the intruder and again Mr. Staines obeyed.

He heard the rustle of turning leaves but he did not turn his head. Five minutes passed and a chair was pushed back.

"Stand still," said the stranger.

The door opened and closed rapidly. A few seconds later he heard the crash of the wicket gate and then he sat down heavily in his chair.

"Well, I'm - !" said Mr. Staines and his profanity was pardonable in the circumstances.

2

Jeremiah Obadiah Jowlett

IN a small, gloomy office overlooking Whitehall, Mr. Jeremiah Jowlett collected together the dossiers he had been examining, tucked them under his arm and sprinted for the room of his chief.

Lord Ilfran looked up as his subordinate came in.

"Hullo, Jerry, haven't you gone?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Jerry unnecessarily, and put the envelopes before the older man. "I think we can prosecute in the cases of Myer and Burton," he said, "but there does not seem to be a case against Townsend."

Lord Ilfran nodded.

"Is there any fresh news?" he asked.

"None sir, of any importance. I see in the newspapers that an attempt has been made to rob the strong rooms of the mail boat *Carmuria* but the thieves seem to have bungled it very badly and they are in custody at Southampton."

"There are no good strong-room robbers left," said Lord Ilfran in a tone which suggested that he regretted the circumstances. "Ever since the Stedman gang were laid by the heels that branch of crime has become uninteresting. What is this I see," he asked, "about the hold-up of a builder in Camberwell?"

"Oh, yes." Jeremiah was leaving but turned back. "That is extraordinary. There was a man held up in similar circumstances at Eastbourne two or three days ago, and now this man Staines has been victimized."

"Nothing was stolen?" asked Lord Ilfran.

"Nothing at all, apparently," replied Jeremiah. "As in the previous case, the burglar merely asked to see the state of the pass-books and the private ledgers of John Staines."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Lord Ilfran looking out of the window. "Most extraordinary! And nothing was stolen you say?"

"Nothing at all," said Jeremiah and threw a glance at the clock above the head of the Public Prosecutor.

"Well, get off," said Ilfran with a smile. "I suppose you are catching your 4.57. What on earth makes you live at Arthurton?"

"Come down and spend Christmas with me, sir," said Jeremiah

with a smile, "and I think you'll understand."

The taxi that took him to Victoria was a slow one and he had to race to the platform and even then only arrived as the train was on the move. The guard opened the door of a first-class carriage and he jumped in and would have fallen, but a small hand, thrust out in alarm, saved him.

"I am so awfully sorry," said Jeremiah with that smile of his which had disarmed so many of his critics.

"I think the train jerked," said Margot Panton primly.

"I'm almost sure it jerked," said Jeremiah, and then he chuckled and the girl laughed, too.

It was all very unusual. Margot rarely conversed with strangers, and yet before the train had reached Clapham Junction, Jerry had told her that his favourite name for aunts was Maud and she had explained the inner workings of the prefect system at the school she had left.

"Arthurton!" he said in delight when she told him her destination. "Good lord, I'm going there, too. Where are you staying?"

"With my guardian, Mr. James Stuart."

"Is that so?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "Why, we're neighbours! Mr. Stuart is an antiquarian or explorer, or something, isn't he? I know he lives abroad."

"I know very little about him," she replied, "and I don't remember having seen him. He is the only relative I have in the world," she said simply.

Jeremiah was more than ordinarily interested and plied her with questions as to her length of stay until laughingly she changed the subject.

"If you live at Arthurton -"

"As I swear I do," he said.

"Don't interrupt. If you live at Arthurton you can tell me something I'm dying to hear about."

"I have a bronze medal for saving life," he said modestly. "I must tell you this in case nobody else does. I am willing to earn another one."

"Have you ever seen the Ghost of Down Hill?" she asked.

He fell back in his seat and laughed.

"I am the Ghost of Down Hill," he said, and she stared at him. "At least I'm the only ghost that's ever haunted Down Hill. My house is built, if not upon the site, at least upon the land which the old monks owned and which formed part of Down Hill Farm before it was burnt down a hundred years ago."

"And you've never seen the ghost?" she asked.

"I've never seen the ghost, and Minter – he is my valet, cook, and general manager – hasn't seen a ghost either."

He hesitated and then:

"No, we've seen nothing."

"You were going to say 'except'," she began.

He smiled.

"Except that two or three nights ago we saw a strange figure in the garden, but it was probably a poacher setting a snare. There are thousands of rabbits on that part of the Downs.

"You'll love the place," he said as he helped her to alight at Treen Station, "and I hope your uncle is going to invite me to tea. And there is your uncle, over there. Shall I introduce you?" he asked whimsically.

The man who walked towards her was a little above middle height and strongly built. Apparently he was in the region of sixty but he was as straight as a ramrod. The short-clipped white beard, the shaggy eyebrows, and the large nose gave her the impression of an old eagle; an impression which the bright deep-set eyes helped to strengthen. He gave her smile for smile as he met her and enveloped her hand in both of his. Though it was bitterly cold and the snow lay thick on the roads, he wore neither overcoat nor gloves and the soft white shirt was open at the neck to expose the corded throat.

"You're Margot," he said, and brushed her cheek with his lips.

"How do you do, Mr. Jowlett. This is a neighbour of ours, Margot."

His manner was brusque, his voice gruff, but his attitude was genial. He had a small car waiting in the station yard. It was parked alongside Jeremiah's one extravagance, a long-bonneted sports car, the possession of which he excused on account of its hill-climbing qualities.

"It is my elevator," he said. "I live on the first floor of the world, Miss Panton, a position which gives me the happy feeling of being able to look down upon my fellow citizens."

They gave him a minute's start and he disappeared across the snowy carpet.

James Stuart followed at a respectable distance. He did not speak to the girl and she had time to take stock of this new relative who had come into her life. He was her mother's brother and she felt that she could love this grim old man, upon whose

face she thought she detected the lines of suffering.

Mr. Staines had not exaggerated the beauty of her new home. It was an old house, creeper-grown, and stood in extensive grounds. Even under its white, fleecy covering, which lay in thick pads on the spreading cedars, she saw the beautiful possibilities of the sleeping garden.

"I wonder you can ever leave this place," she told her uncle as she stood looking through the french windows of the drawing-room.

"It's pretty," he said shortly.

"Is there anything in Brazil as lovely?"

He shook his head.

"Nothing," he answered shortly.

Her own large room overlooked the garden and the furniture seemed new: she discovered later that this was the fact and that it had only arrived that day from Eastbourne.

She found her uncle amiable enough at dinner. He had a fund of sardonic humour which kept her amused and he took, moreover, a surprisingly broad view of men and things.

"There isn't much young company for you in Arthurton," he said. "A girl like you should have plenty of dances and similar nonsense. I'll invite young Jowlett over to dinner tomorrow night if you like."

She did like very much.

"In the season there's plenty of social life in Eastbourne, that's only fourteen miles away and I'm thinking of getting another car," he said. "But now - " he hesitated and rubbed his beard with his knuckles, a little gesture of irritation which did not escape her - "I am very busy in the evenings with my specimens and I'm afraid you'll be left alone - "

"Please don't worry about me, Uncle James," she said earnestly. "I can amuse myself, I've plenty to read and if I think I'm on your mind all the time, it will take half the fun out of life."

He seemed relieved at this, and then awkwardly:

"Well, you can start right away," he said. "I am going to my study now."

At ten o'clock she tapped at his door to say goodnight and went up to her room. She undressed and sat in her dressing gown by the open window looking over the garden. It was the third quarter of the moon and it was rising as she looked out upon that most wonderful of landscapes.

The snowy expanse of the Downs lay in blue shadow and the

moonlight flooded the broad white Weald with an uncanny radiance.

She sighed happily, switched off the light and got into bed. The strangeness of the room and, perhaps, the queer smell which all new furniture has, prevented her sleeping as soundly as she expected. She turned from side to side, dozing fitfully, and then she heard the faint sound of a foot on the gravel path outside. From the position of the patch of moonlight on the floor she knew it must be very late and wondered if her uncle was in the habit of taking midnight strolls on such a freezing night. Slipping out of bed, she pulled on her dressing-gown, walked to the window, and looked out.

And then her blood froze and her knees gave under her for there, in the middle of the garden path, standing out against the snowy background, was a figure in the sombre habit of a monk!

The cowl was drawn over the head and the face was invisible.

It stood there motionless, its hands concealed in its wide sleeves, its head bent as though in thought. Then slowly the head turned and the moonlight fell upon the bony face, the hollow sockets of its eyes, the white gleam of its fleshless teeth.

For a moment she stared, paralysed, incapable of sound or movement; and then she found her voice, and with a shrill scream collapsed on the floor in a dead faint.

3

The Tramp

WHEN she came round she was lying on the bed under the Weiderdown and her uncle's anxious face was looking down at hers. He was in his dressing-gown and his hair was rumpled untidily.

"I am such a fool," she said, with an apologetic smile.

"I heard you scream. What was the matter - nightmare?" asked Mr. Stuart.

And then she told him what she had seen. Stuart walked to the window and looked out.

"A manifestation," he said gravely. "You were very fortunate."

"A manifestation?" she repeated in amazement. "Do you believe - ?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe there is a great deal one doesn't understand; a great

many things and a great many phenomena," he replied. "But honestly, I think in this case you have been suffering from nightmares."

"Do you - do you think," she faltered, "that it was the Ghost of Down Hill?"

She heard him chuckle.

"So you've heard the yarn, have you?" he said. "Perhaps it was. Perhaps it was oyster patty followed by coffee - a combination which has produced more ghosts than any of us spiritualists have raised."

Margot Panton was neither superstitious nor a sceptic. She was ashamed of the way she had behaved. It had been the surprise of it; the atmosphere of mystery; the moonlight; the strangeness of the place - all these circumstances had combined to surprise her into that ridiculous fainting fit.

Alone in her room, she sat up in bed clasping her knees. Her common-sense told her that there was no such thing as ghosts and they did not wear boots that crunched the gravel beneath them. She got out of bed again and looked out into the garden. It was empty. Then switching off the light with a contemptuous "pooh!" she curled herself in bed and fell into a dreamless sleep.

Her uncle was out when she came down to breakfast but he returned before she had finished the meal.

"Well, have you got over your scare?" he asked.

"I'm perfectly certain it wasn't a ghost," she said.

"Oh, you are, are you?"

His eyes twinkled. "And how do you reach that conclusion?"

"Ghosts don't wear boots," she said decidedly.

"They may have shoes," said the dry old man. "I take tea without sugar or milk, Margot. If it was not a ghost, then I ought to be very careful," he said. "I have brought some rather valuable things back from Brazil and Peru; some old statuettes of the Incas," he explained, but did not offer to show them to her.

She had had a glimpse of his study that morning, a plainly-furnished room on the ground floor with a bookcase and a desk, and a few skins of animals stretched on the walls and little else.

That morning she was still occupied in unpacking her trunk and disposing of her photographs about the room.

She lunched alone; her uncle had gone to Hastings in his car. When he had told her he was making this trip she had expected he would invite her and he must have guessed her thoughts.

"When I get a better car I'll take you round the country, Margot,

but you make my old flivver look shabby.”

She smiled at the implied compliment. She was beginning to like this old man with his mordant humour and his pretty turn of compliment.

His absence gave her an opportunity of exploring her new domain. Putting on a pair of boots – for the snow lay thick upon the hillside under a radiant sun – she went out on a tour of inspection. Beyond the garden was a wide paddock which ran up the hill and was divided from the next property by a wire fence. She followed this fence to the crest of the rise and saw that it passed close to an attractive brick bungalow which stood on the top of the hill. This must be Down Hill, she thought. It covered a larger area than she had imagined. She caught a glimpse of bachelor comfort through the wide open windows. A stout man, whom she rightly guessed was Jeremiah Jowlett’s factotum, gave her a stiff little bow as she came abreast of him. He was shovelling away the snow that had fallen in the night from the garden path.

“Good morning, madam,” he said respectfully.

“Is this Down Hill?” she asked.

“Yes, madam. This is Mr. J. O. Jowlett’s estate.”

The words sounded to her a little magnificent and she repressed a smile. She remembered that her travelling companion of the evening before had said that his man disapproved of Jeremiah. She passed the house and walked along the Downs and sat down to rest on a garden seat which had evidently been placed there by Jeremiah; and was dry and free from snow.

The view was wonderful. In the golden sunlight the Weald was a glittering snow-field and far away on her right she saw the silver fret of the sea running across the gap at Seaford. She sat entranced, dreaming idly; formless, pleasant fancies floating across her mental vision – lazy mists that alternately revealed and veiled the substances of life. Her reverie was rudely broken.

“Pretty view, ain’t it, miss?”

She turned with a start. Not more than two yards away a man was standing in the road. He looked like a tramp. His clothes were old and soiled, his boots were gaping, and his chin had not known a razor for a week. He was puffing at an empty pipe and his big coarse hands were thrust into the pockets of his tattered overcoat.

She rose quickly.

“Yes, it’s very beautiful,” she said.

“Do you live around here, miss?”

"Yes, I live here," she said shortly and turned to walk back towards Down Hill, the red roof and chimney pots of which showed above the trees. She heard his feet crunching through the snow behind her and presently he drew abreast.

"Nice place to live, ain't it, miss?" he asked and she made no reply.

"I haven't had anything to live on since yesterday morning," he said hopefully.

She opened her bag, took out half a crown and handed it to him without a word.

"Thank you kindly. Mind you, I'm a rich man by rights, if every man had his due."

He volunteered the information and paused at the end as though he expected her to make some reply. She quickened her pace but recognized the futility of running from a danger which was probably non-existent, and when they came again in sight of the house and the placid servant leaning on his shovel, she recovered something of her lost self-possession.

"There's a ghost around here, so they tell me," said the tramp, and she looked at him more carefully.

He was a hollow-faced man with small eyes set close together and a long aggressive nose. She thought his age was something between forty and fifty.

"I shall be round here for a day or two," he said. "My name's Sibby Carter. I'll just be hanging around."

In spite of herself she laughed.

"I don't know why you should tell me that," she said. "I am really not interested in your plans."

"Sibby Carter my name is," he repeated, and smacked his lips, "and I shall be hanging around here for two or three days."

She was walking away from him when he followed and caught her arm with a grip that made her wince.

"Here, I can tell you something," he began but the stout servant had seen, and with a surprising agility had leapt the hedge and was coming towards them.

"Clear out of here. What do you mean by accosting this lady?"

Sibby Carter released his hold and his thin lips curled up in a sneer that showed his yellow teeth.

"Hello, fat and ugly!" he said rudely. "What are you coming interfering for?"

The girl, breathless and a little white, had instinctively moved to the stout man's side.

"You be off," said Mr. Jowlett's servant peremptorily.

"I've as much right here as you have," said Sibby Carter.

"You're on private property, you know that! Now be off, or I'll take you down to the village and give you in charge."

The tramp seemed impressed at this possibility and he looked from the girl to the stout man, and then:

"Fat and ugly!" he shouted. "Fat and ugly!" and went trudging back the way he had come, his shoulders hunched, his hands in his pockets.

4

The Passing of Sibby

WHEN James Stuart returned the girl told him of her unpleasant experience and he listened with a grave face.

"As a rule we see few tramps in this neighbourhood," he said. "You must not go out alone, Margot. What did he call himself?"

"Sibby Carter!" she repeated with a half smile; but Mr. Stuart did not smile.

"I must remember that name. It may be useful for purposes of identifying him," he said. "We must thank Mr. Jowlett for the service that his servant has rendered us."

He himself met Jeremiah at the station that night and Jeremiah, whose work had suffered that day by the memory of two laughing grey eyes, accepted the invitation to dine - with indecent haste.

"I am glad Minter was on hand," he said. "Confound that fellow! But that was Minter all over. Ever the knight-errant and rescuer of distressed ladies - lucky devil! I'll go and change."

"No, no," said Mr. Stuart, shaking his head. "I want you to come as you are. Perhaps you'll drive straight to the house."

"I'll take the elevator to the ninth," said Jeremiah, "and I'll be back at the house in time to welcome you."

But when he did get to Arthurton Lodge, Mr. Stuart was waiting. The dinner was a great success from the point of view of two people who talked as though they had been friends since childhood. The old man was a silent but appreciative audience.

"And so you actually saw the ghost! And he wore hob-nailed boots. Bully for the ghost," Jerry said boisterously.

"It's fun for you but I was scared to death," said the girl.

"You were afraid I'd lose him I suppose," said Jerry, "and thank you for your thoughtfulness. He certainly had no right to

stray on to your property, and any time you see him away from his ancestral home, I hope you will send him back. I must get some slippers for him," he said gravely. "You've no idea how that ghost wears out boots . . ."

"You haven't seen him yet!" she challenged. "You won't speak so flippantly of him when you do."

"I never speak flippantly of ghosts," protested Jeremiah. "Certainly not of my own ghost. When I bought the property five years ago and built that bungalow I particularly asked for special provision to be made for William -"

"Who is William?" asked the unsuspecting girl.

"William is the name of the ghost," said the other solemnly.

"You're incorrigible. And besides you know my uncle takes quite a different view."

"About ghosts?" asked the other incredulously.

"Don't you, Uncle James?" the girl appealed.

Mr. Stuart rubbed his beard.

"Naturally I believe in manifestations," he said. "I have witnessed some extraordinary psychic phenomena and I would not exclude the possibility of even a ghost."

"I'm sorry if I -" began Jeremiah.

"You can say anything you like about them," said the old man good-humouredly. "I'm merely expressing an opinion."

They adjourned to the drawing-room after dinner and to the girl's surprise Mr. Stuart accompanied them. It was in an interval of silence, one of those momentary cessations of speech which the superstitious associate with the twentieth minute, that an interruption came. The girl looked round suddenly at the shuttered window.

"What was that?" asked Mr. Stuart quickly.

"I thought I heard something," she said. "It was as though somebody had touched the window pane."

Jerry rose.

"I'll go and see," he said, but the hand of James Stuart detained him.

"It may be our friend the ghost," he said, half joking and half serious, "and in that case I think that somebody should see him who takes a less frivolous view."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Jeremiah.

"I'd rather go alone," replied Mr. Stuart, and was gone for some time.

They heard his footsteps walking along the gravel path which

ran round the house, and then they heard him return. It was some minutes before he came back to them and he met Jeremiah in the passage.

"Margot was getting anxious," said the young man.

"Nobody was there," explained Stuart as he came back to the drawing-room and laid a torch upon a table. "I searched the shrubbery and the garden but there is no sign of ghost or burglar."

"It may have been the creeper knocking against the window," said Margot, but Stuart shook his head.

"There is no wind and I particularly noticed that the creeper is trimmed close near the window," he said. "Perhaps it was your imagination."

They sat talking for some time and the old man included himself in the conversation. Jeremiah was hoping that the explorer would tell something of his adventures in Brazil but, beyond a perfunctory and superficial reference to the heat and the mosquitoes, he said little or nothing and the talk was mostly of Margot's school life and Mr. Stuart's reminiscences of her mother when she was a girl.

He was in the midst of one of these stories when he stopped suddenly and bent his head.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked.

"I heard nothing," said Jerry in surprise. "What did it sound like?"

"It sounded like a footstep on the gravel. Did you hear it Margot?"

But Margot had not heard it either.

"Strange!" muttered Mr. Stuart.

The conversation was resumed. Again he stopped.

"I'll swear I heard a cry," he said.

Jeremiah had heard what he thought was the faint screech of a distant owl.

"I thought it was an owl, too," said Margot.

Shortly afterwards Jeremiah rose to go and they walked with him to the hall, Mr. Stuart helping him on with his coat. Jeremiah had left his car at the back of the house outside the garage, but he refused the old man's company.

"I can find my way up the hill road blindfolded," he said as Stuart opened the door, "and -"

He stopped and started back with an exclamation of surprise. And well he might be surprised, for crouched in the porch was the figure of a man. The light in the hall was strong enough to

show every detail of the huddled man and Margot recognized him.

"Why, it's the tramp!" she cried. "Sibby Carter."

Jeremiah leant over the figure and touched it; and at that touch it rolled over and fell in an inanimate heap.

"Dead!" gasped Jerry and looked closer.

As the figure lay, its throat was exposed and there was a round and livid bruise at the nape of the neck.

"Dead!" said Jeremiah again. "And murdered, I think. The Ghost of Down Hill has a pair of very powerful hands, Mr. Stuart, for this man's neck is broken!"

5

Minter The Servant

THERE was no doubt about it. The man was dead. Jeremiah had only to look at him for a second to see that. Gently he shepherded the girl back to the drawing-room. She was white but very calm and when she spoke her voice was steady.

"Is he dead?" she asked quietly, and marvelling at her self-possession, Jeremiah nodded.

"How dreadful! What do you think happened?"

"My mind is in a whirl," said Jeremiah, shaking his head helplessly. "I know no more than you."

"I am sure he is the man who said his name was Sibby Carter," she said; and he looked at her in astonishment, for he had not heard her half-whispered words when the body had been found.

"Do you know him?" he asked incredulously.

She shook her head.

"I only met him today," she said, and she told him again of her meeting with the tramp.

"That man?" he said in surprise. "What an extraordinary coincidence!"

It was an hour before the police came, and nearly two hours before the ambulance arrived from Eastbourne to carry away the victim of the tragedy.

"It was very fortunate you were here," said James Stuart gravely. "I can't understand it. Why did the man come here; and who but the Ghost of Down Hill could have slain him?"

In other circumstances Jeremiah would have laughed.

"The Ghost of Down Hill?" he repeated. "But surely, Mr.

Stuart, a ghost is not a material thing with material strength in its substantial fingers?"

James Stuart shook his head.

"There are more things in this world than are dreamt of in your philosophy," he said simply, and with these words in his ears Jeremiah made his way back to his bungalow, a worried man.

Although the hour was late, the stout and placid Minter was waiting for him. A fire burnt in the grate of his comfortable sitting-room and Minter, who never seemed to be tired, listened to the story of the "exciting night" with that air of polite interest which invariably annoyed Jeremiah.

He was a large, calm man with a clean-shaven face and deep-set eyes, the very model of a perfect valet-butler; but there were times when he irritated Jeremiah beyond endurance. The man had been in his service for five months and in every way had been satisfactory; and now Jeremiah had a particular reason for being grateful to him for he had that morning saved Margot Panton from the unpleasant attentions of the dead Sibby Carter.

"One would imagine, Minter," he said irritably, "that I was telling you the story of a tea-fight. Don't you realize that there has been a murder committed under your very nose?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Minter respectfully. "What time would you like your breakfast in the morning?"

"Pah!" said Jeremiah.

He dismissed his servant and went to bed. But his mind was too active to sleep. Again and again he turned over in his mind the extraordinary circumstances of that evening, and somehow the adventure of the surveyor of Eastbourne and Mr. Staines' curious experience insisted upon obtruding into his mind and mixing themselves up until, with a groan, he shut his eyes tightly and attempted to dismiss entirely from his thoughts both the Ghost of Down Hill and the mystery man who held up inoffensive people and examined their pass-books.

He was nearly asleep when he thought he heard a stealthy movement outside his door, and was instantly awake. He listened. Again it came, a faint creak of sound and, carefully pulling back the clothes, he got out of bed as noiselessly as possible, crept to the door and listened.

The clock of Arthurton church struck three.

"This is getting on my nerves," he muttered to himself and would have gone back to bed, but for the unexpected repetition of the sound. This time it was outside the house. He walked across

the room to the window and gently drew aside the curtain. The cloud wrack had for a moment covered the moon, but he could see a figure walking quickly down the snow-covered path to the gate, and there was no mistaking its identity, for the bulk of the man could not be disguised. It was Minter!

He pulled on trousers over his pyjamas, slipped his feet into a pair of boots and bundling on an overcoat left his room, went along the passage and out of the side door which was ajar.

When he got outside the man had reached the gate.

"Minter," he called sharply, and at the sound of his voice Minter turned. He was carrying something in his hand; something that glittered and gleamed in a fitful ray of moonlight.

"Minter," called Jeremiah again.

"Yes, sir," was the answer, and the man came slowly back.

Before he could slip the thing he carried into his pocket, Jeremiah had seen the revolver, and gasped. He did not link the mild Minter with lethal weapons.

"What the devil are you doing crawling about in the middle of the night with a gun in your hand?" he demanded.

"I was following the Ghost of Down Hill, sir," was the cool reply.

"The Ghost of Down Hill," repeated Jeremiah. "What do you mean?"

Minter did not reply immediately and Jeremiah, scrutinizing him keenly, saw that he was considerably perturbed by the unexpected interruption to his quest.

"I thought I saw a figure moving through the gardens here and I followed it."

Jeremiah looked at him.

"But you're fully dressed, Minter," he said quietly. "Did you happen to be fully dressed when you saw the ghost?"

"Yes, sir," was the surprising reply.

Jeremiah led the way back to the sitting-room and turned on the light, and this time his examination of his servant was more thorough.

"And did you happen to have changed your clothes before you went to bed," he asked pointedly; for the suit the man wore was not the uniform that had encased his portly figure when Jeremiah had said goodnight to him.

Minter did not make any reply.

"I will see you about this in the morning," said Jeremiah, and with a curt nod dismissed the man.

The more he thought the matter over, the more puzzled he became. A faint glow was showing in the east before he eventually fell into a troubled sleep, to be awakened by the correct Minter, who came into the room with a preliminary knock and carried the usual morning tea.

The man filled Jeremiah's bath and put his clothes ready before he spoke.

"I daresay, sir," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "that you think my conduct last night was rather strange."

"I think it was extremely strange," said Jeremiah, "and I tell you this frankly, Minter, unless you explain what you were doing out in the middle of the night and explain it to my satisfaction, I shall dispense with your services."

Minter's heavy head nodded.

"That I can quite understand, sir," he said politely, "but if I tell you, sir, that I have seen the Ghost of Down Hill three nights in succession and that I was waiting last night to follow him, you will understand that there is nothing mysterious about my having changed my clothes for garments more suitable for an out-of-door chase."

This argument was unanswerable. Jeremiah did not for one moment doubt the big man's word.

"Ghosts, sir," the man went on, "do not as a rule impress me because I come from a long line of Wesleyan Methodists who are not great believers in spiritual manifestations. But a ghost with a theodolite and a measures-rod seems to me to be a little outside of the usual run of ghosts."

"What do you mean, Minter?" asked Jeremiah quickly; he sat on the edge of the bed staring at the man.

"Two nights ago, sir, I saw the ghost and he carried over his shoulder a small theodolite - I saw it in use later. He was making elaborate measurements; evidently starting from the big rock in the sunken garden below the house, I saw the rod as distinctly as I see you. Before I could dress and get out he was gone."

Jeremiah whistled. All doubts as to his servant's story were now dissipated. He knew that the man was speaking the truth.

"You must have found his footprints?"

"I found them immediately after, sir, but was unable to make a very careful observation in the morning because more snow fell during the night," said Minter, shaking his head, and Jeremiah had to laugh at the man's matter-of-fact tone.

"Weren't you at all scared, Minter?"

"No, sir, I wasn't scared," said the man with a smile. "Not so scared as the ghost would be if he knew that I took the revolver prize at Bisley for three years in succession."

6

The Warning

"It is an extraordinary case," said Lord Ilfran shaking his head. "One of the most extraordinary I have ever heard about."

He was seated at his desk in the big room overlooking Whitehall and Jeremiah Jowlett was sitting on the opposite side, facing him.

Lord Ilfran ran his long, nervous fingers through his white hair and stared out of the window.

"You say that this man Carter was a member of the Stedman gang?"

Jeremiah nodded.

"I don't think there can be any doubt about that," he said. "His fingerprints have been taken and identified; moreover, he didn't seem to disguise his name. He went to prison at the same time as John Stedman the head of the gang and they were released from prison within a few days of one another."

"Has Stedman been discovered?"

"No, sir," replied Jeremiah. "We put a call out to all stations but up to now we haven't been able to pull him in."

"It's curious," said the Public Prosecutor again. "And what a terrible shock for that poor girl."

"She stood it splendidly," said the enthusiastic Jeremiah. "Most women would have fainted but she was wonderful."

"There were no footsteps in the snow?"

"No. The garden path had been swept clear of snow, and the only clue we have is the one supplied by James Stuart. He said he thought he heard footsteps a few minutes before the tragedy was discovered."

Lord Ilfran leant back in his chair.

"The ghost suggestion is, of course, absurd," he said. "Somebody is masquerading for a purpose of his own. By the way, have you seen the ghost?"

"Twice," said Jeremiah to his chief's surprise. "The fact is, sir -" he leant across the table and lowered his voice - "so far as

a house can be said to be haunted, that description applies to my bungalow. I haven't told Miss Panton because I didn't want to alarm her, but the Ghost of Down Hill is a very real quantity. Although my glimpses of this midnight wanderer have been more or less sketchy, the descriptions Miss Panton gave me of the man in the monk's robe with a grinning skeleton face are identical with what I saw."

Lord Ilfran was seldom surprised. A lifetime spent in the law had removed the novelty even from the bizarre; but now he was genuinely amazed for Jeremiah was a hard-headed young man, who had few illusions.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked curiously.

"About six months," was the reply, "or about three months before Mr. Stuart returned from the Brazils. The first time I saw the 'ghost' was one late summer night when a storm was working up from the sea. I was sitting in my study reading a law book, when I heard a tap-tap at the window. I thought that a shutter had worked loose and took no notice. Presently it was repeated. I walked to the window and looked out. It was a pitch black night and I saw nothing until suddenly there came a blinding flash of lightning and there, standing in the middle of the path, I saw the figure of a monk. By the time I had got outside it was raining heavily and I couldn't see anything by the fitful flashes of lightning.

"The second time was a month ago, and on this occasion the visitation was a little more serious," said Jeremiah quietly. "I had gone to bed and was asleep when Minter woke me to tell me he'd heard a noise in the cellar - it's under the house and I keep some wine there. When I went to look I found the cellar door wide open and when I went down I found that somebody had dug a hole in the floor of the cellar."

"You saw nobody?" asked Lord Ilfran intensely interested.

"Nobody," replied Jeremiah, "at that moment. But there is a covered way behind the house and when I shone my torch along it I saw the visitor for the second time. He was at the far end near the side door and I am willing to admit that the sight of that fleshless face startled me. Before I could reach him he was gone."

"Has there been any other manifestation?"

Jeremiah smiled.

"It is curious you should use that word, sir," he said, still smiling. "It is a favourite one of Mr. James Stuart. He implicitly believes in spirits and he has asked me to give him permission to

spend a night alone in the house in order that he may lay the ghost. I might add," he went on, "that Minter, my servant, has also seen the figure – a fact which I learnt only last night."

Lord Ilfran rose from his table and paced the room slowly.

"This will not bring us any nearer to discovering the murderer of Sibby Carter," he said. "Are you going to agree to Mr. Stuart's suggestion?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't," said Jeremiah. He did not explain that he was particularly anxious to be on good terms with the uncle of Margot Panton and that, as Mr. Stuart had offered him the use of his own house during the period of his ghost laying, he was all the more willing and ready to humour the old man.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I am planning to take Minter and move in to Mr. Stuart's house the day after tomorrow."

"Well," said Lord Ilfran, "I am sure I wish Mr. Stuart luck."

Jeremiah Jowlett went home that night a little earlier. He was anxious to see the girl who had made so profound an impression upon him; and more anxious to learn whether any new evidence had come to light. He found Margot amazingly cheerful.

"Uncle is out," she said. "Will you have some tea with me?"

Jeremiah did not want a second invitation. He lingered over the meal until it was nearly dinner time, but Mr. James Stuart had not returned and at last he reluctantly took his leave.

It was a beautiful night, despite the cold, and they stood for a moment talking by the garden gate. From where they were the outlines of Down Hill house stood clear against the dying light in the western sky.

"I have allowed Minter to go home to see his sister," explained Jeremiah, when the girl had remarked upon the darkness of the bungalow. "But don't worry about me, Margot, I am an accomplished bachelor. I can grill a chop and boil a potato with the best cook in Arthurton."

"It seems terribly lonely for you," said Margot. "Won't you stay to dinner?"

"I'd like to," said Jeremiah in all sincerity, "but I don't want to annoy your uncle by living on the premises."

Suddenly she clutched his arm.

"Look!" she gasped and pointed to his house.

He could only stare in speechless amazement.

For suddenly every window in the building was glowing redly, as though simultaneously every room was on fire. Fiercely it

gleamed across the snow-white hill and then as suddenly the red glow died down.

"I must go and see what has happened," said Jeremiah.

"Let me come with you," she said, and he felt her grip tighten on his arm and hesitated.

"I think you'd better stay here," he said, and a minute later she heard the thunder of his car as it took the steep hill road.

When he reached the gate of his house, Jerry jumped from the car and raced along the garden path. He tried the side door. It was locked. He thrust a key into the lock and a second later was in the house. He did not meet any intruder, nor did he expect to. There was a strong smell of sulphur and the dining-room, the first he entered, was hazy with smoke. A small fire, which Minter had lit before he went out, glowed on the hearth; but the room was empty, as was his bedroom, where another small fire was burning.

He searched every inch of the bungalow without finding the slightest trace of a visitor. It was impossible that anybody could have made their escape, for all the doors, except the side door, were locked on the inside, and Jeremiah had fitted a new lock to the side door the day after he discovered the hole in his cellar floor – a lock which he knew it was impossible to pick.

He came back to the dining-room and then, for the first time, saw a document which lay upon the table. It was not of paper, but of old-fashioned vellum, and the words were written in quaint old English characters:

"Thy presence on this hallowed spot is a profanation. Leave thy house, lest the lonely monk of Down Hill bring thee to a terrible death."

7

The Footprints On The Roof

HOW had the paper got there? Jeremiah looked round and the solution became apparent. The table was placed near to the window and above the window were two small ventilating panes, one of which was open. The paper could have been thrust in from the outside and the chances were that it would fall on the table. He opened the window to let the fumes disperse and then sat down to puzzle out the situation.

Suddenly a thought struck him and he went to the fire and looked at it carefully. On the top of the red glowing coal were the ashes of paper. He went into the next room and made a similar discovery. Slowly a smile dawned on his face.

"So that's it, is it?" he muttered. He left the house by the side door, carefully locking it behind him. He took a step ladder from the covered way. His home was built into the hill rather than upon it and the fields behind were almost on a level with the roof. He planted his ladder and climbed carefully.

In a second Jeremiah was standing on a small stone parapet which surrounded the roof. There was no doubt now as to what the visitor had done; the snow-covered slates were marked in all directions with footprints, and they led up to the squat chimney stack. He made an inspection and returned to his room. Whoever the Ghost of Down Hill was, there was no doubt as to the method he had employed for producing the effect which had so startled Jeremiah and the girl. Two packages of red fire had been dropped down the two chimneys simultaneously, had fallen into the fire and had ignited, producing that red glow.

He went back to his car and drove down the hill again to reassure the girl. She had put on a thick coat and was waiting at the garden gate of her uncle's house.

"Nothing very startling," he said carelessly. "Some fireworks that I bought to celebrate the coming of the New Year. They had been left too close to the fire and went off."

"It might have been serious," said the girl. "Your house might have been burnt down."

"I don't think it was as bad as that," said Jeremiah.

He stood talking to her for some time and then went back to the house. Half way up the hill he thought he saw a figure crouching in the shelter of some bushes and, stopping the car with a jerk, he jumped out. The man turned to run, but Jeremiah was on him before he had gone a few paces.

"Let me have a look at you, my friend," he said as he gripped the stranger's arm; and then he fell back in surprise, for the man was Minter.

"What the dickens do you mean by sneaking away into the bushes?" demanded the exasperated Jerry. "Now see here, Minter, I have had just as much of this mystery as I am willing to stand. You will come up to the house and explain what you are doing here when you are supposed to be in London attending the sick bed of your sister."

The man made no reply but seated himself in the passenger seat of the car and remained silent as Jerry drove back to the house.

"Now, Minter," said Jeremiah grimly, as he closed the door. "I won't trouble you to spin a yarn about the Ghost of Down Hill; I will even excuse you the lie that you were returning home, that you mistook me for the monkish bogey and hid from fear. Let us have the truth."

Minter was dressed in a rough tweed suit, over which he wore a heavy raincoat. He did not seem in the least embarrassed by his employer's direct questions and his placid face remained impassive all the time Jerry was talking.

"I have no explanation to give, sir," he said in a smooth, even way, "if you will not accept the story that I was returning to the house when you overtook me."

"Why did you run away?" asked Jeremiah sternly.

"That, I admit, was an error," replied Minter, gravely inclining his head. "I should have stood my ground and offered my explanation. The truth is, Mr. Jowlett, I did not think that the occupant of the car was you."

"Nonsense!" snapped Jerry. "You know the sound of my car as well as you know the sound of Big Ben. Now, what have you to say for yourself?"

But Minter had evidently no explanation to offer, for he remained silent.

"Very good," said Jeremiah, "then you leave my service tomorrow. You understand, Minter? I will not have these infernal mysteries."

Suddenly a thought struck him.

"You haven't by chance been perambulating the roof of the bungalow tonight?" he asked sardonically and Minter smiled.

"No, sir, I did not go on to the roof," he said, "but I have been wandering about the grounds; it is possible you may have observed my footmarks, though I was careful to keep to the paths as much as possible."

"Did you see the fire?"

"The red fire," corrected the other. "Yes, I saw that."

"Did you see me come up to the house?"

Minter nodded.

"I even saw you come up to the -"

Crash!

They were standing near the window when the interruption

came. The big glass pane splintered into a thousand pieces, and something dropped heavily on to the floor. Minter stooped and picked up an object from the ground.

"How very cheerful, sir," he said, holding a large white something in his hand, and despite his self-possession Jeremiah shivered. It was a human skull that had come hurtling through the window!

* * *

Jeremiah Jowlett was early in London the following morning and, instead of going to his office, he took a taxi to Scotland Yard where he had an interview with the Assistant Commissioner.

That official listened without comment whilst Jeremiah told his story and when he had finished:

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I want the best detective you have, sir, preferably Leverett, who I am told is a particularly good man; for I am sure that behind all these ghostly warnings there is something particularly sinister and I associate the death of the man Carter -"

"With the ghost?" smiled the Commissioner quietly.

"With the ghost," said Jeremiah.

The Commissioner shook his head.

"I am afraid you can't have Leverett; he has been working for some time on the Stedman case. You have probably heard of it?"

"I know about the Stedman gang," smiled Jeremiah. "What is Leverett doing?"

"He has been trying to recover the money that was stolen from the liner. The Stedmans got away with an enormous sum, you will remember, and not a penny of it has been recovered."

"There is another thing I want to say, Sir John," said Jeremiah, and he seemed reluctant to continue. "It is about my man Minter," he explained. "I have reason to suspect that he knows more of this ghost business than he will admit - in fact, I wonder whether he *is* the ghost!"

He took an envelope from his inside pocket and produced a photograph.

"I snapped Minter the other day when he wasn't looking; perhaps you people may be able to identify him. I hate thinking ill of the man, he has been a particularly good servant, but in the circumstances -"

The Commissioner took the photograph from Jerry's hand and examined it.

"Do you know him, sir?"

"I seem to remember the face."

"Is he a member of the Stedman gang?" said Jerry with sudden inspiration.

"I will ask Leverett," said the commissioner quietly. "And in the meantime, Mr. Jowlett, I will see that your house is kept under observation. It must be an extremely trying experience for you."

"It will be more trying for the ghost," said Jerry unpleasantly.

He had arranged that Minter should take his clothes and personal belongings to James Stuart's house and when he returned there that evening it was with a sense of going home.

He found the dutiful Minter very much at his ease in his new surroundings.

"Nothing disturbs that fellow," said Jeremiah, with reluctant admiration. "You would imagine that he was born and bred in your uncle's service."

Margot laughed.

She was looking unusually beautiful that night, Jerry thought, and he prayed that Mr. Stuart's investigations into spiritual phenomena would occupy at least a week; though he felt guilty about allowing the old man to go up to the house alone. His conscience was pricking him that night at dinner.

"Mr. Stuart," he blurted out, when they had reached the coffee and dessert stage in the meal, "I think I ought to tell you that these manifestations, as you call them, are due to human agency."

The old man turned his grave eyes upon Jeremiah.

"That is what the uninitiated say of all manifestations," he said quietly.

"But I have a feeling that I am deceiving you by allowing you to go to the house," said Jerry.

"I am willing to be deceived," said Stuart with a quiet smile.

"I saw you today."

It was the girl who spoke and she addressed her uncle.

He rose his bristling eyebrows.

"You saw me, my dear," he said gently. "Where did you see me?"

"At Seaford," said the girl with a smile. "You were in a big motor-boat, or perhaps I should call it a cruiser. I had to go into Seaford to get some medicine for Mrs. Wilmot's rheumatism," she explained.

"You should have gone to Eastbourne, the road isn't so bad,"

he said shortly and then after a long pause: "Yes, I was trying the boat. A man wants me to buy it, but I am not very keen on the sea."

"But it was a brand new boat, and they told me it had just arrived from London and that it was yours."

He smiled.

"The wish was probably father to the thought," he said good-humouredly, "and the gentleman who gave you this information was probably the proprietor who is anxious to sell it to me at a good profit."

He went on to talk of other things.

At nine o'clock that night, with a small case in his hand and Jeremiah's keys in his pocket, James Stuart said goodnight to the two.

"I shall probably have some very important information to give you in the morning," he said. "I am in a particularly good mood tonight and there is very little doubt that I shall gain communication with those upon the other plane."

"Happy hunting," said Jeremiah, who could think of nothing more appropriate to say.

"Poor Uncle James," said the girl when the older man had gone. "He really does believe in spirits you know."

"I'm inclined to believe in them myself," said Jeremiah flipantly. "In fact, I hope that Down Hill is stiff with ghosts and that they will keep Mr. Stuart busy for another year."

He reached out and took her hand, and saw her colour change.

"Margot," he said, "how long does a man have to know a girl before he falls hopelessly in love with her?"

She tried to withdraw her hand but he held it tightly.

"Margot," he said earnestly, "I can answer the question I have just asked. It takes a man just as long as I have known you to fall in love."

"Do you play chess?" she asked hastily.

"I play everything except the flute," said Jeremiah.

He was a riotously happy man that evening, for he had read the answer in the eyes of the girl and when he went to bed that night (which was in Mr. Stuart's own room) he seemed to tread on air.

* * *

The next morning brought James Stuart a little weary-looking,

but full of confidence. He had an amazing story to tell of a visitation and of a long conversation he had had with one of the innumerable spirits which haunted Down Hill, but he only stayed for ten minutes and then returned to the house on the hill.

Jeremiah went up to London, taking Minter with him to help with his Christmas shopping. They got back to Arthurton after nightfall and the snow was falling gently but persistently.

"It looks as if we are going to have a pretty wild night, Minter," said Jerry as he climbed into the car.

"Yes, sir," said Minter agreeably.

The wind was blowing in fitful gusts and the drive to James Stuart's house took longer than usual.

Jerry could not see Down Hill house from there, the falling snow made an impenetrable veil which hid not only the bungalow, but the whole of the hill.

Margot had been busy decorating the house with holly and greenery and Jerry spent a happy evening helping her. He allowed Minter, who said he had a chill, to go to bed early; but this was no great hardship to Jerry, who wanted to be alone with the girl, free from interruptions.

They had almost finished their work when Jeremiah remembered a particular present which he had given Minter to carry. It was intended for James Stuart and was not amongst the parcels that were piled on the hall table. Minter would not be asleep so early, he thought, and went up the stairs to the room where Minter was sleeping. He knocked at the door but there was no answer and he turned the handle and walked in. The room was empty; the bed had not been slept in and Jeremiah went back to the girl a very thoughtful young man.

Mrs. Wilmot, the housekeeper, had not seen Minter, nor had the other servants.

"He said he had a chill and I let him go to bed," said Jeremiah in a troubled voice. "I don't understand it and I don't like it. If he had a chill he would not go out on a night like this; and if he hadn't a chill, he had certainly some reason for lying."

"Perhaps he's gone up to your house for something he's forgotten," suggested Margot. "Now don't be silly, Jeremiah; come along and help me with this holly."

Midnight came and Margot went to bed, but still Minter had not returned. Jerry made three visits to his room and at one o'clock he decided that he would lock up and go to bed. But how would Minter get in? Minter was beginning to worry him. That

smooth, placid man, who was never disturbed and never distressed by the most extraordinary happening, was beginning to present a problem almost as insoluble as the Ghost of Down Hill.

At two o'clock Jerry went up to his room and lay down, pulling the bed cover over himself and expecting any minute to be disturbed by Minter's knock, but no sound came. After waiting for an hour he got up and looked out of the window. The snow was still falling and there was no sound but the low souging of the wind and the distant hoot of a fog-horn in the far-away Channel.

He wondered what the old man was doing at that lonely house on the hill and smiled despite his annoyance. Then he heard the low purring of a car. It came to him with the wind in gusts, sometimes loud, sometimes almost indistinguishable. He threw open the casement windows and leant out, peering into the darkness. Nearer and nearer came the sound and suddenly, with a start, he recognized that it was his own car which he had left in the garage on the top of the hill on the previous night.

He could not have mistaken the sound. Jeremiah could have distinguished it from a dozen. Suddenly the purring ceased; the engine had stopped. Faintly came the sound of a voice; a strange, eerie sound it made in that silent night; high-pitched and unintelligible. Another voice replied, and then there was an interval of silence. Suddenly a shot rang out, clear and distinct. It was followed by another, and a third, in rapid succession.

Jerry waited to hear no more. Within seconds he was outside the house and running through the deep snow in the direction of the road whence the sound had come.

He heard the roar of his car and jumped aside just in time to avoid being run down. It was without lights and he only had time to glimpse a huddled figure at the wheel before it passed into the night.

He stood still, bewildered and baffled. Then there came to him a faint cry and he plunged through a snow-drift almost up to his waist in an effort to reach the man who had called. Putting his hand in his pocket he discovered his torch, and flashed the light. He knew before he had picked up his bearings that he was in one of the deep ditches which ran on either side of the road; and he struggled back to firmer going.

"Where are you?" he shouted.

"Here," cried a faint voice, and he turned into the narrow lane which led up to Down Hill farm.

Suddenly he stopped and his blood ran cold. Staring up from the ground was that ghastly fleshless face he had seen on the monk. He picked up the thing. It was a mask; evidently dropped by somebody and evidently part of the ghost's equipment.

"Where are you?" he called again.

"Here," said a voice close at hand, and he turned his torch on a figure that lay half covered by the driving snowflakes.

"My God," he gasped, "Minter!"

Minter's white face was streaked with blood; but that calm man could afford to smile.

"My name isn't Minter," he said. "I am Inspector Leverett of Scotland Yard, and I am afraid I am badly hurt."

* * *

It was some time before Jeremiah could get help to carry the wounded man to the house, but at last Leverett was propped up on pillows in the drawing-room and Mrs. Wilmot was lighting a fire.

Jerry had a rough knowledge of first aid and he saw at once that the two wounds in the man's head and shoulder were not as desperate as he had feared; a view which was confirmed when Arthurton's one doctor came upon the scene.

"Who did this?" asked Jeremiah.

"Stedman," was the reply. "I have been watching him for five months and now the devil has got away; though he can't escape from England, that I swear. Which way did he go, sir?"

"Was he in the car?" asked Jeremiah.

The man nodded and winced with the pain of it.

"I think he went to Seaford."

"To Seaford," gasped Inspector Leverett. "Didn't I hear the young lady say that he was trying out a motor-boat? That is the means by which John Stedman will escape."

"No, it was Mr. Stuart who was trying the motor-boat," said Jeremiah.

The man looked round.

"Is the young lady about?" he asked in a low voice.

Jeremiah shook his head.

"No, thank heavens. Mrs. Wilmot tells me she's still sleeping."

"Good," said Leverett and eyed Jeremiah curiously. "You say that Mr. Stuart owned the boat at Seaford," he said, "and I told you John Stedman would escape by means of that boat. I

now tell you what will probably surprise you, Mr. Jowlett. Stedman and James Stuart are one and the same person!"

8

A Letter From The Yard

MARGOT PANTON never knew the story of her uncle's past. She simply heard that he had gone abroad and did not even know that the wreckage of his motor-boat was picked up in the Channel four days later. To her James Stuart is still the pleasant memory of a pleasant and eccentric old man who left England hurriedly and unexpectedly on a wild winter night and has not returned.

Jeremiah saved her from the knowledge; and when he sold the house at Arthurton, and without authority disposed of James Stuart's property, handing the proceeds to the girl, she never dreamt that he was not acting under Mr. Stuart's directions.

Even when they married, as they were three months later, Jeremiah never showed her the letter which Inspector Leverett sent to him a week after the girl had been whisked off to London.

"Dear Mr. Jowlett," the letter ran,

"I feel that I owe you an apology and an explanation beyond the few incoherent remarks I made on the night when you undoubtedly saved me from death; for I should have died of exposure by the morning.

"You probably know as much about the Stedman gang as I do. The gang was organized by one of the cleverest crooks in the world; his real name was James Stuart. Stuart had been in the hands of the police many times, but always under the name of John Stedman. He was a clever bank smasher and for his crimes he served three terms in prison. His long absences from home, when he was supposed to be engaged in tours of Brazil and other parts of South America, are explained by the fact that he was serving prison sentences during these periods.

"Nobody knew that the white-bearded gentleman who lived at Arthurton was Stedman, and I had no suspicion of the circumstances until some six months ago. Stedman's, or Stuart's last job, was the burgling of the strong room of a liner. He and his two companions got away with nearly a million dollars in

paper currency, with the police hot on their track. The third man of the gang was drowned in an attempt to swim a river but Stedman and the man named Sibby Carter went their several ways, agreeing to meet in London at a certain rendezvous. The police picked up Sibby Carter, and from him learnt the direction Stedman had taken and started off in pursuit of the leader of the gang. Stedman must have known what was happening, for he went straight to the country he knew best – the country about Arthurton, where he lived as Stuart, respected by his neighbours, who had not the slightest idea that they were harbouring one of the greatest crooks in the world.

“He dare not go home, however. His biggest asset was his identity as Stuart, and he had a shrewd suspicion that the police would not be shaken off. He arrived at Arthurton in the night and his first step was to bury his plunder. He chose a spot on the top of a hill, the site of an old monastery which was supposed to be haunted. There, deep in the ground, he buried a steel box containing his loot.

“After carefully marking the place, he went on to London, hoping to baffle his pursuers, but he was arrested at Charing Cross station, two days later. He swore that the money was lost and was sent to prison for seven years, as also was his confederate, Carter. The two men were released within a few days of one another, but unfortunately Stedman was released first. Carter, who wanted his share of the loot, and who knew that his chief had hidden it, began a search to discover the hiding place of his former leader.

“Carter must have known something about Stuart’s identity, for he appeared in Arthurton a short time after his release. It was his arrival at Arthurton which brought me, for I was trailing Sibby Carter in the hopes that he would lead me to the stolen property. Carter was anxious to get the money but he was also in some fear of Stuart and did not approach him until that night when he lost his life. But here I anticipate.

“Stuart, released from gaol, came back home and discovered to his horror that a bungalow had been erected on the very spot where his money was hidden. His first suspicion was that the builder, or the Clerk of the Works, must have found the money and said nothing about it. He paid a visit to the Clerk of the Works, who by this time had an appointment with the municipality of Eastbourne, and, holding the man up at the point of a gun, he examined his pass-books, his object being

to discover whether any large sum had been paid into the account during the time the bungalow was being built. Failing to make this discovery he next called upon the builder, a man named Staines, and submitted him to the same search. When these had failed, he was certain that the money was still under the house and began his carefully considered plan of frightening the occupant away so that he could pursue his search without hindrance.

“Unfortunately for him, I had already arrived at Arthurton and knowing that Sibby Carter was in the neighbourhood, and more than suspecting that James Stuart and Stedman were one and the same person, I had contrived to be taken into your employment as a butler – in which capacity I trust I have given you no cause for complaint.

“I shaved off my beard and moustache, and it was fortunate for me that I did so, otherwise Stuart would have recognized me.

“On the night that Sibby Carter was killed I was watching the house with a pair of powerful night glasses and I saw the two men in conversation. They must have walked to the porch and there undoubtedly James Stuart, who was a tremendously powerful old man, broke the neck of his erstwhile companion in crime, in order to silence him. Possibly Carter had threatened to expose Stuart. The motive for the murder is not at all obscure; there were many reasons why it was necessary that Carter should be put out of the way.

“The rest of the story needs no telling. Stuart, posing as a spiritualist, got admission to your house. On the night he dug deeper into your cellar and unearthed the tin box, I was watching him. I followed him down the hill road through the storm, hanging on to the back of the car, knowing that he was making his final getaway and that the tin box on the seat by his side contained the money he had stolen from the liner.

“When we reached the road the car slowed and I thought it was time to reveal myself. I ran forward, put a revolver under his nose and demanded his surrender. At the same time I reached for the steel box. Before I knew what had happened Stuart had shot me down – that is the story.

“The money is now recovered, and I should not think it is necessary that Miss Panton should know any more than she already knows.

“One thing I think you can tell her – it is that her uncle,

definitely and finally, has laid the Ghost of Down Hill.
Yours very sincerely,
Frederick Leverett."

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In the distance we heard the roar and hiss of the surf as it crumbled on the shingle beach. It was very dark, with no moon, and clouds hiding the stars. Janice sensed my fear . . .

Arthur Kent NIGHT OF THE HI-JACK

Arthur Kent is a 38-year-old London-born journalist working for the Beaverbrook Press and formerly with the Australian "Daily Mirror" and the "News Chronicle" in London.

He is the author of some twenty books, with "Long Horn, Long Grass" (Robert Hale) published this spring and "Black Sunday" (Robert Hale) appearing this autumn.

IN the narrow beam of light from the dashboard I saw the flash of nylon as Janice slid her legs from the Jaguar car. I reached for the Smith & Wesson thirty-eight revolver in the dashboard pocket. The butt was cold in my grasp. I shivered slightly.

Janice was now standing on the grass hump beside the ditch. She said to me in her educated English voice, "Have you got the gun, Clark?"

I only grunted. There was sweat on my forehead already and my voice was clogged. The brandy I'd reinforced my jangling nerve with back at the country inn, seemed to have lost its zing. If anything it had helped to make my stomach queasy. I told myself now, for about the twentieth time, that it wasn't too late; that I could call it off; that we could go back, our dough intact.

But Janice, cool and confident, was already moving and I knew how she would take it if I funked now. I remembered that she had dropped her ex-R.A.F. flyer boyfriend, Dennis, because he had lost his nerve and began to hit the bottle.

She went to the car boot, appearing a moment later with the bag. There was a lot of money in that bag, and a third of it was mine.

I took Janice's hand and together we inched along the

road through the darkness. In the distance we heard the roar and hiss of the surf as it crumbled on the stone shingle beach. It was very dark, with no moon, and clouds hiding the stars. Janice sensed my fear. She said calmly and not unkindly, "Clark, stop worrying. There's no indication, for one moment, that this lot are the same crowd."

Not the same crowd! In the BEA handgrip there was fifteen thousand pounds in five pound notes, and if something went wrong – if these French guys *were* hi-jackers – Janice and I would lose ten thousand pounds between us.



We were about to buy a consignment of contraband from a yacht coming across from France. Courier had met courier. Plan had been checked against plan. And the deal had been finalized and the South coast rendezvous point agreed upon.

It was our biggest smuggling venture project yet, and I was worried on a couple of counts. For a start, the French boys were being a little too eager and co-operative, and after all they were taking the major risk by bringing the stuff across. Also I had heard stories in the London drinking clubs where the smuggling

fraternity met. There had been several tales told in recent months of English smugglers having their cargoes hi-jacked.

The hi-jack had almost always followed the same pattern. But with one difference from now. Usually it had been an English yacht, slipping into a lonely Normandy beach to pick up cargo to be paid for on the spot, which ran into treachery. The French, heavily-armed, had taken the cash and kept the cargo. The unarmed British had been lucky to get away with their lives and their yachts.

Janice and I reached the end of the road and turned off. The narrow track now dropped sharply towards the beach. On either side of us were the dark silhouettes of large houses against the night skyline. This was a beauty spot, I remembered Janice telling me. Once Noel Coward lived here and Peter Ustinov still had a summer retreat nearby.

Below us was a small bay shielded on either side by towering white chalk cliffs. Small craft could nose into the half-bay and run against the one or two small jetties which poked into the sea. Contraband could be swiftly unloaded in the dark and humped silently the few yards to a waiting van.

We had a Land-Rover down there now – ready. Behind a corroding breakwater boarding waited the third partner, Jack. And Jack was a third source of worry to me. He had put up the other five thousand pounds, and he wouldn't be keen to lose it. Jack was a hothead. He, too, had been worried about the possibilities of hi-jacking. And he had said at our last meeting, "Don't worry about it, Clark. I'm bringing a chopper, and I have the nerve and the know-how to use it."

By chopper, he explained, he meant a Sterling submachine gun. But he didn't bring it after all. I thought he had only said that because he didn't trust me. But he brought a wooden cudgel instead, and he did have weight on his side.

So arm in arm, like a couple of lovers, should anybody see us, Janice and I went down the gradient to the biggest night of trouble I've experienced in my forty years of knocking about the world.

* * *

But a little, just a little, about my background. I'm an American, and I'm in the smuggling business in England, and this is the story of how I got into it and what happened on that night of trouble. My real name and where I come from in New York, doesn't

matter. Perhaps I'll publish it in my old age, when I've made my pile, stopped my restless wandering, and settled down in some nice quiet and beautiful spot – say like Marrakesh.

But why smuggling, especially in England? Well, there are several advantages in smuggling into Britain. For a start she's just about the highest-taxed country in the world. For another, the English have a soft spot for a smuggler. They don't look upon him as a thug, and this attitude is reflected in the penalties handed out by the courts to people they catch. Only subsequent offences are usually punished by imprisonment.

Smuggling, in Britain, has been looked upon as a romantic adventure since the Napoleonic wars. It really reached its peak then, for the British Government of the day had to impose high taxation to pay for the massive armies and navies they were creating to combat the little Corsican corporal.

Almost overnight smuggling became a national sport. Entire coastal villages would participate, from the parson and squire down. Cornishmen used the caves in their towering granite cliffs to hide contraband shipments. Kentish men brought their consignments strapped to donkeys across the beaches and the Romney Marshes. Then the contraband was usually French lace, silks, brandy, tobacco. Now, moving with the taxation of the times, it's almost everything – watches mainly and jewellery, pornographic novels from the Paris presses of Olympia.

In the old days the penalty on capture could be hanging if you resisted arrest by force. Now, and they have to catch you, it's only a stiff fine, the profit from a couple of successful operations. Although it's true that Customs now have science aiding them – radio and radar – it's also a fact that the smuggler has taken advantage of progress, too. For big deals he uses aircraft. The murderer, Donald Hume, who killed car dealer Stanley Setty in 1949 then dropped his dismembered body over the Essex marshes, was such a flying smuggler. Yachts are also used on big deals, in which small operators get together and share the costs and profits.

If you doubt that the United Kingdom is a smuggler's paradise just look at these figures issued by the powerful National Association of Goldsmiths. Urging stiffer penalties for smuggling in 1962 they stated that approximately £5,000,000 worth of watches were annually smuggled into Britain. And since the average legitimate foreign import is only twice this figure, it means that roughly every third foreign watch is here illegally!

But how did I become a smuggler? I was bumming my way around the world as a deckhand on any tramp steamer that would take me somewhere new. Often I would jump ship at some interesting place, and get involved in something, and this is what happened in London.

I was on furlough from my ship, in no particular hurry to go back, and I was killing time in one of those small drinking clubs off Piccadilly, which open in the afternoon to circumvent the liquor laws. I was waiting for evening to brighten things up, pick up a girl, see a show. The usual stuff.

The club was deserted. Except for the barmaid – and Janice. She was sitting alone, toying morosely with a lager and lime, her favourite long drink, and smoking a cigarette poked into a fancy elongated black ivory holder. She was about twenty-five, and damned attractive, and everything was shaped the right way. She was wearing an expensive form-hugging two piece charcoal grey suit. Her raven hair was worn short in a poodle cut, and she looked as sophisticated as all hell.

I took a seat two spaces from her and ordered a whisky. I made a couple of wrong assumptions about her. I categorised her either as a bored housewife out for an afternoon's search for worldliness, or a divorcee up to see the bright lights. She seemed to be both bored and a little upset.

I looked at her through the mirror a couple of times. She looked back with interest. I got some sixpenny pieces, crossed to the jukebox, and fed them in. Before pressing the number buttons I asked her what she would like to hear.

"Silence," she said; but she smiled encouragingly. I left the buttons unpushed, looked around the bar-room, saw the alcoves lining the wall, and indicated them. She got the message. She picked up her handbag and glass, I collected my drink, and followed her across.

I soon discovered I was wrong about Janice. She was neither a divorcee nor a bored housewife. She was waiting, I discovered later, for an ex-RAF fellow, who had been hitting the bottle too much of late. I soon discovered that she was interested in the two M's. Men and money. But she was no hustler, no gold-digger. She liked her men one at a time, and she liked to do the selecting. And also she liked him to become her partner in her smuggling racket, but I didn't discover that right then.

She had both brains and guts, I was to learn, and took her share of any risks. An unusual and brilliant woman. She was well-

educated at a good private school, had been a school mistress for a time, was amusing and with-it in every way. Nor, really, was she basically dishonest, if you overlooked the smuggling. She was against all other forms of crime and I never knew her to cheat anybody.

We had a few more drinks. Then we went to the theatre. Janice was to teach me a lot about the theatre, about music, and the arts. I had been something of a rough diamond until Janice took me in hand. After the theatre, we had dinner, a few more drinks, and I got her back to her apartment a little after midnight. It was in a street off swanky Chelsea, a cream and black-painted cottage, with shutters over the windows.

There was one of those tense moments when you get from the cab and you don't know whether to pay the cabbie off or not. But a quick look at Janice, and I knew she was expecting me to do this. She had already crossed the pavement and was unlocking the front door.

I had got to know Janice in those few hours, and I was both elevatingly captivated and depressed. I was completely under her spell, but I was wondering how long it could last. For how could I keep up with her financially? I didn't have the kind of dough to take her to the places that she liked to visit. That night had already set me back twenty-five pounds, and I could manage that - about one night in a month!

I had expected her apartment to reflect her own personality. Neat, tasteful. But it was really an eye-opener. Not only was it expensively equipped, but a lot of thought and ingenuity had gone into the décor. She flicked on subdued wall lights, which lit the room in an intimate glow. She indicated a redwood cocktail cabinet, and then a matching stereo. "Drink and music, Clark," she smiled. "I'll only be a minute."

I poured a whisky and started the radiogram. Most of the composers on the disc sleeves I had never heard of. I settled for a couple of LP's by the "Satchmo".

She came back in a housecoat, but it wasn't the vamping flimsy garment I had been hopefully expecting. And I discovered another thing about Janice. She didn't pick up her sex and heave it at you. I got her a drink and we sat listening to "Satchmo". A drink later she suddenly said, amusingly, "You like women, don't you, Clark?"

"I guess so."

"But what about money?"

I hesitated. "They go together." I thought gloomily that she had guessed my problem. Maybe she liked me, but she had realised before the first evening was out – even though I had taken pains to hide it by ordering the dearest food and wine and overtipping – that I couldn't keep up with her financially.

I said, "I like money, sure, Janice. But I've never worried over-much about it. I've always had enough for immediate wants. Lack of dough," I stressed, "hasn't lost me a woman I wanted yet."

She laughed at that. A beautiful tingling laugh. Then she indicated her apartment. "Money isn't important perhaps, but look at what you can get with it. These are the tangibles. These are the things you can see right now. But what about the other things – respect, independence, foreign travel."

"I have plenty of foreign travel . . ."

She laughed again. Then her mood suddenly changed. She was looking at me pointedly above the rim of her glass, and her dark eyes seemed to be misty."

"Do you like me, Clark?"

"Too much."

"It can never be too much," she whispered.

"Much is much is much, and is enough," I smiled.

"Then do something about it," she said.

We moved together on the divan as if on one string, and the touch of her lips was a soft, tingling electric shock.

* * *

We lay beneath one sheet, smoking, watching dawn creep across the rooftops of the buildings. I felt in a strangely dreamy half-awake, half-asleep mood. I've slept around a bit, but Janice was really something I'd never encountered before. This was a daydream come true. This was straight out of *Orient Nights* or *Harem Days*. Janice not only put herself physically into love-making but she used her imagination, too. Now I was completely beneath her spell, and suddenly, with a twinge of jealousy, I recalled the ex-RAF flyer who hadn't turned up, and I asked her about him.

"Dennis," she said bluntly, "is my lover and my partner." Then, turning, propping her head on her hand, she smiled, and said, "Was my lover and my partner."

I thought about that, and I said, "Partner?"

"You can be a partner, too," she smiled dreamily. "If you want

to come in.”

I turned reaching for her, “I want in, Janice,” I whispered.

Janice explained with complete frankness what the partnership was. She and Dennis were small-time smugglers. And this was how it worked. Every four or five weeks, taking it in turn, Janice or Dennis would fly to Paris for the weekend. If Dennis, he would wear a fancy rust-coloured waistcoat with little pockets spaced in the lining and one of those old fashioned canvas moneybelts. On his return journey, he would be carrying some 500 Swiss watches, brought from a Swiss watch manufacturer’s representative in the Latin Quarter. He would pay about £500 at the top for these – depending on quality. Usually, however, about £300. He would have a gay weekend in Paris, returning on the Sunday night or the Monday morning, and they would be sold in bulk to a Hatton Garden dealer. Profit on the venture, again according to quality, would be about £300 to £500.

Janice filled me in on details over breakfast. Several couples were working the racket, she said. On a higher level, there were cars going over and coming back, their engines and interiors and cushions packed with watches. Higher still there were groups of syndicates sharing the costs in yacht and aircraft ventures. The dimensions of the smuggling business staggered me.

Janice told me that in the West End there was a drinking club used almost exclusively by smugglers. Dennis was welcomed there because he was a flyer. Occasionally he had been in on deals to fly contraband in from Ireland. Usually a Rapide biplane was used for this. But to make this risky venture worth while, financial backing of about £50,000 was involved, and Janice didn’t care for it. She was well satisfied, she said, with an income of about a £100 a week, free of income tax – as she should well be.

And this had been the reason for her estrangement from Dennis. He was losing his nerve on the small, one-shot, Paris visits. He wanted to pull off a big flying caper, mortgaging everything he and Janice had. By the law of averages, Dennis logically argued, they couldn’t go on escaping detection forever. Either one of Janice’s Paris trips, or one of his, would go sour – and then they would be marked-down by Customs and be useless as couriers.

But Janice’s answer was worth considering. If the plane and the cargo were seized by Customs, everything they possessed would have gone.

The end result of our conversation that morning was that I became Janice’s partner and made my first crossing to Paris eight

days later. I carried only a small holdall, with shaving tackle, spare shirt, stuff like that. Janice had kitted me out in an expensive lightweight blue suit and suede shoes, and I was creating the impression I was the junior executive type, doing Paris for the weekend. There was no trouble going. The French Customs were casual to the point of indifference and inefficiency.

It was much safer picking up the contraband in Paris than going to Switzerland, even if the stuff was cheaper by going to Basle or Geneva. Who went to Switzerland for weekends? And, besides, Customs kept a watch on buyers of Swiss watches. From all this illegal enterprise, Swiss manufacturers were amassing a fortune.

I booked in at one of those students' pensions in San Michael on the Left Bank, which Janice had recommended, and made contact with the Swiss representative at a cafe called *Le Jockey* not far distant. He was always there on Sunday mornings – lingering over coffee and croissant, a small, wavy-haired man, almost an Italian in appearance, who didn't wear a wristlet watch himself because he thought them ostentatious.

I had had an enjoyable night out before, having met a honey-haired Swedish girl studying art and collecting experiences, so I had gone a little deeper into my capital than Janice had innocently expected I should.

The contact had five hundred women's cocktail watches he could put my way. I went back with him to his rooms, he laid them out on the bed, and I had to settle for 480 of them, at a pound a time. While he complained about Paris, its grime, contrasting it with Geneva's modern buildings and cleanliness, I stuffed the watches away into the miniature slots in my waistcoat and into the moneybelt. There was no romance in that little Swiss. But perhaps he had been sitting around *Le Jockey* for too long. I suggested in the interests of security and novelty, he change the meeting place.

At four o'clock that afternoon I left Paris by the Invalides air terminal, and just two hours later my Air France Constellation put down at London Airport. I got into the middle of the forty or so passengers, heading towards the Customs. I found myself sweating a little.

I picked a spot at the Customs counter with people on either side of me – people with big suitcases – and placed my little grip, opened, before me. Blue-uniformed men, with sharp expressions, swarmed down on us.

Customs officers, I've discovered, study faces before cases.

Since it would be almost physically impossible to search everybody's belongings, they use psychology. They give you the hard look, and if you're guilty about something, you can, if you're not careful, betray the fact. They look for the nervous, the jittery, the passenger who looks everywhere else but at them. They get a lot of results this way. Small stuff. The professional smuggler doesn't fall for it. But the typist, smuggling a single watch back, her boy friend, with an extra bottle of brandy and carton of cigarettes – these they catch.

A bright, gingerheaded youngster stopped before me. I had laced myself with brandy on the aircraft, and felt brave enough to stare him out. No, I had nothing mentioned on the card he held up, other than a couple of hundred cigarettes and a half bottle of whisky, the permissible allowance.

“This your only luggage?” he asked.

I nodded. “Okay,” he said. He made a chalk mark on it, and I was away, as he swung on a nervous man beside me, who was clinging to two huge suitcases.

Janice was waiting out in the hallway by the Barclay's Bank currency exchange counter. She lifted her lips like a dutiful housewife to be kissed. “Nice trip, Clark?”

“Perfect, darling, perfect.”

On the car drive back to town, I told her that the Swiss representative had only 480 watches, but, taking advantage of me, no doubt because I was new, he had insisted on taking £500 for them. Janice only smiled. I think she was wise enough to have known.

Either it was the brandy, the relief, or intoxication with success, but I became lightheaded on the drive back.

“What did you do last night?” Janice asked.

“Went after the Bardot – and had success there, too!”

She only laughed, and didn't press me further.

I felt a little guilty about the Swedish blonde and was very attentive to Janice that evening. We were like a loving couple who had been reunited after a couple of years – not two days.

Next morning, while I slept the sleep of the victorious warrior, Janice drove to Hatton Garden. She traded the watches for thirty-five shillings each. I became enthusiastic. I wanted to go right back and scoop up another four hundred pound profit. Why once a month only? I was demanding. Why not once a week? I began to list the different routes you could use to get to the Continent without coming up against the same Customs officials. One of their tricks was to search anybody who they saw going through

too often. But by rail and air and boat there was a good dozen different ways. There was no need, I told Janice, to wait a month.

She told me, however, about the law of averages, and said that most people got caught when they became too greedy.

* * *

Four weeks later Janice made the trip. This time we cleared about £450 in profit. Three weeks after that I went, with the same profit. Meanwhile I had been thinking about various angles and Janice okayed my "Operation Kids" project. I had bought a station wagon, and I suggested we find three or four slum kids and take them with their parents' permission on a vacation to Paris. Coming back with the noisy youngsters, we'd jam-pack the car with watches.

Janice was willing to try it – once. At first she had been doubtful. There had been several people caught with watch-lined cars. You could cop a prison sentence for this, and the fines alone were prohibitive. I said the people who had been caught had done it once too often. Greedy, they were making a short periodical hop of it. This talk appealed to Janice.

We needed a little more capital to make the project worth while, for between us we could scrape together only two thousand pounds. Our Hatton Garden contact formed a syndicate for the extra money and Dennis, who was now back in London, wanted to put a thousand into it. Our friend at *Le Jockey* was told that five thousand – not five hundred – watches were needed. We had agreed to split 50–50 with the backers on the earnings made by their money.

Janice worked like a beaver. She found three children through a charity organization. She got them new clothes and identity cards. We arrived in Paris with them on a Tuesday and stayed for six days. The kids had a fine, noisy, roistering time at the expense of Her Majesty's Customs. Janice and I went to places like the *Lido* late at night, and the week went like a dream.

When we motored back via Ostend–Dieppe the following Monday there were five thousand watches scientifically packed in the lining of the car. I wondered what would happen if the car got jolted on the Channel crossing, and all five thousand watches began to tick at once – just as we got to the Customs shed!

The Customs official took one look at the happy children, at the neatly-dressed Janice, and waved us through after only showing

us the card. I told him we had the stipulated amount of spirits, cigarettes and perfume, and he was satisfied.

The happy kids were dropped back with their parents. That night members of the syndicate met in our apartment. Prices were agreed and fixed. Janice and I calculated, after expenses, we had cleared nearly three thousand pounds.

Dennis, who now had a new girlfriend, pulled the same stunt in exactly the same way a month later and we had fifteen hundred pounds invested with him, which cleared us £750 profit. I now began to meet Dennis frequently in the drinking clubs and I got to like him. He bore me no grudge over Janice, said that they had been ill-matched in any case, and he remained on good terms with her, too.

He was right about one criticism of Janice, however. He said once, "It's not her fault, Clark, it's a failing of her sex. She's frightened of the big gamble. If you keep doing those solo Paris trips, you'll end up with a case of jitters like I did. Much better to do a big one and then rest for six months."

I began to see Dennis's point. Those trips to Paris every six weeks or so in a fancy waistcoat, would eventually get anybody down. About this time, too, Dennis got involved with a smuggling syndicate based on Manchester. They were bringing stuff from Southern Ireland across in a small biplane, a De Havilland Rapide. Dennis was acting in as occasional pilot and sharing in the costs and profits.

I became interested, but he told me he couldn't cut me in. There was more than enough money in the north to cover the shipments. But he did know, he said, of several people who were shipping stuff into the South of England from France – using small yachts and ex-naval motor torpedo boats for the purpose.

The yacht *Christine* of Great Train Robbery renown, which disappeared and in which Danny Bassett sailed to his death, was once used for smuggling purposes.

About this time, too, newspapers ran the story of the smuggler in the north who had got lost over England with a consignment of contraband, and had put down at Blackbushe Airport. Customs had confiscated the plane and the cargo. This was enough to sour Janice from ever participating in such a venture. So I had trouble, about a month later, when Dennis arrived to tell us about a big project that he was lining up.

Some French people, with a small motor boat, were willing to bring a big consignment across the Channel to the Kent coast,

he said, and had approached him to act as broker and line up the money. The cargo would consist of brandy, American cigarettes, Olympia novels like *The Kama Sutra*, *Fanny Hill*, both unpublished in England at that time, perfume and, of course, watches.

The Rapide captured at Blackbushe Airport hadn't belonged to his syndicate, he said. So there was more than one group using a plane in the north!

Janice, characteristically, wasn't keen. There had been stories about French treachery, she said, as if the weather and the Customs weren't enough to contend with. And the size of the operation scared her. Fifteen thousand pounds were involved. She talked to Hatton Garden, and they weren't interested. That should have been a warning to us, too. I worked hard convincing Janice. I told her that from the profits on this venture, we could take a six-month Caribbean cruising tour. I subtly inferred that she was a coward, and eventually brought her around.

Dennis was supposed to put up three thousand, Janice and I seven, but Dennis had tied up too much capital in the north when the French deal came up sooner than expected, so that Janice and I had to sink five thousand each – all our capital.

Our partner in this venture was a hard little nugget of a cockney named Jack, whom Dennis recommended. He was investing five thousand pounds and was as suspicious as all hell when I met him at Chatham, two days before the caper. He advised me to come armed and be ready for trouble. If there was one race he distrusted, it was the French, and it had nothing to do with de Gaulle.

He said he would have a Sterling submachine gun, but he didn't. He brought instead a thick wooden cudgel which he laced to his wrist.

On the day of the delivery, Janice, Jack, and I booked in at the *Stagecoach* at Dover. We drove out to the delivery point in the afternoon, to check it over by daylight. Although there were sumptuous houses about, the beach was shielded enough for our purposes.

* * *

In the darkness, arm in arm, Janice and I went down to the beach. Now it was Janice, once in, who had all the calm and the confidence; only Jack and I were worried. The path widened at the bottom of the hill and vaguely in the darkness we could see its

contours.

Above the sound of the breakers on the shingle, we heard the crunch of footsteps. Jack loomed, squat and sinister, before us. "Clark?"

"Jack?"

"She's already in, mate. I was waiting for you. You can just see her against the jetty if you strain your eyesight."

"No sign of Dennis?" Dennis had gone across to France following the Chatham meeting. He would come across in the boat and check the cargo for us.

We walked the few yards to the jetty. Janice turned back to the Land Rover, to carry out her part of the operation by backing it down to the jetty, when told to. We were all carrying torches, but would only use them if it became absolutely necessary.

"How long she been in?"

"God knows. Suddenly she was there. No sound. Gave me the shakes."

"Must be Dennis's navigation," I answered.

We walked along the jetty and they heard us on the boat. We could hear the slight bumping sound now as the swell brought the side of the boat against the jetty.

Then Dennis spoke. "That you, Clark?" I could detect the tension in his voice.

I said, with relief, "Yes. Everything okay?"

We came abreast of the boat. I could hear the engine faintly ticking over. And I could see Dennis and the Frenchmen in the slight glow of a red cabin light.

"Come aboard, Clark," said Dennis. "This is the skipper." He indicated a shadowy figure. I was supposed to go down in the cabin with the captain and count over the money while the others unloaded the cargo onto the jetty.

Dennis said everything was all right. That meant he had checked the cargo and found it genuine. Since he hadn't put up any of the stake money he was on just ten per cent - from both sides - for negotiating the deal.

I stepped across to the boat. Jack stayed on the jetty. He called to Janice. As I began to climb down to the cabin, I heard Janice back the Land Rover. Dennis and another man on the deck began to shift cargo.

I couldn't see much of the skipper in the bad light. Just a blond, sun-bleached beard and curly hair, a misshapen dark blue jersey and oil-stained khaki denims. We didn't speak. I placed the

bag on the table and he reached for it with eager, greedy fingers. He lifted the first bundle of notes and began to flip through them. He replaced that bundle and dug deeper, taking out another and flipping that – trying to judge the amount and checking whether it was genuine or stage money.

I remembered being both irritated and amused. You have to trust somebody sometime, especially when what you're doing is illegal. You already have enough odds against you in any such caper – so you want to be able to trust your business associates.

He seemed satisfied. He dropped the notes back and went to pick up the handles of the bag. But I bent forward quickly, anchoring the bag to the table with my fists, "When the cargo's off," I said.

His English was bad, but he got the message. He didn't speak, and we stood there, watching each other, both holding the bag.

And then it happened. There was a sudden shout on deck and, simultaneously, the engine came to life and the boat moved away from the jetty. Somebody, in hiding, had used a pole to jerk the craft away. This seemed to be the signal for the captain. His hand moved quickly for his coat. Instead of drawing my gun, I tried to grab the bag, thinking I would get it because he held it now with only one hand.

I had the bag all right. But he had a firmer grip – by the handles. His hand returned with a length of iron bar. As he swung it, so I kicked him.

* * *

I kicked him, and he missed me, and I headed for the steps, dragging, or trying to drag, the bag and him with me.

Now above the roar of the engine I could hear Dennis shouting – calling my name. I turned and kicked the skipper again, just as his bar cracked down across my shoulder – numbing my right arm. But I had caught the skipper squarely, and he doubled slightly, sagging. For a moment his hold on the handle had relaxed. I snatched it. About two bundles of notes skipped out, and I knew I had the bulk. I raced up the dozen steep wide steps to the deck.

I knew that if I didn't get off the boat quickly, it would be too late. That possibly I would end up dead. Either that or I would have to use my gun to hold off the crew, and that would be a bloody business. Rather lose the goddamn money.

With the bag now firmly gripped I reached the side of the boat.

I couldn't see the jetty clearly now, but I thought I could see Dennis, waving his arms, and the sound of his voice came from that direction. No sight of Jack.

I teetered on the edge, grasping the bag firmly. It was going to be a swim. I hoped we weren't going to lose too many notes. Then somebody hit me. He caught me across the ear and side of the head and my skull seemed to explode.

I felt a vicious tug as the handgrip was snatched away. I felt blood running down the side of my head, and then I was punched cruelly in the back.

I hit the sea on my belly, flopping into it like a seal. My head was spinning and I was vomiting dizzily. But I managed to strike out limply towards the jetty. Dennis had a torch on now. Janice joined him, her features ghostly white in the faint light.

The French yacht was already way out when they dragged me, dripping and bloody, onto the jetty.

"The money, they've got all of it," I whispered hoarsely.

Janice used a headscarf to stop the bleeding.

"And eighty per cent of the cargo," Dennis said sorrowfully. "The double-crossing . . ."

And Jack had been in on it. Dennis had been pushing a cardboard crate of cigarettes into the truck, aided by Janice, when Jack had pushed the craft away from the jetty, and the Frenchman at the wheel had brought the engine to full pitch. Jack had hoped that the captain had settled me, by knocking me out. God knows what they would have done with me, had he succeeded. Dennis thought, optimistically, that they would have given me my fare back from France, but I don't really know about that.

Personally, I don't think they would have bothered. Jack, who had close French connections, had organised the hi-jacking. He also had a customer, we discovered later, in the north, and they sailed straight away for Great Yarmouth.

I must say Janice took it philosophically. No recriminations that she had told us so. After we checked the cargo we found that we had about fifteen hundred pounds in goods. Dennis refused to take his share, blaming himself for the fiasco. He talked of killing Jack when he next came across him, but Janice cleverly talked him out of that. It wouldn't be worth it, she said.

We got back to London very tired, wise and silent. Janice bandaged my head and I went straight to bed. Next morning, Janice gave me breakfast in bed and then went to a cupboard and laid out our gear on the table. She didn't say anything because she

didn't have to.

I looked at it – my passport, my fancy waistcoat with the slots for watches, and the money belt. We were right back where we started.

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Next month in **EWMM**

EDGAR WALLACE

“Thieves Make Thieves”

NIGEL MORLAND

“Cyanide City”

JACQUES PENDOWER

“Mrs. Webber's Profession”

WILLIAM H. FEAR

“The Drug Smugglers”

REX DOLPHIN

“The Last Bandit”

– and other stories



EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE No. 2
will be on sale Saturday, 15th August. Readers are
advised to order in advance.

NEW BOOKS

THE BIG HEIST, by Howard Charles Davis; John Long, 12s. 6d.

An attempt to steal the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London . . . on the face of it, a theme that might have delighted the audience of a pre-war boys' adventure weekly. Remarkably, Howard Charles Davis has managed to develop it into a gripping novel that will please an adult audience of today.

His thieves might not be particularly believable, "real-life" persons but with their cunning leader sporting the name of "Otto Kraft", it is probable that they were never drawn with such purpose in mind.

However, this hardly matters. Kraft and Company are undoubtedly colourful villains and their fascinating activities obviously have been researched and recorded with considerable thought and professional diligence. I can recommend this novel to anyone who enjoys a good, action thriller.

ENQUIRIES ARE CONTINUING, by Jeffrey Ashford; John Long, 15s-

The résumé of press acclaim which appears on the back of this book's jacket leaves no doubt that Jeffrey Ashford's previous four suspense-novels have had a very favourable reception. The reputation Mr. Ashford has to live up to is an impressive one.

Enquiries Are Continuing tells the story of three unpleasant crime cases, and Detective Inspector Don Kerry's conflict with his new divisional superintendent – a pompous know-all called Pallett.

The country police background has the ring of authenticity, the characters are living, breathing people, and the total effect is one hundred per cent realistic.

The other day, a well-established crime writer suggested to me that this type of novel is probably more popular with reviewers than it is with the public at large. There may be a grain of truth in his contention, but I do not believe that reviewers alone can have promoted the popularity and fame which is currently enjoyed by, say Ed McBain and J. J. Marric. Nor, I am confident, will it be the case when Jeffrey Ashford wins his place alongside these leading exponents of his chosen line of writing.

Sir Mortimer swore softly, slowly and terribly. "I've seen some things in my time," he said, "but I've never seen anything like this before."

BEN SOAMES cut across the meadow from his small farmhouse, the early-morning ground mist wreathing his ankles. As he climbed the stile into the lane, he met Miss Lark. Because this was the halfway point of the steep Twin Meadows Hill, the elderly district nurse had dismounted from her old-fashioned upright bike and was manfully pushing it.

She said good morning to the young farmer and his

Vern Hansen

SAVAGE

Vern Hansen specialises in thrillers with a touch of the macabre. Some of his stories are so downright uncanny that they wouldn't fit in our magazine at all, and, though the present story isn't one of these, it still has that deliciously "nasty" flavour which is the Hansen "trademark". His latest published works are "The Twisters," "Claws of the Night" and "The Grip of Fear." He lives in a flat in South London amid a wife, two daughters, a tortoiseshell cat called "Little Pinks" (after the Damon Runyon character), and a welter of hi-fi.

answer was affable, his dark face lighting momentarily. He was a moody, taciturn man but, like everybody else in this area, he liked the dumpy, red-faced Amelia Lark. She could be seen at all hours of day and night perched atop her bike, like a dumpling on a scaffold, sailing along past the hedges or trundling over the cobbled streets of Ham Corners.

"Early call, Miss Lark?"

"Yes. Mrs. Bloggs of For-sythia Cottage. Her fourth. Her eldest ran to fetch me."

Soames scowled. "Yes, I saw

the little pest on his way back. He used all the short cuts he could find. He was on his way across a field I've just ploughed up."

"I fear he is not a pleasant child," Miss Lark sighed. "Well, I must get on. Good day, Ben."

"Good day, Miss Lark."

* * *

The air was full of the myriad sounds of the half-awake countryside: birdsong and the rustle and purr of small animals; somebody was chopping logs in the distance, the *clap-clap* of the axe carrying in the crisp air.

Ben Soames was at the bottom of the hill when Miss Lark screamed again and again.

DEATH

He couldn't mistake the sound: it cut through the atmosphere like the jagged stabs of a saw-toothed knife.

He turned and ran back up the hill.

Miss Lark was almost at the top, standing in the lane, looking back towards him. One of her hands was raised in a signal. The other one seemed to be up to her mouth. A fugitive ray of morning sunshine glinted on the handlebars of her bike as it lay on its side on the grass verge beside the dry ditch and the low, carefully-trimmed hedgerows.

Panting, Ben Soames reached her. Her normally ruddy face was ashen. She pointed a shaking hand at the ditch and her voice was a croak when she said:

"Ben . . . Look!"

Soames skirted the bicycle, walked to the edge of the shallow ditch, looked down.

"God! It's old Jabbo Morrow."

His swarthyly-handsome face was as set as ever as he turned back to the nurse. But now, although the morning air was keen,

sweat bedewed his forehead.

He took Miss Lark gently by the arm and led her across to the opposite verge. He took off his coat and placed it on the grass and made her sit upon it.

"My own phone's out of order, so I'll have to run across to the big house. The old man's been dead quite some time so I don't think there's any danger. Will you be all right here till I get back?"

"Yes, Ben, you go on." The colour was coming back into the old lady's dumpling face and her blue eyes were hot with a mixture of outrage and anger.

Ben Soames forced his way through the hedge and set off across the field towards a cluster of chimneys peeping from behind a copse.

The old lady sat and looked in the direction of the ditch and the thing hidden from her view there.

"The beasts," she whispered. "The filthy beasts!"

2

THE Big House had once belonged to an earl. He had broken his neck on the hunting field and his family had gone abroad. The place then was occupied successively by a playwright, a sculptor, and as a country home by a politician, all of whom left within six months. The sculptor, after suffering concussion from one of his monster works toppling upon him, referred to it as a "bad house".

It had lain disused for years until a wealthy young Bristol couple called Mobley took it over and converted it into an ultra-modern showplace complete with swimming pool, patios, tennis-courts, barbecues, bars in every room . . . all mod cons. The clannish Gloucestershire villagers didn't like this, but there was nothing *they* could do about it.

Ben Soames ran up the smoothly-asphalted drive flanked by silver birch, laurel and rhododendron. A dog barked in the house and the white door was opened as Soames reached the top of the steps.

In the aperture appeared a middle-aged man in a striped waistcoat, his smooth white face wearing an unwelcome expression in which superciliousness and cynicism were mixed. Ben Soames had seen him around the village with his bowler hat and his little shopping bag and knew his name.

"I want to use your phone, Mr. Cadleigh. There's been a terrible accident."

The butler's expression did not change. "You'd best come in, Mr. Soames." He held the door wider.

As Soames moved into the wide white hall Mrs. Ruth Mobley came out of a door beside the open-work stairs of polished teak. Soames knew her to be thirtyish. But here in the sun-dappled hall, clad in a filmy negligée, her hair like a dark cloud round her shoulders, she looked like a young girl. Sweet, ripe, eminently desirable.

Her figure, through the negligée, was a thing of shadowed lines and hollows. Having seen it in tight riding habit, Soames knew her body was near-voluptuous, its proud bearing suffused with a kind of fluid languor. She reminded Soames of a sleepy cat, but a cat that could be easily roused, and with exciting results. After their first brief meeting, a mere exchange of "good mornings" as she rode by leaving him in the mud beside his tractor, he had wanted her with an intensity that surprised him.

He was so entranced at the sight of her now that, fantastic though this might have seemed to him later, he momentarily forgot the reason for his visit, forgot the horror he had seen in the ditch barely a quarter of a mile away.

Despite the rounded curve of her form she was tall; her beauty was Junoesque. But then, in maddening contrast also, her face was small, her chin pointed, her eyes large and dark, giving her the look of a worldly female sprite. She was a creature of contrasts; there was something maddening about her.

"What is the matter, Mr. Soames?" she asked in her high-pitched, finishing-school voice.

He was jerked back to the present. He gaped like a fish and it was the butler, Cadleigh, who answered the question for him.

"Mr. Soames wants to use the phone, madam. He says there's been a terrible accident . . ."

But now Soames had seen the phone on the hall-table and he made for it. He got through to the local police and was hardly aware of Ruth Mobley going past behind him and on up the stairs.

As he left the house to return to Miss Lark and her lonely vigil by the horror in the growing sunshine he heard Ruth call: "Nigel! Nigel, my dear," and then Mr. Nigel Mobley's sleepy reply.

Miss Lark was no longer alone. With her was another person known to the villagers of Ham Corners as a "foreigner", though he had been living in the area for all of seven years.

His long burgundy-coloured sports car was drawn up at the grass verge and he was standing, hands on waist of modish tweed, looking down into the ditch. The cloth of the jacket strained against his muscular shoulders and the sunlight glinted on his mane of blond hair. Miss Collingdale the local librarian had once likened him to one of Jack London's "blond beasts".

Ben Soames said "Good morning".

"Good morning, Soames." Kennedy Lomas never dignified any other man's name with the prefix of "mister".

If first sight of the thing in the ditch had shaken him, there was no evidence of that now in the square, handsome bronzed face from which the blue eyes shone arrogantly.

Miss Lark rose from her seat on the grass verge.

"I almost forgot poor Mrs. Bloggs and her expected," she said. "I must go to her."

She was her old ruddy, dumpling self and as she firmly mounted her bike neither of the two men tried to prevent her. They watched her while she toiled manfully upwards. She finally disappeared over the brow of the hill.

"I suppose she should really have waited for the police to get here," said Lomas.

"She'll be back this way," said Soames.

He didn't like this arrogant upstart who had taken the old Conson place and let the land go to ruin while he entertained his city friends to wild parties in the converted farmhouse. Why, those parties even spilled over into the neighbouring churchyard and the small, quiet grey church. "Orgies of witches and satyrs," librarian Miss Collingdale said.

* * *

An official-looking black car sped up the hill, halted. From it alighted Sergeant Cal Rippon, and the chief constable, Sir Mortimer Lang who, it transpired, had happened to be visiting Ham Corners when the terrible news arrived.

Sir Mortimer wore brown tweeds that made him look like an enormous teddy bear. Red-faced, white-haired, splendidly moustached, bluff and vague all at the same time, he hid a keen mind behind his old soldier's pose. He had already proved that he

was not a mere desk-man but an astute sleuth. This, however, would be his first murder case.

It would be the first murder, too, for the local sergeant Caleb Rippon. He was born in a neighbouring village a few miles from Ham Corners. Until his dramatic capture of a bunch of "country house" thieves a few months before he had been a mere constable. He was a bright young man, tall, dark, smart as new paint. Everybody said Ham Corners was sure to see the back of him ere long: perhaps he'd even join Scotland Yard.

The police-driver stayed in the car. The other two moved over to the ditch, squatted on their haunches and looked down. Cal Rippon didn't say anything, but Sir Mortimer was heard to swear softly, slowly and terribly. Then he said:

"I've seen some things in my time, but I've never seen anything like this before."

* * *

"It was Ben Soames," said Ruth. "Wanted to use the phone, said there'd been a terrible accident. I didn't wait for the details."

She brushed her hair with measured strokes. Nigel Mobley sat on the edge of the bed and watched the play of his wife's plump back-muscles in the flimsy silk. He yawned, scratched his thin brown hair, his left armpit.

"That's the young farm-bloke that lives the other side of the hill isn't it? Sullen-looking geezer?"

"That's the one. Reminds me of a bomb on a short fuse. I'm not sure I like the way he looks at me either."

Nigel giggled. "Go on, my pet! Since when have you begun to worry about how men look at you?"

She turned her head, her face half-smiling, half-pouting. "But I've always been faithful to you, Nigel, you know that."

"I didn't say you hadn't, my pet . . . I don't think I'll go early to the office this morning. Come here!"

"Oh, Nigel, you'll mess up my hair again."

But she rose, undulated over to him. Both of them had already forgotten, it seemed, the "terrible accident" - whatever it was. What happened outside, among the local yokels, as Nigel always put it, was of little concern to them.

. . . But outside in the sunshine, in the farms and cottages and the local pub, in the backyards and somnolent kitchen gardens and pig-pens and poultry-runs, the word spread. Soon all Ham

Corners knew that Jabbo Morrow, the ancient hedger and ditcher, had been found on Twin Meadows Hill with one of his own neat, carefully-pointed wooden stakes driven savagely through his heart.

3

JABEZ MORROW had been a somewhat secretive old man, living in his tiny smoky cottage on the edge of the village by night, and by day, rising earlier even than the local poultry-farmers, ranging the hedgerows for the Urban District Council, making them into marvels of green plaited symmetry. He had been a widower for many years and his dark brood of children left him long since. His wife had been a local lass but the old ones said that she met Jabez when he visited the area with a travelling fair.

The old man was supposed to have gypsy blood, hence the nickname "Jabbo".

Though to some of the old ones Jabbo was still a foreigner, he knew the area's countryside better than anybody. He was an expert poacher, and no respecter of persons high or low. He had a sardonic sense of humour and was certainly not the most popular person in Ham Corners.

Had he been found in a ditch with his backside full of small shot from a gamekeeper's gun there would have been no surprise. But nobody could possibly imagine who had hated the old man so much to want to kill him in such a terrible way.

The stakes which Jabbo made himself with which to strengthen his hedgerows were usually of about five feet in length, of unpeeled wood trimmed of its larger protuberances and sharpened to a neat white point. To drive them into the soil Jabbo used a small, short-handled sledgehammer.

The murder-stake had been driven so powerfully through the old man's chest – obviously while he lay flat on his back – that it pinned him to the ground. There was no evidence of the sledgehammer being used and, in fact, none of Jabbo's usual tools had been found near the body.

The police doctor said the old man had been killed in the early hours. He had probably been poaching. Even so, there was no sack near the body, no dead game, no snares, no clues at all. Jabbo Morrow was dead and his body even more uncommunicative in death than the old man had been in life . . . the eyes staring

at the sky, speaking only of terror before the spirit died from them.

* * *

After a shopping expedition to the village, the butler Cadleigh brought the news back to the big house. The young Mobleys, now fully-dressed and healthy and shining, agreed that they vaguely knew the old hedger and ditcher. They were suitably shocked. Still talking about the tragedy they went through the french windows to walk in their large garden which blazed with specially-imported blooms and was carefully tended by one horticulturist (also imported) and two local boys.

With a half-sneer on his smooth white face, Neil Cadleigh watched them go. Then, with the shopping, he made his way in the direction of the kitchen, anticipating with relish the reactions of cook when he gave her the dread news.

Cook was still in the full spate of a half-tearful tirade against the "lewd wickedness" of modern times when the phone rang in the hall. Cadleigh went to answer it.

It was Mr. Kennedy Lomas of "Old Farm" and he wanted to speak to Mr. Mobley. Cadleigh went out into the garden and fetched his master, leaving Mrs. Mobley sitting on the rustic bench admiring the azaleas and the sun glinting on the swimming pool beyond.

A few moments later Nigel rejoined his wife.

"It was that fellow from Old Farm. Kennedy Lomas."

"Yes, I heard Cadleigh say so." Ruth smiled. "Lomas. That's that big blond beast of a man with the reddish sports car, isn't it?"

She would have been surprised to learn that her description of Kennedy Lomas coincided with that of a virginal spinster, the village librarian.

Nigel gave one of his dirty giggles. "That's the one. He looks a bit effeminate to me, though, despite all his beef. His sort are often a bit - er - that way y'know."

"He could be both ways for that matter," said Ruth. "Anyway, what did he want?"

"He's throwing a party at his place tonight and wants us to go. I told him we would, of course. He said he felt guilty about not asking us before, that it was time we got acquainted."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"I'm told that his parties are pretty wild."

"Village gossip," said Ruth. "They think all us city slickers are bloated perverts or something."

"There's *somebody* around here who is pretty perverted, judging by what happened to that old man last night."

Ruth shuddered. "Oh, please don't let's talk about that any more now, Nigel," she pleaded.

"Don't let it get you, old girl," he said.

4

"THE lane's not used a great lot," said Sergeant Cal Rippon. "And then usually only by locals. But, of course, they don't like the hill and many of 'em use the field-paths to avoid it."

"Quite," said Sir Mortimer Lang, somewhat absently.

The two men were back where they started from, as it were. Standing beside the black police-car, looking at the ditch and, with absent swivellings of their heads, the terrain surrounding it. The impassive driver sat behind his wheel and smoked, perfectly sure he wouldn't be reprimanded for doing so. Decent pair of blokes these two, though the old 'un did tend to waffle a bit.

He was off again now, his handsome white moustache ruffling in the breeze from across the fields. He was kicking the surface of the lane with the toe of his brogue, raising little puffs of white dust. "Hard as iron anyway . . . Yes, you could drive a tank over it without leaving a mark . . ."

"Tractors come along here sometimes," put in Cal Rippon.

With surprisingly light, quick steps for somebody so bulky, Sir Mortimer strode across the grass verge. He leapt the ditch a few yards down from where the body had been found and the spot roped off. He forced his way through the hedge.

"Same here," he called. "Turf springy and crisp. Lovely stuff. Not so good for us right now though. Barely shows my footmarks and I'm pretty heavy. Closes up again in no time."

"It's good pasture-land round here," said Rippon.

Sir Mortimer continued to pace, obviously talking to himself, his voice not now audible to the two men the other side of the hedge.

Though he knew this country like the back of his own right hand, Cal Rippon revolved slowly on his heels in the middle of

the lane and surveyed the horizon again.

Down the hill there was the stile and the field-path disappearing in a pencil-thread over the green hill before running past Ben Soames's small farm which was hidden from the lane.

Looking in the other direction, there was the copse and the chimneys of the big house peeping above the trees.

Rippon had seen the Mobeys a few times. A handsome couple, particularly the woman; but to Cal's way of thinking the man was probably a bit of a weakling.

The young sergeant had made it his business to find out something about the couple. He knew a lot about everybody else in his bailiwick so why not the Mobeys, too? "Foreigners" or not, they were now – as far as the local law in the shape of Rippon saw it anyway – a part of the community.

* * *

He had learned that Ruth Mobley was once an actress quite well known in the West Country and even once star of a short-lived West End play. Nigel Mobley was the only son of a Bristol industrialist and, on the sudden death of his father, inherited the business. He didn't need to run it, though; the old man had hired experts to do that. All the young one had to do to keep up appearances was show his face in the office from time to time.

His mother lived in solitary serf-surfeited splendour in the family house overlooking the Avon Gorge. By all accounts she had violently objected to her son marrying an actress.

Evidently Nigel's weakness for the Junoesque Ruth had carried the day. One could not blame the young couple, however, for burying themselves in the Gloucestershire countryside more than a good arm's length from the uncompromising old lady.

Ruth Mobley rode well. Despite her theatrical background – and many of the old 'uns still thought of stage people as rogues and sinners – she seemed to fit into the country environment far more comfortably than did her husband . . .

Cal Rippon came out of his reverie on personalities and allowed his gaze to travel on. Back to his superior, still bumbling about in the meadow on the other side of the road – though Rippon knew Sir Mortimer enough to realize that he never merely bumbled.

And past the bulky old man in the hairy brown tweeds was more meadowland similar to that on the other side of the road except there was no stile, no path, no distant chimneys. There

was a copse, however, nearer to the lane than the one on the other side and around this from time to time uniformed figures appeared. The search for clues was widening . . .

The sun was low, red; the shadows were lengthening.

Sir Mortimer meandered across the meadow to the copse. He spoke briefly to one of the uniformed men and then he began to return. But he was taking his time, weaving a little, looking at the ground.

Cal Rippon turned, skirted the car. In passing he winked at the driver, his blandly-handsome face momentarily adopting a mischievous look. He went on to the other side of the lane and through the hedge and ditch there, almost opposite to where the body had been found. The murderer could have approached from this side.

He halted and stood looking out across the meadows: at the field-path, at the coyly peeping chimneys of the big house, and at the field-path again, his mind ranging onwards to where his eyes could not see.

He put a stalk of grass in his mouth and began to chew it. His body threw a long wavering shadow on the ground. The breeze was up, southing gently, but with an edge to it.

* * *

. . . Ben Soames' farm was the building nearest to the spot where the body had been found. Soames had been first on the scene after Miss Lark. He had come across the field and had been climbing the stile when Miss Lark first spotted him.

He could have crossed that field and climbed that stile in the night, too, and nobody the wiser, except maybe Jabbo Morrow, and he couldn't talk.

Still - Rippon had to be fair! The big house wasn't much farther away than the farmhouse. The big house standing back at the end of its drive debouching on the wider road, the one that was far busier than the narrow Twin Meadows Hill.

It would have been easy for somebody to slip across the meadows from the big house or leave a car on the road and take the same short cut. Enquiries were already being made about cars that might have been seen parked on the big road during the night, or of strangers being seen in the last few days.

The possibility of a roving lunatic could not be ruled out. Whether roving or local, however, the man who killed Jabbo

Morrow had more than his fair share of the quality of madness.

Already enquiries were being made about inmates that might have escaped from mental homes in this part of the world. Somehow Cal Rippon couldn't help feeling though that any comebacks in this field would prove negative. He had an idea that the answer to the whole nasty business lay right here in Ham Corners.

The maggot hiding in the rosy apple; the canker of the rose; the perversion on the healthy stock.

He shuddered a little and blamed the rising wind.

When Sir Mortimer called him gruffly from the other side of the low hedge he started violently.

5

"THEY haven't found a blasted thing," said the old man. "But I'd like to get some more men out here to relieve this bunch so that the search can be continued."

"Yes, sir. I've got some coming in from Peeley Common and Bentfields and Lowfield Junction. They might be back in the village now."

"Let's go then," said Sir Mortimer, climbing into the car. He was still talking as they sped away.

"Everybody'll have to be questioned. Everybody! The whole blasted village. . . ! First of all let's recap, though, shall we?"

"Yes, sir," Rippon ticked off points on his fingers. "After Miss Lark showed the body to Ben Soames, Ben ran over to the big house to use the phone. He said his own phone was out of order - I've checked this and it's quite true. Cadleigh, the butler, let him in. Mrs. Mobley was up, though still in her negligée. Soames didn't tell 'em what had actually happened, only that there had been an accident. Mrs. Mobley didn't seem interested in hearing details. Maybe her womanly curiosity was dormant at that early hour. Or maybe there was another reason."

"Go on."

"Mr. Mobley seemed to be still in bed. As Soames left the house he heard the woman call her husband. He heard the man's sleepy reply. Soames returned to Miss Lark. In the meantime, Kennedy Lomas had turned up.

"He said he was on his way to Gloucester to meet a friend. This can be checked—"

"Sure it can," put in Sir Mortimer. "Of course! But isn't Mr.

Kennedy Lomas what you might call the local mystery man?"

"If you mean that nobody knows much about him and the villagers are understandably piqued because of this – well, you're right there, sir."

"Don't blind me with rhetoric," grunted Sir Mortimer. "Go on!"

"Let's take Kennedy Lomas then. He came here about seven years ago, bought the old Conson place, had it remodelled completely. He renamed it 'Old Farm', though there's very little old about it now. He's a bachelor but has lady friends visiting him frequently. I did hear that at one time he was divorced, but I don't know how true that is.

"He seems to have independent means. He travels frequently to London, Bristol, Gloucester, Cardiff, Birmingham. He's away for short periods of time and in the summer he takes a month or six weeks and goes abroad.

"He rides well. He's a good mechanic. He drinks pretty heavily but it doesn't seem to have much effect on him. He pops in the local from time to time and is very generous when he does. Many of the locals distrust him but I don't think anybody actively dislikes him. Nobody has reason to, as far as I know.

"The tradesmen, particularly, do well out of him. I'm told that Lomas's booze and food bill is on occasions really something to write home about. The people who do complain are the more toffee-nosed residents living adjacent to Old Farm. And, of course, there are the church-people . . ."

Rippon paused.

Sir Mortimer said: "All right, you've had a breather. Now elucidate."

"Well, sir, Kennedy Lomas throws some pretty wild parties. Hordes of friends from town; bohemian and Mayfair types. As no doubt you know, Old Farm is almost next door to the church and I'm afraid that in the small hours the parties often spill over into the churchyard. Our Kennedy and his friends play tag – and other things – among the gravestones . . ."

"I heard some talk of Black Magic orgies – that sort of thing."

"There are orgies and orgies, sir, if I may coin a phrase. But Black Magic? Guff, sir! Lomas and his friends just aren't the sort."

"You never know," said the old man darkly, though his keen grey eyes wrinkled at the corners. "There's something very macabre and nasty about this murder y'know, young Cal."

"I've seen my horror movies, sir," said Rippon. "I know that a stake driven through a vampire's heart is supposed to lay him at rest forever."

"And some of the people here are pretty archaic in their thoughts, pretty superstitious."

"Only the old ones, sir, and none of those would have had the strength to do that job."

"Yes, you're right there, sergeant. Only a strong man could have done that. Or a madman!"

* * *

The policeman who drove Sir Mortimer's official car was not a local man but came from a small town some miles away. His name was Bassett. He was fond of his beer and, when he had had a few, was a gregarious and garrulous person.

He visited the Ham Corners local inn that night, knowing he would be the cynosure of all eyes, the man in the know. The locals made an unusual fuss of this particular "foreigner". Some of them even bought his beer for him.

Bassett glowed and expanded; he winked and whispered and narrowed his eyes and lengthened his long face lugubriously and talked his head off.

Soon, with darkness over the land, all the village knew that a madman was at large. Bassett, being a policeman, knew all about madmen. One nasty murder never satisfied them. They always wanted another, and another, and another . . .

The Mobley butler, Cadleigh, nipped into the bar for a quick pint. When he got back home he told his mistress what he had heard.

Nigel would be out late that evening: a directors' meeting or something.

Ruth felt she needed some protection.

When they took over the big house, they heard rumours that the place was haunted, a "bad house". They heard strange sounds in the night. But Nigel said it was just the new wood "settling in". One night there was a clumsy attempt at burglary by a couple of local youths. They were disturbed and left empty-handed.

Nigel didn't bother to report the incident. The following day, however, on returning from a visit to his headquarters in Bristol he gave Ruth a thirty-two calibre revolver. She was scared of the weapon, but, patiently, Nigel showed her how to use it. She was

surprised at his knowledge of such things and the cool, proficient way in which he handled the deadly weapon.

Now, she closed her fingers around the serrated butt. Though the coldness of it made her shudder, there was comfort in the feel of it, too.

But she did not have to keep up appearances now; she was alone in her room; there was no need to act the gay socialite, the county lady . . .

And in her dark eyes was a brooding terror.

6

WHEN Ben Soames entered the bar of the local there were murmurs of "Look who's here", "Look what the wind's blown in".

The regulars were inclined to tolerate this infrequent visitor more than usual because like police-driver Bassett, Ben Soames was in the know, had seen the body of old Jabbo in all its mutilated horror in the early morning.

Bassett, suddenly quiet, had moved through the middle door into the little snug and was sitting up the chimney-corner on his own.

A bluff old farmer clapped Ben Soames on the back and said: "We don't see you in here often enough, lad. What'll you have?"

Soames had a pint of bitter, the best beverage the hostelry had to offer. The regulars clustered round him at the bar and from behind it the fat ruddy landlord beamed.

Soames hadn't said much except "Good evening" and "Hallo, Sam, Tom, Jack, " et cetera. He had named his poison. And now he had closed up again, a brooding clam.

You couldn't push a man like Ben. It had to come slowly. Perhaps after he'd had a few . . .

These were phlegmatic country people: they were used to waiting. Or, at least, most of them were . . .

But there were others. The younger element. The teens and twenties. Ben Soames could almost be said to fit into this category himself, at the extreme end of the scale that is. But Ben had always seemed older than his years. He was a master man, too, a farmer with his own place, well-kept, a credit to the neighbourhood.

The others, the impatient ones, they travelled to their offices in the city or worked in the satellite factories on the edge of the

neighbouring town. They drove their motor-cycles and rakish cars wildly through the lanes and outwards into the glittering world.

They were split roughly into two camps. On one side there were the types who aped the "county gentry", wore florid sports-jackets, fancy blazers, biscuit-coloured slacks and mocassins. Their girls tended to be frilly and shrill and somewhat overpainted.

The other camp had their girls, too, though in many cases these looked little different to their menfolk. They wore the same bulky leather jackets, helmets, goggles, gauntlets, and sometimes the same trousers, too, the same high boots with furry interiors. These were the mo-bike brigade, who despised the village that had spawned them, despised their opposite numbers, the "county types", were loud in their disgust at all these "squares".

The leader of the mo-bike brigade was a dancer-like wide-shouldered young brute called "Tocky" Bates. He had a beautiful, gum-chewing moll called Kate.

All that the locals could get out of Ben Soames with their proings were grunts of "Terrible", "Scandalous", "Beastly". That is, until Tocky thrust his way to the middle of the circle at the bar. And Tocky didn't even mention the murder.

* * *

Tocky grinned at Ben Soames with teeth that were white as milk. His narrow blue eyes were alive with devilment. To Tocky, Ben Soames was worse than a square, he was a "bloody hypocrite". Tocky knew all about Ben's dockland debaucheries.

He knew about something else, too, and he spoke on that now.

He said: "Hey, Ben, who was that bint I saw you with out in the fields last night? Boy, you looked as if you really meant to make a night of it. If I hadn't had Kate with me I might've tried to cut myself in for a piece o' that."

"I'll get you, Tocky, you ram!" threatened the fair Kate from somewhere in the background.

There was a spattering of laughter. But it was uneasy and soon died. Everybody who could manage to do so was watching Ben Soames.

He looked at Tocky from under lowering brows. He had already, almost absently, put his half-empty pint glass back on the bar. His right arm was held across his belly and now it came back and

upwards with rapidity.

Tocky gave a shocked exclamation and staggered on his heels from a terrific backhander across the mouth.

The press of people kept him on his feet, precipitated him back at Soames, head down. The young farmer went "Oof" as he received Tocky's hard head in his midriff and was rammed back against the bar.

"Get him, Tocky!" screeched golden-haired Kate and the rest of the black-jacketed bunch took up the cry.

Neither of the contestants had much finesse. The brawl was rough and clumsy and punishing. Soames kned Tocky in the groin. It was the leather-jacketed young man's turn to gasp, recoil. Soames charged after him. The circle of watchers wavered and spread, grinning, shouting. The fat landlord called "Gentlemen, please!", bleated about sending for the police.

Tocky swung out of Soames's way, slipped, went down on one knee. Soames missed him but turned, catlike, and swung a heavy boot into Tocky's ribs. The young man grunted with pain and fell sideways. Soames flung himself upon him, grabbed a handful of long brown hair. "I'll fix you," he said. "I'll fix you!" His teeth were drawn back from his lips in a wolfish snarl; his eyes blazed.

* * *

Constable Bassett was feeling guilty.

His trouble was he boozed too much. If it wasn't for that he might have had promotion long since, he always told himself. When he was in drink he had a big mouth. He had to face that fact and he had to face it squarely.

He had reached the point now, here in the chimney corner in the little snug, where no matter how much he drank he couldn't get any drunker. He had gone through the usual patch and come out on the other side. He was in a new dimension where he could sit apart and regard dispassionately that brokendown copper known to one and all as Bigmouth Bassett.

This new man could see straight and clear and he had no illusions. He was disgusted with that other person, crunched up in a chimney corner, beer on his chin like a toothless old gaffer . . .

Bassett was brought back slowly, mind and corporeal body as one, Bassett and Bassett, Bigmouth and all, by the landlord bawling at him, standing over him, redfaced and bug-eyed.

There was a fight in the bar. Bassett could hear sounds of it now.

Bangings and shoutings. A girl screaming.

Bassett rose. He was a mighty man. Tight-lipped, unspeaking.

* * *

As Bassett marched into the bar the outer door opened and Kennedy Lomas came in, a lush redheaded girl on his arm.

"Sounds like there's a bull loose in here," the blond man said. "What's up, Bassett?"

Bassett didn't answer, marched on.

Ben Soames had young Tocky down and was trying to throttle him. Others were dancing ineffectually around the two, pushing and pulling at Soames but with little success. The yellow-haired girl in a black leather jacket was screaming at the top of her voice as she fought to get at the two men on the floor.

Bassett went through the press like a battering ram. He was a big man, not yet forty, powerful. He grabbed Soames by the scruff of his neck and hauled him upwards.

The young farmer cursed vilely. Once on his feet he turned and swung at Bassett. The big policeman rode with the blow, hit Soames in the pit of his stomach, doubling him up, pushing him backwards with the other hand.

Tocky Bates was tough. Gasping for breath, he rose to his feet. Kate flew at him delightedly but, gasping, he held her off. From inside his leather jacket he took a large jack-knife and opened it with his thumbnail. His eyes were mere slits and seemed to have no expression in them at all.

He skirted the girl and Bassett and made for the staggering Soames.

"I'm going to cut your liver out," he said, softly.

Next moment Bassett was in Tocky's path again and the big man said quietly, "Give me the knife, son."

Tocky paused. "Get out of my way, copper," he said.

Bassett's arm looped out swiftly. His fist cracked against the side of Tocky's jaw. Tocky fell back into the crowd and they held him. The knife clattered to the boards. Bassett was bending to pick it up when Kate attacked him, all fists and feet and flying yellow hair.

It was Kennedy Lomas who grabbed her, held her kicking form. He kept saying, "Woa there! Woa there," as if quietening a fractious mare. His teeth shone in his bronzed square face and his blue eyes danced. The redhead he had brought with him looked

on in sultry disapproval.

Kate became still, looked slyly upwards at Lomas.

He said: "You never know your luck do you? All I came in for was to order some more booze for a big do I'm having tonight."

Constable Bassett said, "What started this?" and the bedlam of recrimination, denial and advice broke out again.

7

CAL RIPPON was in the swivel chair behind the desk. Sir Mortimer Lang sat against the wall, his chair tilted perilously on its back legs. He seemed to be contemplating the muddy toes of his brown brogues and taking no interest whatsoever in the proceedings.

The three malcontents stood facing Rippon. Tocky Bates and his yellow-haired Kate held hands and Ben Soames stood apart.

Constable Bassett stood by the door, looking grim, as sober as a judge, ready to quell with his strong right arm an attempted rebellion or break-out.

"You didn't see who the girl was?" said Cal Rippon.

Tocky Bates shook his head, scowled. "I told you, didn't I?" His defiance failed miserably in impact, for he had the beginnings of a ludicrous black eye, swollen lips, a jaw that was already going lopsided where Bassett had hit him.

"Nor did you?" Rippon looked at Kate.

She shook her wild blonde locks vigorously and wagged her eyelashes at the handsome sergeant. But this seemed to have no effect on him at all.

"She was all muffled up," said the irrepressible blonde. "Had a hood sort of thing on an' a long coat." She gave Soames a wicked sidelong glance. "I guess Ben aimed to take care o' that pretty soon though."

Soames looked straight ahead and pretended he hadn't heard her.

"You'll have to tell us who it is, Ben," Rippon said. "We've got a particularly nasty murder case on our hands here. We can't afford to waste time while you play at Sir Lancelot protecting the honour of some silly female."

Ben Soames set his battered face in stern lines and was obstinately silent.

Cal Rippon picked up the jack-knife that Bassett had taken from

Tocky Bates. He opened it slowly and ran his thumb along the shining blade. He tapped the point gently on the blotting pad before him. He glanced sideways in the direction of Sir Mortimer and nodded his head. The old man turned his thumb down dispassionately.

Rippon let the open knife fall with a clatter to the desk.

"Lock 'em up in the back, Bassett. Creating a disturbance, drunk and disorderly, intent to wound, attempted murder, any other little sidelines you can think of."

"With pleasure, sarge," said Bassett and started forward.

"It was Rosie McAvoy," said Ben Soames dully.

Tocky Bates gave a harsh little snort of laughter. "Rosie McAvoy! That cow!"

Soames's expression was murderous as he turned on the leather-jacketed young man.

Bassett grabbed Soames's arm. "Now then!"

Soames didn't pull away. He rocked his head from side to side, his eyes turned upwards, not looking at anything or anybody in particular now.

"I'll get you," he said. "I'll get you!"

"That'll be enough now," said Bassett and he shook him slightly.

"What time did you leave Rosie McAvoy?" Rippon wanted to know.

Soames didn't answer, his head hanging now like a beaten child's as Bassett still held him. Rippon wagged his head in signal to the big constable and Bassett let his captive go and returned to his post against the door. Through all this Sir Mortimer Lang had sat virtually motionless and as if in a brown study.

Rippon spoke again and his normally deep voice became higher, almost shrill, cracking like a whip. "I asked you a question, Soames! What time did you leave Rosie McAvoy?"

Soames looked up. "I don't know. It was pretty late. I didn't notice the time. I went to sleep."

"So you had left the meadow by then?"

"Yes. We were at my place."

"So you didn't leave Rosie, she left you."

"Yes."

"Take 'em out, Bassett."

Bassett took them out.

Rippon swung his swivel chair around until he faced his chief. "Do we let 'em stew overnight, sir, or do we let 'em loose?"

"It's early yet. Let 'em go home later on. Keep tabs on Soames

and Bates."

Bassett came back; said: "Jameson's watching them."

"What do you think of them, Bassett?" asked Sir Mortimer.

"A vicious pair, sir. Both strong as bulls and hardly responsible for their own actions when they're in a paddy. Both capable of murder, I'd say, even a nutty sort of thing. . . ."

He hesitated; while still facing the chief constable, he looked out of the corner of his eyes at Rippon. And when he spoke again his words were half-question, half-statement and seemed to be directed at the sergeant as much as at his superior.

"I believe Soames went a bit funny years ago . . . There was something about a girl. One of the locals told me . . ."

Rippon said: "You mean the affair of Ben and the butcher's daughter." His lips quirked sardonically. "A case of rape I suppose, really. Ben was about fourteen, the girl about the same. She's married now - two kids - the experience doesn't seem to have done her any harm. Ben got off lightly I suppose. Two years probation and a thrashing from his father. There's never been anything like that with Ben since. No woman - seriously - as far as I know . . ."

"Are his parents still alive?" asked Sir Mortimer.

"No, they were killed years ago in a motoring accident. He's alone except for old Simmy who helps him around the farm."

"How about this Rosie McAvoy?"

"I don't think Ben 'ud take Rosie seriously - not really seriously I mean. Though you never know, of course."

Sir Mortimer addressed the waiting constable. "All right, Bassett. Thanks for your help."

"Thank you, sir." Bassett closed the door gently.

"Drinks too much bless 'im," said Sir Mortimer.

Sergeant Rippon was familiar now with his superior's occasional zany pronouncements. He didn't try to work this one out.

The old man said, "Tell me about Rosie McAvoy."

Rippon tilted back in his chair and regarded the ceiling.

"Rosie McAvoy is Ham Corners' perpetual light o' love. She is all things to all men. She is the prototype of all the Rosies. Fair Rosalinda, sweet Rosamunde, Rosie O'Grady, Rose of Washington Square. She could be out of Shakespeare, Faulkner, Dylan Thomas. She's all sorts of woman and she's had all sorts of men."

"Come down to earth, boy!"

Rippon straightened up, grinned slyly. "Rosie's about thirty and she's married to an old merchant-navy captain, retired,

Simon McAvoy. In his seventies, if not older. Rosie is mother, daughter and housekeeper to him. Whether she's still a real wife to him, too, is a source of ribald speculation to the villagers.

"Simon was supposed to have been a hell of a rip in his younger days, a girl in every port and a wife in none. As long as Rosie keeps the cottage spick and looks after him well, he seems to let her go her own way. There's a theory that Rosie regales the old man with tales of her varied lovers and their peculiarities. I wouldn't be at all surprised . . ."

Sir Mortimer chuckled. "I love a bawdy tale myself. Perhaps Miss Rosie will have a few to tell us. We'll go and see her, huh, young Cal?"

"Well, we'll have to check Ben Soames's story anyway," said Rippon, sardonically. "Won't we, sir?"

8

MRS. Rose McAvoy had curly russet hair, a fresh country complexion, large guileless blue eyes and the sweetest beestung lips Sir Mortimer had ever seen. As he said to Rippon afterwards it did his old heart good to look upon her.

The chief constable also ventured the opinion, in a rather less bluff manner than usual, that he couldn't understand why such a creature, amoral or not, wasted herself on a scruffy old goat like Captain Simon.

The old seaman had winked and twinkled at them with rheumy eyes. He evidently considered that any "gentleman callers" Rosie had could have come with only one purpose. Late though it was, he had potted out to his shed at the bottom of the garden to "have a pipe" leaving his wife and her visitors to do what they would.

With devastating candour Rosie collaborated Ben Soames's story and added a time the farmer hadn't been able to remember. She had cut across the meadows to home, not seeing anybody or hearing anything, and when she reached the cottage it was two-twenty a.m. by the grandfather clock that old Simon always kept dead right by the wireless.

She referred to Ben Soames as "a nice boy", though he was probably a few years her senior. She called him "gentle". Afterwards Sir Mortimer remarked:

"I wondered whether we were all talking about the same

person."

"Ben Soames seemed fond of her, too," Rippon said. "A queer cuss. A very queer cuss."

By this time Soames, Tocky Bates and Kate had been sent home after a phone message to the station by Rippon. Sir Mortimer wanted to question Tocky about his whereabouts on the murder night and preferred to do this in the young man's home and away from his blonde collaborator.

Tocky lived in a rambling, tumbledown old house on the edge of the village, with his scruffy mother and father, half-a-dozen scruffy brothers and sisters, three scruffy dogs and a handsome, shining tabby cat who walked disdainfully among the squalor. Mr. Bates was a scrap-dealer and the large yard around his home was littered with a backwash of his trade through which the two visitors wended their way in the perilous darkness.

"One o'clock he came in on that infernal machine!" said Mr. Bates. "Waking us all up - an' everybody else for miles around I shouldn't wonder."

This was backed up by Mrs. Bates and all the remaining Bates, large and small, while Tocky sat with a smug look on his toughly-handsome visage.

"Stay put," said Cal Rippon to the copper who watched the place from the outer perimeter of the scrapyards.

* * *

They went next to visit the fair Kate who lived in more respectable surroundings than her boy friend, with her insurance-agent father, her prim mother and her two priggish little brothers. She told the visitors that Tocky left her just before one. Her parents confirmed this. They heard him roar away just before Kate came in. It was evident they were at their wits' end with their beautiful skid-kid daughter and her wild lover.

"Five minutes or so from here to his own home," said Cal Rippon. "It all matches up. But he could have slipped out later, had time to kill old Jabbo. Just as we know Ben Soames could have done it after Rosie McAvoy left him, two-ish. The police surgeon figures the old man was killed in the middle hours of the night . . ."

"I know all that, young Cal," put in the chief constable rather testily.

"Of course, sir, sorry - I was just talking aloud."

As they returned to the station it began to rain quite fiercely.

9

IT would have been nice had Rippon and Sir Mortimer been finally able to say that they alone, between them, had solved the “vampire murder”, as the yellow rags called it. But this would not have been strictly true.

They had a lot to do with it, of course, and they were in at the death. But the climax and *dénouement* came about also through a combination of circumstances, happenings, a coincidence or two. Also through clashes of personalities – to say the least – and the accidental intervention of what might be termed “subsidiary characters”.

One of these subsidiary characters was Constable Percy Clutterman. Percy was a fledgling policeman who came from a neighbouring town and had been virtually press-ganged into working among these “hayseeds”, as he termed the villagers of Ham Corners. On the other hand, he was intrigued at being connected with a murder case so early in his career.

He became lumbered with a spell of night duty at the site of the murder and that wasn't good – particularly when it started to rain. A town boy, if only a “small-town-boy”, Percy didn't like the countryside at night, even at the best of times. The fact that there was probably a homicidal maniac abroad in the darkness did not help Percy's nerves one little bit.

He put on his oilskins and bent his lanky body against the buffeting of the wind and the rain. The hedgerows were too low to give him shelter. The nearest shelter was the copse of trees. Percy debated on running across there. He then decided against this. He had been told to stay put. He was a good copper.

It was such a dark night – the visibility being made even muddier by the rain – that he could hardly see the trees. They were just a sinister wavering bulk on the skyline and, shelter or not, didn't look inviting. Percy decided that he preferred to stay in the open, rain and all.

Under cover of his oilskins he fingered his truncheon and was comforted. He went over to the edge of the ditch. The section where the body had lain was roped off.

There was nothing to see except the storm-rain beating into the earth, the oily-looking puddles forming. Percy had been told it

was lovely rich soil hereabouts and he was prepared to believe this.

Something glinting in the mud caught his eye. He wiped rain from his face with the back of his hand and got down on his haunches on the edge of the ditch. The wet rope sagged in his face and he recoiled as if from a ghostly touch.

He put his hand down to steady himself and his fingers dug into the mud and loam. Cursing, he wiped them on his oilskin. The rain beat at him in mockery.

He was in danger of pitching headfirst into the ditch. He rose and strode over the wire, treading carefully, bending.

When he straightened up once more he held something that gleamed dully, that, despite the mud still adhering to it, was quite obviously a cigarette lighter.

Percy held it carefully in his hand as he climbed out of the ditch. It must have lain beneath old Jabbo's body and become embedded in the ground so that it could not be spotted before. The driving rain had revealed it now.

Had it been dropped last night by the murderer? Or had it been lying there for days, even weeks? Constable Percy Clutterman didn't quite know what to think, what to do. His first reaction was to dash back to the station immediately with his find. But he didn't want to make a fool of himself.

Then he remembered the man watching the Soames farm, only over the stile and across the field-path. Just a few minutes walk . . .

Purposefully, Percy moved into the centre of the lane, and down Twin Meadows Hill towards the stile. His shoulders were hunched, his head bent against the rain. It was purely by chance that he happened to glance back towards the top of the hill. It seemed to him that a figure was silhouetted momentarily against the skyline there. He blinked, looked again – and there was nothing. He wondered if his eyes and the driving rain were playing him tricks.

He knew he had to go back and find out.

The cigarette lighter was safely buttoned in the top pocket of his tunic beneath the dripping oilskin. Percy gripped his truncheon tightly and, turning, went back up the hill.

He went past the scene of the murder and on. He reached the crest of the hill. The lane was empty.

A figure launched itself violently from the ditch beside him.

Miss Amelia Lark had had a late call. Such was her selflessness and dedication to duty that she hadn't imagined there might be any danger to herself, lurking out there in the darkness. She slammed down her phone and struggled into her winter coat, slapped her hat on her untidy locks. It was raining heavens hard when she got the upright bike from the shed and mounted it.

Her call led her again up Twin Meadows Hill and past the spot where she had discovered the body of Jabbo Morrow. Only then did she begin to feel trepidation, have an urge to turn back, find another route, send for the neighbouring doctor to take over the job for her: anything to avoid going past that accursed spot where beasts' work had been done.

But, automatically, her legs carried her onwards, and she pushed the old bike up the hill as she had done countless times before in sunshine and snow and rain, in daylight and darkness.

She consoled herself by assuming that Sergeant Rippon and the bluff chief constable would have put a man to watch the spot. They were both smart men. Sir Mortimer's pose of soldierly stupidity didn't fool Miss Lark in the least.

She wondered if their theory matched hers. *Beasts! Beasts!*

She was surprised to discover there was nobody at the scene of the crime. Her trepidation grew as, her head bent against the rain, she pushed her bike on up the hill. She was panting more than usual . . .

Perhaps the constable was sheltering in the trees. Yes, that must be it!

She was at the crest of the hill when she heard a man's voice cry out. Then, even as she paused, aghast, things happened so quickly that she screamed shrilly – she who was not the screaming kind. She let go of her bike and turned, her hands reaching for the heavens, her stubby legs pumping as she started to run.

Something hit her with stunning force on the back of her head. She felt her hat crumple and it came over her eyes. There was the blinding pain, a sensation of falling – and then only blackness.

* * *

She was lying on the hard ground. Her eyes opened. A demented face looked down into hers. She screamed and went on screaming.

A hand grabbed her shoulder and shook her and a voice called her name over and over again.

She became more rational, though her breath still sobbed in her throat. The dark, contorted face belonged to Ben Soames. He babbled:

"I saw who it was. I saw him! I guessed . . . all along I guessed. He laid the policeman out as well. He got away. But I'll get him, Miss Lark. You'll see! I'll raise the people . . . We'll get him . . . We'll get 'em all!"

He was gone then; leaving her there. She rose to her feet, swaying. He was running across the field, a demented scarecrow moving in the rain.

The policeman lay crumpled on the edge of the ditch, half-covered by his own voluminous oilskin, like a tent that had been brought down upon him by the force of the gale.

Amelia Lark went to his aid.

Beasts! *Beasts!*

They would pay . . .

* * *

Ben Soames had eluded the constable put to watch him. A slow-moving local man named Brownham. But Brownham heard the screams and he left his post and ran out into the meadow to investigate.

He saw the man in a dark macintosh and cap running along the path towards him. He was shocked almost to immobility when he recognized Ben Soames. He couldn't have known that the restless young farmer, out on the prowl, had found it child's play to elude his watchdog.

Soames was almost upon him when Brownham realized he didn't have time to ponder and he drew his truncheon and barred the path.

"Hold hard there, Ben," he said.

Soames just came on faster and then, when he was almost on top of Brownham, he swerved neatly.

Brownham turned ponderously, his truncheon raised. While he was off-balance Soames hit him on the side of the jaw, then hit him again while he was falling.

He stood over the still figure for a moment. "You shouldn't have tried to stop me, Brownie," he said. "There's something I've got to do." Then he turned on his heels and ran on.

10

BOTH men had their outer clothes on. The phone rang and Sir Mortimer, who was nearest, lifted the receiver. He perched his bulk on the edge of the desk. Rippon stood by the door, watching him.

The chief constable barked, "Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . I understand . . . Yes, Cadleigh . . . They must stay put . . . Yes - everybody . . . We'll be there as soon as we can. Goodbye."

He hung up. Still sitting, his big head swivelling, he said, "That was the butler at the big house. The killer's on the loose. Young Clutterman's been clobbered. He's still out . . ."

Rippon didn't wait for further explanations. He opened the door, stuck his head out, bawled: "I want the car. Quick!"

A disembodied voice floated back in reply.

"I want three men at the Soames farm," said Sir Mortimer. "Grab Soames if they can find him. Brownham's been clobbered, too, though he's okay. They're all at the Mobley place, the big house. Miss Lark, too. That's where you and I are going, Cal. I want men spaced out in the countryside. A triangle, the three corners of which are Soames's farm, the big house, and the Lomas Old Farm."

"I get you, sir." Cal Rippon went through the open door.

* * *

The rain had stopped. The air was fresh to fevered brows. The party was in full swing at Old Farm and had already spilled out into the neighbouring churchyard when the accident occurred.

Now Ruth Mobley lay on the big couch in the library with an anxious Nigel bending over her and most of their new friends gathered around. The Mobleys' first attendance at one of Kennedy Lomas's parties had suddenly gone wrong.

Ruth's face was as white as paper, although she seemed unmarked. Dried mud dappled her bare arm.

She said: "I told you - I slipped." She giggled. "I hit the back of my head on a gravestone, of all things."

Not all the guests were in the library, only the ones who had been near when Ruth screamed in the darkness. Many were still out there and didn't know of the accident. Among these was

Kennedy Lomas himself. It had been suggested that he be paged, but Ruth Mobley had vetoed this.

Already the colour was beginning to come back into her cheeks. The other guests lost interest and began to drift away in search of new diversions. Most of them were tipsy, their fine feathers ruffled by horseplay and indulgence.

Nigel, now on one knee beside the couch, said, "How'd you feel now, darling?"

"All right, really," said Ruth. "Will you leave me now, dear, so that I can make myself presentable? Please."

"All right, if you say so."

Nigel left, reluctantly.

His wife waited a bit and then she rose. A little unsteadily she crossed to the door, closed it, turned the key in the lock.

She went over to the french windows, her walk becoming steadier and more purposeful with each step. One of the wings was slightly ajar and the rich drapes were thrown back. Ruth stood for a moment looking out into the darkness. The sounds of drunken male laughter came into her and the shrill squeals of the women. Ruth's face sagged and aged, became set in a grey mask of disgust. Deep in her dark eyes was an unutterable horror.

A face grinned and gibbered at her from the other side of the glass and then disappeared again. Ruth drew the drapes together but she did not close the aperture and the night air and the sounds of revelry still drifted in to her.

On the long refectory table in the corner of the huge book-lined library, coats were piled higgledy-piggledy, some of them spilling onto the floor. There were handbags, too, most of them stacked in a corner behind the table.

Ruth swayed across the room. She seemed normal again and in her red evening gown was tall and slim and very beautiful.

She found her handbag in the corner and from it first of all took her vanity case. Through her mirror and with the usual aids she repaired her make-up and combed her glossy black hair. She dropped the open handbag on the table and from the welter of finery there extricated her fur stole and draped it around her shoulders.

She picked up the handbag again and extracted from it long white gloves and drew them on. All her movements were unhurried and deliberate.

From the handbag, too, she took the gun that Nigel had given her some time ago. She left the bag on the table, still open, some

of its contents spilling into the tangled jumble of finery. Carrying the gun incongruously in one white gloved hand she went over to the french windows again. She halted. Now, for the first time, she seemed hesitant . . .

* * *

"I should've told you before," said Cadleigh the butler. "Volunteered the information I mean. But they've both been pretty good to me . . ."

He paused, blinking against the hard stares of Cal Rippon and Sir Mortimer, both standing facing him.

They were in the Mobleys' drawing room, a handsome apartment with solid mahogany furniture and trailing plants and mirrors in the modern manner.

Constable Brownham stood against the closed door. His face was swollen and sore where Ben Soames had hit him. On a palatial chaise-longue the younger officer, Clutterman, lay unconscious and Miss Lark was on an overstuffed leather pouffe at his side, watching him anxiously.

"Go on," said Sir Mortimer, such harshness in his voice that the plump district nurse started violently. The events of the last two nights had been very bad on her nerves.

Luckily, the blow the killer – if it had been he – had launched at her from behind had struck her only at a glance. Her concern for the young constable had already almost made her forget the incident and, except now and then, the headache it had left behind with her. If only the police hadn't turned up with their haste, their curt voices, their questions. Everything would be taken care of without their intervention . . .

That Cadleigh man was talking again, his voice a mere drone in the back of Miss Lark's head. But, of course, the police were hanging on the man's words . . .

"They were both out that night. The master and the mistress. He was in Bristol. I didn't really know whether to expect him or not. He hadn't rung me and if he rang the mistress she hadn't mentioned it. She went to bed about her usual time. Twelvish. Neither of them are early birds.

"I myself never go to bed early. I suffer with insomnia you see. When I've locked up I usually sit in the kitchen reading, maybe another hour or so.

"I heard this noise from the front of the house. I looked at the

clock on the mantelpiece. It's always ten minutes fast. By that it was quarter to one, so that'd make it . . ."

"We know, we know," said Sir Mortimer in his parade-ground manner. "Go on, go on!"

"Yes, sir! Well . . . I went through and I was just in time to see the mistress, in a macintosh and a head-scarf, leaving by the front door. She didn't see me – she must've thought I'd gone to bed – or that I wouldn't hear her . . . I didn't hear the car so she must have gone on foot . . ."

"You didn't follow her?" said Cal Rippon.

"No, sir. But I waited up. I waited up till two o'clock and she hadn't returned. And by then I was so tired – the strain I suppose – that I went to my room. I must have gone to sleep. I was awakened by the car coming in. The other car, that is – the master's car. I saw him let himself in. It was five o'clock, not yet light. He went right upstairs. I imagine Mrs. Mobley was in by then or the master would surely have come down again and called me. They share the same room, sir . . . the same bed . . ."

Cal Rippon began, "Is there . . . ?"

He was interrupted by Miss Lark exclaiming, "The young man is coming round."

Constable Clutterman was trying to sit up.

"Sarge!"

"Take it easy, son."

Clutterman had something in his hand. Dirty but gleaming. A cigarette lighter. He was holding it out, desperately.

Rippon took it.

The young constable shrugged off Miss Lark's detaining hands. If a man could come to attention while still half-reclining, Percy Clutterman could be said to be doing just that.

"The murderer must have come out to look for it, sir. He might have got it, too, if he hadn't been interrupted . . ."

The lighter was heavy, obviously good silver. It was tubby, plain except for small marks on one side, in a corner. While his chief looked over his shoulder, Rippon rubbed dried mud away from the metal with his fingers.

"Initials . . ." he said.

"They will pay!" cried Miss Lark suddenly, shrilly. "They will all pay! That will be taken care of now . . ."

11

RUTH MOBLEY was still standing near the french windows when the drapes were pushed aside and Kennedy Lomas came in. He was panting. His face was red and puffed, his eyes wild.

He stopped when he saw her and she backed a little, levelling the gun.

As if by some invisible sleight of hand Lomas had donned a mask, the red and bloated face became the genial bronzed one, the eyes glowing, the teeth flashing in a smile.

He half-turned. He closed the french windows gently behind him, latched them, drew the drapes close.

He moved forward.

"Stay where you are," said Ruth. "The gun's loaded and I can use it. I'm going to kill you."

"You foolish girl," said Lomas.

"Why not?" said Ruth. "Why not kill you? You tried to kill me back there in the graveyard. No doubt you would've finished the job, too, if somebody else hadn't come near. As long as I'm alive you're not safe, are you? You don't want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, but you know you have to . . . Besides, I'm sick of being bled white by you . . ."

"Oh, is that it?" Lomas interrupted, his face distorted again now by a twisted sneer. "Is that what you want? Your money back! You had your money's worth didn't you? You said you loved me. You said we'd be together always soon . . ."

"I must have been as crazy as you are, you animal!"

"Don't say that! Don't say that about me!" The wild light flared in his eyes as he started forward.

But he was rational enough to be halted again as Ruth jerked the muzzle of the gun threateningly.

His eyes narrowed. She watched him like a cat watching a bird as he put his hand inside the lapel of his fine cashmere blue suit. He brought out a wad of notes.

"Here, take these for a start," he said. "I've got to get out of here, quick. Or you can come with me if you like. We'll go abroad, start a new life."

It was obvious that his rationalism was slipping again, that he was talking wildly to gain time.

"I'm the one who's going," said the blackhaired woman.

He was about to throw the money in her face when she shot him twice in the stomach. He clutched at himself, bending over, sinking slowly, making little incredulous protesting sounds which rose to an agonized shrillness.

A shrillness that seemed to be echoed and re-echoed by ghostly voices as somebody hammered on the glass of the french windows to be let in and then went away again. And all over the house doors banged and feet clattered and voices screamed and shouted. And in the background, like the southing of an evil breeze, sounded the baying of the mob.

* * *

There wasn't an enormous number of them: it was the sound they made that was frightening as they came in from the fields and on to the unkempt lawn and across the corner of the churchyard over which they now held undisputed sway; no revellers they, but spirits of vengeance crying for blood.

By now the door was locked against them but their leader, Ben Soames, hammered upon it in righteous anger. But even he stood back when it was opened and a lone woman stood there. In the light on the porch it was seen that she wore a red dress and an expensive fur stole and long white gloves. She was regal and very beautiful.

The shouting died and in the silence Ben Soames was heard to exclaim:

"Mrs. Mobley . . . I - I didn't know you were here."

Her voice rang out then. "If you want the murderer," she said, "if you want Kennedy Lomas, you're too late. He's dead."

Her husband appeared at her side, caught hold of her arm.

As if the sight of another person, a man, had unleashed something, the mob surged forward again, shouting "She's lying", "Let's get them", "Out of our way, you!" and other things.

It looked as if Ben Soames, trying to stop them now, protecting the beautiful dark woman, would be swept down and trampled upon.

But suddenly two other men joined him, ranged themselves one on each side of him. Sir Mortimer Lang and Cal Rippon, a pair easily recognisable.

"Back, you dogs!" thundered the white-haired elderly man, bearlike and formidable in his rough tweeds.

"What do y' think you're doing, eh? Go back to your homes

before you're all put under arrest."

"Police!" shouted somebody, this time from the back.

The mob broke up into fragments, into pairs and trios and single scuttling figures, harried and shepherded by the blue-coated officers, not many, but enough, moving in on all sides.

* * *

"I met him at a theatrical party months ago," Ruth Mobley said. "My husband wasn't with me at the time. We became lovers. I used to meet him regularly in London, during shopping expeditions. Sometimes I stayed overnight and we went to an hotel . . ."

They were in the library from which the body had been discreetly moved. A mat had been drawn over the patch of blood. Sir Mortimer Lang, Cal Rippon, and Mr. and Mrs. Mobley.

Nigel Mobley sat in an armchair behind the others and looked at his shoes. At no time during the interview did he look up.

"I always thought he was a theatrical agent or something," the woman went on. "I didn't really care, I suppose . . ."

She sat alone on the chaise-longue with the two policemen facing her, both on ordinary chairs of an antique nature.

" . . . He told me about this empty house and I persuaded my husband to buy it, get it converted. I just wanted to be near him - Lomas. It was then that the blackmail started. I learned that this was his profession. Blackmail. Among other unsavoury things. He had other women on a string, too.

"He threatened to tell my husband about our relationship, that we had kept so very secret up till then. He had hotel bills, receipts, a couple of letters I had written him. He knew Nigel was very rich. He had planned this all along.

"Although perhaps that seems very hard to believe now, I love Nigel. I was obsessed by the other man. I didn't want Nigel hurt, didn't want to lose him. I paid, and I kept on paying.

"The other night, the night of the murder, I knew Nigel would be out. He had phoned and told me so. I arranged to meet Lomas. Very late. I don't know quite what I meant to do. Had I thought of the gun I would've taken it with me then. But I didn't.

"We met on foot. On Twin Meadows Hill. I threatened to expose him. He had been drinking and was in one of his sadistic moods. He laughed at me. Then he threw me down on the grass, began to make love to me, hurting me, punishing me. It was then that the old man interrupted us. Old Jabbo. He was poaching

maybe – or just prowling. A strange old man, standing there, cackling at us, offering lewd advice . . .”

For the first time Ruth Mobley’s voice began to crack. She let her head fall and began to move it from side to side like a dumb trapped beast. The actress wasn’t acting anymore. She had stopped acting long ago.

“Do you want a drink, madam?” said Cal Rippon.

“No, thank you. I’m all right now.” Her head up again, she seemed to be looking right through the two men and in her dark eyes there was the ghastly light of remembered horror. She went on, tonelessly:

“Lomas ran at the old man. Jabbo grabbed a stake he must have had loose in the ditch and swung it. It caught Lomas’s shoulder. It wasn’t a hard blow. Lomas hit the old man with his fist and knocked him down. He must’ve been unconscious. Lomas stood over him and lifted the pointed stake . . .”

Her voice broke again and she buried her face in her hands.

The man behind her did not look up, but he half rose, involuntarily. Then he subsided again.

“That will be all, Mrs. Mobley,” said Sir Mortimer in a gentle voice. “Will you come with us now?”

Cal Rippon took the woman by the arm.

As they left the room the wild, strangled sobs of a man in torment rang after them until the closed door mercifully cut the sound off.

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Drop us a line . . .

We should like to hear from our readers. Comments, criticisms, queries, requests – please do not hesitate to write to *The Editor, Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine, Micron House, Gorringe Park Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey, England.* It will be your letters that help us to plan ahead, featuring the most popular types of stories by your favourite authors.

What was the secret of the Phantom Guest? How did he pull off his remarkable vanishing act? Laying him by the heels produced more than one surprise!

**Rex
Dolphin**

THE PHANTOM GUEST

This story was originally broadcast in the BBC Light Programme in 1958, but like most of the contents of EWMM has not previously appeared in print. Author Rex Dolphin has written several detective novels and is a member of the Crime Writers' Association and its Treasurer for 1964.

HMM-MM – this is a nice old pub. Reminds me of the sort of place the Phantom Guest used to pick on.

Never told you about the Phantom Guest, did I?

He'd pick on the best medium-sized hotel in a country town. Breezing in after paying off his taxi, he'd set down two heavy, expensive-looking suitcases, which he'd say contained valuable samples. His line was apparently jewellery and watches, and you could tell by his dress, his speech, and his easy manner of mixing with all men from squire to roadman that he was at least an assistant sales manager.

He would put on quite an act with the heavy cases, telling the porter not to bump them, and to put them down carefully in his room. He'd give the man a big tip.

He'd have a couple of expensive meals, with wine, cigars and all the trimmings. Later he'd go into the saloon bar. He had stories for all occasions, and soon they'd be patting him on the back and buying him drinks, and he'd do the same for them.

He was *in*.

He'd stay a day or a few days or even a week, till he thought the right time had come. Then late in the evening he'd say he was going for a walk around

the block to get some air before turning in.

He was, in fact, skipping.

But who would ever suspect such a thing of a man so prosperous, so well-turned-out, so genial and frank? And if anyone *had* suspected, weren't there two heavy cases of samples in his room? Cases which in themselves, let alone the contents, were worth fifteen to twenty guineas.

They only suspected it later, when he didn't return, and when perhaps a few of the saloon bar crowd found money missing from their wallets.

Panic. Uproar. The manager or landlord dashes upstairs to our friend's room. We'll seize his cases. Open the door. No cases. Thorough search. Still no cases. Cases gone – but *how*? He was seen to walk out without carrying a thing.

All sorts of theories were advanced – that he'd burned them, lowered them out of the window, and so on. All these ideas were disproved by the local police – but they could offer none in exchange and were completely baffled.

The thing got so widespread that the Yard was brought in. Yours truly was the officer assigned to the job. Hopeless, it was thought. The job, I mean, not the officer.

We plotted the jobs on a map. I've got to call them *jobs*, not *cases*, or you'll wonder whether I'm talking about cases or cases, if you see what I mean. Well, the area of operations had limits of a sort, showing that this fellow had his base within those limits.

All hotels were warned to watch out and report anyone thought to be using the *modus operandi*. Of course, we got some false trails and some red faces, but gradually the bloke's route began to show shape, although we didn't yet get close to his person.

Meantime I was pondering what sort of chap we were looking for, and if you'll take time to think it out – consider the pocket-picking, the establishment of confidence, the spinning of yarns, and above all the vanishing cases – you'll understand why I settled for someone in the stage magic business. A retired illusionist, a man who made his own magic props.

I reckoned out how he made the cases disappear, but I kept it to myself because although it was simple it was also fantastic.

So by now we should have his full description? Maybe, but he varied his appearance. The influence of the stage again, you see. All we could build up was a picture of a man as seen through a mist.

Eventually our enquiries pointed to a man who had called

himself I. Van Ische during a very successful few years on the stage a while back. Drink had got him down, and his act became corny in both ideas and performance, and he soon vanished in reality. Nobody knew his present whereabouts, but we got hold of a photo of him and showed it around his victims, and he seemed to fill the bill.

One day we got the call. A policeman saw a man answering Van Ische's description walking into the Bear at Washington, carrying two cases. Local police laid on a discreet guard, while I hared down there in a car.

The manageress of the Bear was a plump, pleasant middle-aged woman.

I said: "Gentleman booked in this afternoon with two heavy cases. Looks something like this." Showed her the photo.

"That's right." She looked surprised.

"I'd like a word with him, madam." Showed her my card.

She continued to look surprised. Probably at the sight of a detective officer showing controlled excitement.

She rang his room. Yes, show the inspector up.

Up I went. And there he was – I. Van Ische in the flesh, quite undisguised. He was elderly, of medium height and build, a pleasant looking man who could well have been somebody's favourite uncle.

"Ah, Inspector!" He came forward, putting on an act of looking pleased at meeting me.

I said: "I'm glad to see you still have the cases, Mr. Van Ische."

"Why yes, Inspector. Did you suppose they might have disappeared?" He was smiling with his whole being. He was cool, all right. Let him be – he'd soon get hot.

I looked at the cases. They were the cases in the case, right enough. It was high time he started getting scared.

"I'm going to tell you a story, Mr. Van Ische. Once there was a man they called the Phantom Guest" – here I sketched it in – "and the whole thing turns, Mr. Van Ische, on how the cases were made to vanish. Well, I don't have to tell *you* how a stage magician can construct a suitcase that can be dismantled into pieces small enough to be hidden on the person, say under a topcoat.

"But what of their contents? What was there that was bulky, heavy, yet could be made to vanish in a flash?

"There was only one answer. In every hotel room there is a washbasin. Down which can be poured water. These cases con-

tained football bladders or specially made rubber bottles filled with water.

"All you had to do was pour it away, dismantle the cases, secrete the components and bladders on your person, and you were ready to walk away."

Van Ische was gentle. "You mean, Inspector, that's all the *Phantom Guest* had to do."

I wasted no more time. "Open those cases."

He did so. I stared unbelievably at the solid hide cases and the packed clothes, books, personal belongings they contained. My carefully built up theories thundered crashing to the floor of my brain. I rooted desperately in the cases, hoping to find I didn't know what.

I looked up at Van Ische, who was smiling benevolently.

"You picked the wrong hotel, Inspector. *This is where I live.*"

I couldn't prove a thing.

But from that day the Phantom Guest never operated again.

Not that that was really the end of Van Ische. The shock of discovery stimulated his old talents, and he found a new racket. Oh, quite legitimate. He got a regular spot on a television show. And quite a few hotel people watching him must think: "Now where have I seen that man before?"

He preferred a deadlier and more certain justice than the Law could provide . . .

**Martin
Thomas**

HARVEST OF HOMICIDE

Martin Thomas has been a freelance contributor to the Press since the age of seventeen. His first fiction was a series of occult short stories, published in British newspapers and magazines and syndicated overseas by Mirror Features, appearing in eight languages. There followed newspaper serials in the detective and science fiction genres, a hundred or so short stories and several dozen crime novels under five pseudonyms.

THE seeds of murder were sown in Yokohama and Shanghai, came to fatal flower in Hong Kong, and were then carried on a gale of hate to London, England. Here they stealthily germinated, to come to final fruition nineteen months later – with a grim harvest of silent death. A harvest that ended only when Dr. Rex Dimond, that debonair police surgeon, personally confronted the menace of the sinister reaper.

The trail of tragedies began with the phenomenal gambler's luck of Fen Tsi, a young member of the crew of the Japanese - registered tramp steamer *Tako Maru*. Fen Tsi had two dominant passions. One was wanderlust, the other was a craving for gambling. The two passions combined to cause his premature death.

The *Tako Maru*, a battered veteran of the seven seas, was riding at anchor in Tokyo Bay, after a rough passage from Vancouver, when the morose serang gave grudging permission for Fen Tsi and five other Chinese members of the galley and stokehold crew to take a couple of hours' liberty ashore in Yokohama.

Chang, the big-built self-appointed leader of the shore party, pushed a way through the crowds thronging Theatre Street, to an eating-house where

the seamen could enjoy the rare luxury of Tamago-yaki omelettes, nasubi egg-plant and long draughts of saki. As all six men had accumulated wages to squander, Chang led his companions from the eating-house to the house of a bakuchi-uchi, a professional gambler, who provided facilities for the fascinating game of "Go". Squatting on a quilted futon, Chang and Fen Tsi and the four other Chinese enjoyed the manoeuvres of the black and white counters with all the gambling passion of their race.

It was Fen Tsi who enjoyed the game most, because good luck seemed to be his alone. Tonight happened to be the festival



of Jugoya-Otsuki-Sama, when persimmons, grapes, chestnuts and soya beans were offered to the Lady Moon. The occasion, and his winnings, made Fen Tsi feel generous, and on leaving the gambling house he treated his friends to a meal of sweet trout and mushrooms. But, except for Fen Tsi himself, it was a very surly party of revellers which eventually wended its way back to the jetty and the fo'c'stle of the *Tako Maru*.

Four days later the ship weighed anchor and cleared the Bay, bound for Shanghai, for an exchange of cargoes. Again in Shanghai the crew, in separate watches, were given shore leave,

and again it was Chang who led the little party of Chinese in quest of entertainment.

Crowded in a hired sampan, they crossed the yellow surface of the Hwang-pu and then straggled along the Bund. They were interested not in the European settlement but in the teeming streets beyond the old walls of the native city. Once through the Sing-Poh-Mun gate, five shipmates closed around Fen Tsi and steered him towards a dingy tea-shop. Having now drawn the balance of pay due to them, they had a hasty meal of rice and cakes and water-melon seeds preparatory to the serious entertainment of the evening. In spite of his companions' affability, Fen Tsi sensed in them a smouldering resentment of his success back in Yokohama – and a determination to reverse the result in the game of fan-tan that was planned.

To that determination, however, Fen Tsi's luck proved impervious. Again it was his friends' money that had to change hands, and it was Fen Tsi's face that split in a grin of delight. With his pockets stuffed with their wages, Fen Tsi eventually ambled out of the gaming dive in a state of bliss founded entirely on ignorance.

It was in a narrow street near the gate, on their way back to the ship, that the little party came to an abrupt halt and Fen Tsi's bliss was shattered. Fen Tsi found himself suddenly dragged into an even narrower alley, which had been deserted. With a losing gambler gripping him by either arm, he found himself gazing up into the almond eyes of the large Chang. Happy-go-lucky as he was by nature, Fen Tsi felt his heart quail.

"Fen Tsi!" Chang whispered. "Tonight, as on the other night, Fortune has smiled on you. Is that not so?"

"Hi low!" the young fellow faltered, in his mellifluous Cantonese. "That is true –"

"Is not then a time of good fortune the best time to – die?" Chang demanded eagerly. And he made a quick gesture.

Fen Tsi's skull wilted under the crushing force of a sudden, vicious blow from behind. Fen Tsi was unconscious even before his knees buckled and he slumped limply to the ground.

Like a pack of ravening animals his five companions pounced on his prone body, and in a few seconds were squabbling among themselves over the spoils from his pockets. It was only the appearance of a rickety jutka at the far end of the alley that sent them off in the opposite direction in a frenzied rush for the city gate.

When they arrived aboard the *Tako Maru* their story of having lost Fen Tsi in the crowd around a political procession satisfied the serang. The serang was even more satisfied at mid-day next day – when the missing Fen-Tsi made an unexpected reappearance. Unexpected to five members of the crew. Chang and his four accomplices looked almost as sick as Fen Tsi himself when the missing man, pale but far from dead, rejoined them in the dark fo'c'stle.

It was difficult, but not impossible, for Chang to account for what had happened.

“Haie!” he exclaimed in mock distress. “Did I not warn you of death approaching from behind? Too late to save you, Fen Tsi, from the unspeakable mob who attacked us! We gave you up as lost, but – as I said – it was truly your night of good fortune.”

Fen Tsi, with his head sorely pained and sorely puzzled, resumed work and earned more money. It was when the *Tako Maru* put in at Hong Kong ten days later that he sought to recoup his lost wealth.

This time only Chang and two others accompanied Fen Tsi ashore. After an hour of shop-window gazing Fen Tsi found the nerve to suggest another game of chance.

Rather to his surprise, Chang agreed with enthusiasm. Could even Fen Tsi's luck continue? But the pleasure was all Fen Tsi's when the little party had crossed the Creek to Kowloon and settled down to a sustained session of fan-tan. Fen Tsi did recoup his losses – without suspecting that it was his own stolen money he was recovering.

To take the party of four back to the *Tako Maru*, Fen Tsi hired a sampan. Except for the lights on junks and on a variety of powered shipping, the harbour was dark, the sky being black and the lights of Hong Kong dimmed by distance. While the sampan-man rhythmically operated his sweep, the four passengers crouched under the curved mid-shelter, shivering in the chill of the breeze blowing from the Peak.

But it was something much colder than the breeze which brought an icy chill of fear to Fen Tsi's heart. With a moneyless shipmate again clutching him at either side, and Chang looming over him in the sheltered gloom, even Fen Tsi had sufficient intelligence to interpret the situation. But his mouth opened too late to achieve a shout.

A sinewy hand closed over his lips. A brawny arm hugged

tight around his chest. And then Fen Tsi's eyes bulged with terror as something glinted in Chang's big fist. As that something swept swiftly upward . . .

When the knife plunged down again, Fen Tsi's convulsive struggle was his last. In silence Chang wiped the knife on the dead man's shoulder and replaced the weapon in the sheath at his belt. Then he stooped over the body to rifle the pockets for the second time.

When the sampan reached the *Tako Maru* and its owner turned for his pay, his eyes widened in surprise.

"Aih-ya! There were four of you!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

Roughly Chang thrust treble payment into his hand, and gave a laugh of scorn.

The sampan-man watched the three seamen board their ship, then vanished back across the harbour. With his departure went all evidence of the fate of Fen-Tsi.

It was that starkly simple fact which was to have a sensational sequel in another port, on the other side of the world. A sequel of urgent interest to New Scotland Yard.

2

WHAT Fleet Street referred to as "The Lockjaw Epidemic" first came to Rex Dimond's knowledge by way of the press reports. And the term caused him a fastidious and sceptical frown.

It was used again this morning in a leading article he was reading over breakfast in his Sackville Street flat.

Tall, dark and with a small moustache, Rex Dimond, M.D., B.Ch., shared a Hoxton medical practice with two partners, Drs. Mogg and Tucker. A legacy from a dotting aunt had made Dimond financially independent, so that his medical work was virtually a hobby. But a hobby in which he took an equal interest was crime investigation. He had been able to indulge this interest because of his official standing as a police surgeon - and the personal flair he had shown as an investigator.

Ex-major R.A.M.C., he had a subtle air of military distinction, leavened with that debonair sense of humour that was peculiarly his own.

Now he looked up from his newspaper to gaze across the breakfast table at his wife, Sally.

When he had first met her she had been Sally Dexter, dispensing assistant in a chemist's shop. Although the shop counter had concealed a not inconsiderable part of her attractions, those elegant legs of hers, the sheen of her chestnut hair and the allure of her hazel eyes had, in his own words, made Dimond "nuts about her". The physical appeal had been enhanced by the appeal of her personality. Promptly he had induced her to dispense with her employer and to dispense for himself at the Hoxton surgery. And not long afterwards he had prescribed for her a future which had transferred her from the Hoxton surgery to his Sackville Street flat, as Mrs. Dimond.

"Sally," he asked thoughtfully, "what do you know about tetanus?"

"Tetanus!" she said. "That's lockjaw. Oh - you're reading about this lockjaw epidemic..."

"As the pressmen call it," he acknowledged, wincing. "But there's no such thing. Lockjaw is due to infection by the bacillus *Clostridium tetani*, which is pretty common in rich soil, but in the medical sense it isn't an epidemic disease. It's acquired by the entry of the germ through a wound or cut or laceration. In the days before troops were immunised against it by inoculation, it was one of the great risks of war. But, outside warfare, it can hardly occur as an 'epidemic' by pure chance. Which is presumably why Sir Trevor refers to it as 'the tetanus murders'!"

"Murders!" Sally looked startled. "And Sir Trevor -"

"He wants to see me at the Yard this morning. It's time for me to be off."

Dimond crossed to the sideboard. From a cut-glass vase he took a pink carnation, which he clipped to his left lapel. He was seldom seen without such a decoration. With one finger he beckoned to Sally, and when he kissed her it was with particular care not to crush the flower. On the way out he closed an eye at Dot Flinders, the daily maid-of-all-work, who had come to clear the table in time to witness the connubial ritual.

Of the four Assistant Commissioners at Scotland Yard, the one with whom Dimond had the closest acquaintance was the "C" Assistant Commissioner, Sir Trevor Lambert. "C" for Crime. Like Dimond himself, Lambert was an ex-military man. He was a popular and a shrewd administrator, but this morning he was plainly worried. So was the man Dimond found with him.

Detective Superintendent "Birdy" Avery, whose nickname was due to an atrocious pun on his surname, made early in his career. Birdy gave Dimond a grin of welcome.

At Sir Trevor's invitation, Dimond sat down and heard all about it. Or as much as was known.

* * *

Sir Trevor said sombrely: "One of the ways in which fatalities can arouse our suspicions is the occurrence of a wide variation from statistical averages. George Joseph Smith was hanged because three brides of his died from drowning in their baths. Deaths from known diseases are similarly subject to the laws of averages, and any wide deviation soon attracts official attention. I've invited you here, Dimond, because of a sudden crop of deaths from tetanus, which we are now treating as highly suspicious."

Dimond's dark eyes narrowed. "Tetanus is a rather special case," he commented. "It's a natural disease, but acquired by means of an accident. So a fatality would be on the borderline between natural and accidental death."

Birdy Avery nodded. "The normal number of fatalities would," he agreed. "And at first a slight increase in deaths from tetanus excited no suspicion. Infection is possible in so many ways – from garden soil, stable refuse, mauling by circus animals, through wounds of many kinds."

"That's so," Dimond confirmed. "And even if active immunity hasn't been built up beforehand by inoculation, it's sometimes possible to give the victim passive immunity by means of anti-toxin injection after the infection. But, as you know, in most cases the disease has got a grip on the nervous centres before its presence is suspected, and little can be done for the victims. The *trismus* of the jaw is followed by spasm of the general muscular system, and death ensues.

"But these cases you're concerned about . . . suspicion of foul play would have to be based on something more than statistical averages – unless you suspect indiscriminate murder by a maniac. The deaths of the Brides in the Bath were suspicious because they were all married to George Joseph Smith. A rational motive implies some link between the victims. Is there such a link between these tetanus victims?"

Superintendent Avery gave a grim nod.

"Yes," he said. "There's a link. Two links, in fact. Link number one – all the victims during the past month have been seamen. Link number two – most of those victims have been Chinese!"

Dimond glanced from Birdy to Sir Trevor. "That must have narrowed your field of inquiry! A point of contact between them, in some country or port – or ship!"

"Right again, Dimond!" Birdy admitted. "The victims' identities were known. Inquiries at the shipping offices soon brought us the information that every man-jack of 'em had served in the tramp ship *Tako Maru*, which is now in this country for breaking up."

Dimond's brows slanted. "Breaking up! That means the former crew has scattered, I suppose?"

Sir Trevor, now on his feet, explained: "Her owners say the crew was paid off two months ago and, with no prospect of a berth with the same line, the men had to look for jobs in other ships. But the problem that faces us is this. The *Tako Maru* hadn't been in a British port before for over six years. And, with one or two exceptions, the whole crew had been together in that ship for at least three years. That makes it look as though the killer, if there is one, is either somebody in this country with a grudge against the crew dating back more than six years – or is himself a member of the crew, with a motive that originated overseas."

"But if the killer's a member of the crew," Birdy put in wryly, "why should he wait till the ship reached this country before putting his devilish programme into operation?"

Diamond lounged back in his chair.

"I can think of several possible answers to that," he said. "We're presuming a killer who has committed multiple murder by deliberately infecting his victims with the tetanus bacillus. Well, that bacillus, in the necessary culture, isn't normally available in a ship – and it can't even be bought at the local grocer's ashore! If the killer was set on that stealthy murder method, he would have to carry it out where the facilities were available to him. And if the killer is a member of the crew, the murder motive may have originated only during the last stages of the voyage to this country."

"That's feasible," Birdy agreed.

Dimond said: "There's also that other possibility you mentioned, Sir Trevor. A long-standing grudge nursed by somebody

in this country. In that case, the killer may have been waiting for the *Tako Maru* to reach the Port of London in order to carry out his plan. If he knew the ship must do so eventually, and then learned that she was on the way here for breaking up, he could count on a slow journey by such an old tub, and plenty of time for him to perfect his plan."

Sir Trevor nodded. "That seems to cover the possibilities, Dimond. But now we're treating it as possible multi-murder, I've invited you here in case you can offer any suggestions. The cause of death places the matter within your province as a medical man . . ."

"Apart from which," Birdy grinned, "you've always had an itch to take over the C.I.D.'s function even when you haven't had such a good excuse."

The Assistant Commissioner coughed. "With rather good results, I seem to remember, Superintendent!"

"Certainly!" Birdy agreed. "Only this time, Dimond, you're actually being *invited* to lend a hand."

Dimond returned his grin. "I may remind you of that later on!" More seriously, he went on: "You say most of the victims have been Chinese. Does that mean that most of the crew of the *Tako Maru* were Chinese?"

"They were!" Sir Trevor Lambert confirmed. "But our difficulty is that the living members of the crew whom we've traced can suggest no bitter enemy -"

"Or," Dimond suggested, "if they do know of one, they've reasons of their own for not mentioning it?"

"That's a possibility, I suppose. But they're helping us in another direction. With their information we're compiling a list of the victims' known contacts since coming ashore, in the hope of discovering what contacts they had in common. Though, of course, the fatal infection may have been inflicted by some casual contact unknown to them. Similarly with the places on the list we're compiling -"

Birdy said: "The survivors we've traced are helping us to compile a list of places the victims frequented. But there again, the fatal laceration may have been received in some place they visited only once and unknown to anyone else."

"So," Sir Trevor summed up, "with nothing learned from the victims and nothing of any use from the survivors we've traced -"

Dimond looked up from savouring the perfume of the carnation on his lapel.

"We are left with the possibility of future victims. A very nasty possibility. But at least," he suggested, "there's a better prospect of learning something from the *next* victim, if any!"

After a slight pause, he added: "And if you haven't traced all the crew, we may not have long to wait!"

3

IN the insalubrious area bounded by Lemau Street and the Minorities was an establishment much frequented by Chinese and Lascar crews on shore leave and also by European seamen anxious to "raise the wind" by the sale of some foreign souvenir fit to mingle with the odd collection of merchandise in Soong Kai's musty shop.

The shop itself had been in existence as long as the most ancient inhabitant of the district could remember, but the present owner had taken it over only about eighteen months ago. What his own name was he had not announced. "Soong Kai" was still the name on the faded fascia, and to new customers that was also the name of the present proprietor.

To his neighbours he was merely "that Chink" - a recluse seen only when putting up or taking down his shutters; a taciturn man who offered polite greetings but no confidences. It was his fellow-Chinese among his customers who received the favour of his conversation, and even they seldom penetrated to the domestic quarters of the premises.

It had therefore been with some surprise that Chang, once a member of the stokehold crew in the *Tako Maru*, had received a verbal invitation to visit Soong Kai's for tea and conversation about the land of their common origin. An invitation particularly flattering and irresistible because of the intermediary through whom it was conveyed.

Guest and host made a study in contrast when Chang arrived. Physically the burly seaman looked twice the weight of the almost fleshless shopkeeper. But, as Chang's subservient manner showed, the seaman recognized himself to be a lightweight in mentality compared to the man who welcomed him.

After returning the courteous "Hoo la ma!" of greeting, Chang followed his host past the curtains dividing the shop

from the private rooms, and within a few minutes was watching the older man filling a rice kettle and preparing two small cups of tea.

But the conversation that followed the simple meal brought Chang no enlightenment. The explanation of the invitation seemed to be merely an exile's wish to hear something about his own country and the travels of a younger compatriot.

The invitation had been accompanied by a suggestion that any souvenirs Chang might possess of the Far East would find a ready market at Soong Kai's. But since Chang had admitted having no such souvenirs for sale, the attraction of his company must lie in his conversation alone. The situation had a strong appeal to Chang's vanity, and he was willing enough to gratify his host's wish to talk.

"And you live here alone?" Chang asked at length, curious about the other man's static and secluded life.

The shopkeeper smiled. "Not entirely alone!" He made a gesture towards a companion which Chang had already noticed but had not regarded as such. A cat.

But no common tabby cat. This was a specimen of the Siamese breed, with the narrow face and big upstanding ears and startlingly blue eyes. Those eyes were the only sign of life in the cat, which was curled statuesquely still on a cushion set on the floor, near an open cat-basket.

The lids drooped slightly over the shopkeeper's almond eyes. "Greet our guest, Ming!" he instructed.

With the dignity of his kind, Ming stretched, stepped down from the cushion and walked slowly across to Chang. Then, to his owner's evident pleasure, the cat jumped lithely up on to the seaman's knees and stretched out again at ease.

Chang felt even more flattered, and for half an hour he listened patiently to his host's praise of Siamese cats and the philosophy to be derived from studying them. But philosophy at last began to bore Chang, and he made a clumsy excuse to end the conversation.

He made a motion to remove the cat from his lap. With surprising swiftness, the shopkeeper forestalled him by reaching forward and lifting Ming by the scruff of the neck.

From Chang broke an instant yelp of pain. As a cat would inevitably do when suddenly grabbed, Ming had dug in his claws to hang on. Now Chang stood up, ruefully rubbing at his lacerated thigh.

Ming's owner was profuse with apologies. But as the burly seaman strode out between the curtains, the man known as Soong Kai stood looking after him with a strange, secretive and satisfied smile.

* * *

The Assistant Commissioner demanded: "What do you mean by that, Dimond?"

Dimond said: "So far you've only known who has been the next victim on the list when that victim's death has brought the fact to your notice. Right?"

"That's correct," Superintendent Avery confirmed. "And until the recent press publicity about the er-epidemic, the scattered crew of the *Tako Maru* were in ignorance of their shipmates' fate. Most of them had been meeting socially in between looking for jobs, but when a shipmate failed to show up again they merely assumed that he'd found a berth."

"And evidently," Dimond said, "the victims had no idea that they'd been infected with tetanus or any other disease - or they'd have sought medical attention immediately. The trouble is that although lockjaw symptoms usually appear four or five days after the infliction of the infected wound or laceration, they may not appear till three or four weeks after. By which time, if the laceration has been slight, it will have healed and been almost forgotten by the victim. So that he may not even connect his symptoms with the laceration and there may be no trace of the laceration left on his body. Have any such lacerations been found on the bodies of any victims to date?"

"Only on one of them," Avery stated. "A faint scratch on one knee. Healed over and hardly visible. But you mean -"

"I mean this. The only link you've found between the victims is that they've all been former members of the *Tako Maru's* crew. You've found no narrower link limited to the men so far dead from tetanus. So the likelihood is that the motive embraces the whole crew, including those still alive. And that means that further victims are to be expected -"

Tight-lipped, Sir Trevor nodded. "That seems only too possible. The men we've traced alive have received no recent lacerations that they can remember, and have been warned to report any they may receive from now on. But you said that as we haven't traced all the crew, we may not have long to wait for the

next victim – ”

“Yes. If the next victim is among the men you’ve traced we’ll know immediately he receives the infected laceration and, as I said, there’ll be a good prospect of learning something from him. Because he’ll still be able to talk! On the other hand, if the next victim is among the men you haven’t yet traced, we may not have long to wait – because he may already have been infected! The bacillus may already be in his bloodstream, but the symptoms haven’t yet appeared.”

Avery raised an objection. “But wouldn’t he be suspicious about any wound or laceration inflicted on him? After all the press publicity . . .”

The medical man shook his head. “Not necessarily. The press hasn’t yet suggested that there may be foul play behind this so-called ‘epidemic’. And the killer would hardly approach his victims with a blatantly obvious instrument such as a hypodermic syringe. Whether the victim’s suspicions are aroused would depend on the subtlety of the actual method used and the intelligence of the victim.”

Avery said: “The men we’ve traced have not been inoculated against tetanus, and when we find the remaining men – ”

“When you do,” Dimond interrupted firmly, “don’t inoculate them before giving them a blood-test. Have the path. lab examine the blood specimens for the rod-like *tetani* bacillus. Any man found to be already infected will then have to be given passive immunization instead of active inoculation. But a warning should be broadcast on TV and radio that all members of the *Tako Maru* crew should report to the police or to a hospital. One of the untraced members of that crew may already have sustained some slight, apparently accidental, scratch which has been deliberately infected with tetanus. If so, we want to find him not only for his own sake – but for our own. We want to find him while he is still able to talk!”

Dimond got to his feet. Superintendent Avery came round the Assistant Commissioner’s desk to see the medical man out.

“And where shall we find *you*, Dimond?” Avery asked.

Dimond said crisply: “At Sackville Street. I’m phoning Dr. Mogg not to expect me at the surgery for a few days!”

4

FOUR days passed with no report of either a laceration or tetanus symptoms, and also without news of any further *Tako Maru* men being traced.

On the third day Dimond had got tired of the inactivity, and relieved Mogg at evening surgery in Hoxton. Dimond had chosen that particular practice because it didn't really need more than two doctors, so that he wasn't missed when away on police work. And also because the additional attention he did give to the practice when available was, in his opinion, better devoted to patients in Hoxton than to those in more profitable practices. His financial independence would be pointless if his medical work merely added to the cossetting of the city's more prosperous patients, who were well-catered for by doctors interested in profit.

On the fifth day, when the news did come, Sally had to transmit it to the Port of London Authority offices in Trinity Square, where Dimond had gone to make some inquiries about the *Tako Maru*. He immediately returned to his car - parked near the grass island - took Tower Hill in a smooth spurt and swung right into Lower Thames Street. Another tetanus victim was lying in Guy's Hospital. He was a former member of the *Tako Maru's* crew, identified by the contents of his pockets as Chang Su. One of the men who had not been traced - and therefore had not been inoculated.

A white-coated house surgeon met Dimond at the door of the side ward in which the stricken seaman was lying. In answer to the question expressed by Dimond's raised eyebrows, the houseman shook his head.

"Little hope," he said. "Pretty far gone."

Taut of features, Dimond went past him into the little room, to the bed containing a burly Chinese, latest victim of a deadly vendetta.

It was only seven minutes after Dimond's arrival that the Chinese seaman Chang managed to breathe a few gasped words between the muscular spasms that were mounting to a racking climax in his doomed body. The words were just audible through his clenched jaws before speech became quite impossible. But Dimond and Superintendent Avery waited another hour before

abandoning hope and leaving the hospital.

What those last few choked words had conveyed to Avery and the medical staff beside the bed was unknown to Dimond, but his dark eyes held a speculative glimmer as he again slid in behind the wheel of his car.

The dying Chinese, even in his extremity, must have known that it was Englishmen bending over him. For it was in English that he had gasped: "Jazz . . . jazz . . . dig . . . that . . . cat . . . jazz . . . jazz . . . dig . . . that . . . cat . . . jazz . . ."

"Me - I *don't* dig it!" Superintendent Avery admitted to Dimond, when the police surgeon joined him in his Scotland Yard office. "That poor devil's pals may be cool cats - but he must have been delirious to have jazz on his mind when he was in that state."

"Birdy," Dimond suggested, "suppose those words came to his mind precisely because he was in such a condition?"

"Isn't that what I said? Anything could come to a man's mind in such a state. But why didn't he report to us or to a doctor before it got so far? Presumably he hadn't heard our broadcasts!"

"Or," Dimond said evenly, "he may have had reasons of his own for avoiding contact with the police!"

"Eh?" Avery looked startled.

Dimond said steadily: "It's pretty obvious now that the unknown killer intends to murder the entire crew of the *Tako Maru* if possible. Why? Such wholesale homicide can hardly have a profit motive. The motive must almost certainly be a grudge of some kind, and based on some very serious provocation. But in what way could the entire crew have incurred such vengeance?"

"Heaven knows!" Avery said.

"Difficult to imagine one," Dimond agreed. He was slowly pacing the room. "But there's a simpler, more feasible, explanation possible. That an individual, or a few individuals, among the crew have done something to provoke this ruthless grudge - and the killer doesn't know precisely who they are. So, to make sure of killing the right man or men, he is relentlessly exterminating the entire crew!"

Avery gave a soft whistle. His brows drew down.

"It's the most feasible idea suggested so far," he said soberly. "But it implies a corrosive hatred. Some motive which has warped the killer's mentality, submerged all normal humanitarian

scruples.”

Dimond nodded. “The method used is proof enough of that. Tetanus doesn’t cause the most pleasant of deaths. But I suggested that this latest victim, Chang, may have had a personal reason for not reporting to the police even if he heard the broadcast. Someone among the *Tako Maru* crew must have provoked this deadly vendetta. And the provocation must have been serious – perhaps so serious that the person responsible would be strongly disinclined to discuss the vendetta with the police.”

“That’s if he connected the tetanus deaths with his own guilty secret!”

“Exactly! And the fact that the police were concerned about the tetanus deaths of the *Tako Maru* crew would itself tell him that foul play was suspected. And, having got that far, he wouldn’t find it difficult to connect his own tetanus symptoms, when they appeared, with a recent occurrence – recent lacerations of his own –”

“You say recent, Dimond!”

“Yes. I examined Chang Su. I found lacerations which haven’t had time to heal. And they support my belief that those last words of his were not delirious.”

Avery dropped into his chair, frowning deeply. “Jazz, jazz, dig that cat –” he quoted. “But –”

Turning to face him, Dimond gave a faint smile. “Birdy, you automatically interpreted all those words in the current jazz idiom. But, as you said yourself, it would be an odd thing for a dying man to have a frivolous phrase on his mind –”

“Not if he was delirious!”

“He wasn’t necessarily delirious – because those words need not necessarily have been used in a frivolous sense. Suppose he was speaking quite literally? After all, even in these times the words ‘cat’ and ‘dig’ still have their literal meanings. Especially –” Dimond paused significantly. “Especially when a dig from a cat’s claws could have fatal effect!”

Staring up, Avery drew a deep breath. “You’re –”

“I’m remembering that animal trainers run the risk of tetanus when mauled by circus ‘cats’. Why shouldn’t tetanus be associated with the claws of a domestic moggy? A cat whose claws had been deliberately smeared with the culture! Especially when you told me that one of the victims had a partly-healed scratch on one knee. Especially when my examination of Chang Su revealed half-healed scratches on the lower half of his right

thigh. A cat's favourite perch!"

Avery's eyes were gleaming. "So that's what you meant . . ."

"Yes. I suggest that Chang's condition brought those words to his mind not because he was delirious, but because he connected his tetanus symptoms with the dig of a cat."

"And with jazz!" Avery insisted. "Don't forget that!"

"I'm not! That's why there are two things I want to do. I'd like to talk to the surviving men with the longest service in the *Tako Maru*. I want to hear every detail they can recall about Chang's life and associates while in that tub. Secondly, since Chang associated jazz with his condition, let's check your dossier of the crew's contacts and haunts since they've been ashore – and see if any of them has any connection with jazz!"

Avery was reaching for his telephone. In his expression Dimond discerned a wry tinge, and he grinned.

"Well, Birdy," he pointed out, "I did warn you that you were *asking* me to lend a hand!"

5

IT cost Rex Dimond just three pounds to go into the restaurant named The Golden Lotus. The three pounds were paid for the secondhand suit he bought for the purpose.

The list compiled by the C.I.D. of places known to have been frequented by men of the *Tako Maru's* crew had included a number of establishments with Chinese associations, such as Chinese laundries and shops selling Chinese foodstuffs. In that respect The Golden Lotus had been merely one undistinguished name on the list.

But it was not after any tedious lurking around a series of places on the list that Dimond decided to visit The Golden Lotus, nor was it by any abstruse process of deduction that he made it his first choice. What gave The Golden Lotus a clamorous claim to priority was the simple fact that it was the headquarters of a Chinese jazz club. It was the only place on the list specifically associated with jazz.

It was by means of a very simple argument, too, that Dimond had prevailed upon Superintendent Avery to allow him to undertake this probing mission personally. When a criminal, Dimond had pointed out, was waging a private version of bacteriological

warfare, then it was sensible to leave the counter-attack reconnaissance to someone familiar with the drill of bacteria and the strategies by which they might be deployed.

The suit Dimond was wearing was not blatantly nautical. It was a neat worsted, but of the dark-blue colour traditionally, and therefore psychologically, associated with seamen. And for once Dimond was without a flower in his lapel.

He went to the restaurant direct from the Sailors' Rest, so that the fact would be obvious to anyone who might chance to be looking.

The Golden Lotus proved to be a bizarre and shabby hybrid. Oriental food and décor combined with Occidental drinks and music. Dimond made it a point to arrive during evening licensed hours, and soon made it clear that his chief interest was strictly Occidental. Scotch whisky.

First past the street door, then brushing between a pair of light swing doors, to be met by a breath of warm air and a haze of tobacco smoke through which coloured electric lanterns loomed with a mellow glow. Into the room, to hear a subdued hum of conversation with the slightly nasal intonation, epiglottic clicks and guttural inflexion of spoken Chinese. Between the tables, to find himself ignored by ivory-skinned customers intent on their food, drinks and conversation.

The customers at the little tables were quite an assortment, Dimond saw. Some obviously pure-blooded Chinese, some equally obviously "chichis". And a sprinkling of whites, so that he wasn't particularly conspicuous.

The room itself made an over-zealous attempt to look as though it belonged in Saigon or Singapore. Bamboo-and-cotton shades on what he guessed to be windows. Vases of exotic plastic flowers. More lanterns. Peacock decorations on the partitions which separated the tables near the lacquered walls. A dais with dragon-embroidered side-curtains. Lots of black and gold and red. All with a passé air, as overdone and artificial as a Hollywood Englishman.

As soon as Dimond had found himself a vacant table near a wall, a white-jacketed Chinese waiter came for his order. The medical man ordered a meal but left it untouched, then he ordered a Scotch, to which he gave earnest attention.

Soon afterwards, on to the dais walked four Chinese infected with another man-made epidemic, the rash of jazz combos and beat groups which had erupted across the country in recent years.

Musically they made a quartet as hybrid as the place itself. To the Occidental piano, bass and clarinet was added an Oriental stringed instrument, a samisen. When the combination swung into a trad standard the effect was weird, the liquorice stick weaving patterns of shrill delight in competition with the tinny tinkle of the samisen.

For the following number, coinciding with Dimond's third Scotch, the clarinetist made an announcement, in Chinese and then in English.

"... vocalized by our own popular . . . Baby Doll!"

Along near the dais, one of the two waitresses hurriedly jettisoned her apron and joined the quartet. No chichi, this girl. Pure-bred Chinese from the gloss of her jet-black hair to the tips of her tiny feet. And from the high mandarin collar to the split at mid-thigh, the cheap cheongsam of saffron-yellow artificial silk was a glistening sheath on the petite figure. Into the pedestal microphone of the over-modulated amplifier she emoted soulfully with the bastard pronunciation of vocalist's "English".

To the audience that was evidently the language of the heart and mind, because every masculine eye in the place had turned towards her, and nobody sat on his hands when she took her bow. While the quartet resumed without her, she came down from the dais and began touring the tables, smilingly accepting the customers' congratulations. Well, Dimond thought, why not? Sinatra had begun as a singing waiter.

To most of the customers, it was obvious, Baby Doll was very well known. She stayed a couple of minutes at several tables in turn, sitting down where there was a chair vacant.

Dimond had his fourth Scotch between his hands when she reached his own table. And when he looked up at her it was with the lack-lustre gaze of a man whose serious business was being interrupted.

"Hullo!" she greeted amiably. "All on your ownsome?" In contrast to her pop-world accent when singing, her speaking voice was piquantly attractive.

"Do you see anybody with me?" he muttered, with an accent of his own that matched his drink.

She smiled. "What a shame!" She gestured to the chair facing his. "Do you mind?"

"Why should I?" he retorted dourly. Undeterred, she sat down. He glanced towards a distant waiter. "What'll you have?" he asked resignedly, in a tone implying that he recognized this

as the object of the exercise.

Her answering shrug sent the silk rippling across her small bosom. "Nothing."

"Afraid I might try to get you drunk?"

"No. But if I drank with all the customers . . ." She laughed. "Besides, I've some more numbers to sing."

"I can hardly wait."

She seemed determined not to take offence. "Don't remember seeing you here before, Mr. -"

"Crawford. Alec Crawford." There'd been a genuine Alec Crawford on the *Tako Maru*. "And I haven't been here before. First time in this fair city for years."

"You travel?"

Dimond gave a blurred grin. "You couldn't be second engineer in the old *Tako Maru* without travelling!"

"*Tako* -?" She hesitated doubtfully.

"*Tako Maru*. Old tub registered in Yokohama. Here now for breaking up."

"How sad!" She made a sympathetic moue. "You were with her a long time?"

"Four years, thereabouts." His voice was slightly slurred, but he noticed a sudden faint glint in her eyes, quickly veiled. "Mostly in the Far East."

"And now you're out of a job?" The thought seemed to suggest another one. "You must have a lot of souvenirs of your travels in the Far East?"

"Not a lot. A seaman travels light. But some. Why?"

She revealed small white teeth in a smile.

"Seamen spend a lot of money on shore, no? It occurred to me . . . if you had any souvenirs of the Far East you wished to sell . . . my father has a curio shop. You may know of it. Soong Kai's. He gives good prices for genuine Oriental curios . . ."

Dimond's face remained impassive. "Nothing valuable among my stuff. Couldn't afford it on my pay. Just a hand-painted Chinese comb I thought maybe some girl would like, and a few -"

"Nothing's too small to interest my father. Go and see him. Even if you don't do business, he will be pleased to see someone who can talk about China. But I'm sure you'll find it worthwhile." She repeated the name Soong Kai, and gave him the address.

"Okay," Dimond agreed. "Funds are running low. I'll look him up tomorrow afternoon. Sure you won't have a drink?"

"No, thank you. I must go now. But I may see you at my

father's shop, perhaps?"

At that additional inducement Dimond gave a grin of dawning anticipation. Then he relaxed as she went back to the dais and prettily denatured a Dixeland number.

6

CHANG SU had been dead two days when into the musty shop with "Soong Kai" painted on its fascia ambled a tall European with an antique hand-painted Chinese comb for sale.

"Your daughter recommended me to you," he explained to the thin shopkeeper who faced him across the counter. "Thought I'd just bring this comb first - see what you offer."

"Aih-yah - very fine!" the Chinese breathed in admiration, examining the comb. "You obtained this - where, my friend?"

"Shanghai!" the tall stranger answered laconically. At which the shopkeeper's eyebrows rose with interest.

"You have been there! You are a seaman, perhaps?"

"You couldn't be second engineer on the old *Tako Maru* without being a seaman!"

The shopkeeper's eyebrows came down in a frown. With an abrupt gesture the Chinese clasped the comb in both hands, then he gave a smile which momentarily hid his eyes altogether.

"So . . . ! Interesting . . . !" he commented softly. "You would take tea with me while we discuss this - this curio? I am sure we can come to a satisfactory ah-arrangement!"

The visitor's tight smile might have denoted avarice. "Sure - sounds all right!" he agreed.

At a gesture of invitation, he walked round the end of the counter and followed the older man between the curtains dividing the shop from the private rear quarters. On the inner side of the curtains he carefully avoided treading on a saucer half-full of milk, and his brows slanted sardonically.

From the saucer his gaze went across the comfortably furnished room, past an open cat-basket to a silken cushion. On this was resting a Siamese cat, statuesquely still. Its only sign of life was the drowsy regard of its blue eyes, in which the black pupils,

dilated in the dim light of the room, were almost hypnotic in their fixed stare.

"You will take off your gloves?" the shopkeeper suggested, glancing down at his visitor's leather-clad hands.

"No, thanks," the seaman said casually. "Engine oil can cause dermatitis."

"I see. But please sit down."

Silently the ship's engineer took a seat and watched his host preparing tea. He accepted a handle-less cup of fragrant fluid, which he sipped appreciatively.

"You said," the shopkeeper remarked, as though too delicate-minded to plunge into a sordid financial discussion without first showing a polite social interest, "that you'd been an engineer in the -"

"The *Tako Maru* - sure! The old tub's gone for breaking up, and no wonder -"

"You were with that ship a long time?"

"Four years, maybe."

"So . . ." The curio dealer placed his cup on a low table and switched the conversation, following his visitor's glance towards the feline statue sitting on the cushion. "You admire my pet? Ming - greet our guest!" he commanded.

With slow stateliness the cat strolled across the carpet, leapt lightly up on to the European's knee and stretched out comfortably along his right thigh.

Returning the shopkeeper's smile, the visitor gently placed his own teacup on the floor beside him. As though given sudden freedom to talk without restraint, the Chinese resumed his former topic with quick eagerness.

"You were second engineer of the er - *Tako Maru*, Mr. - what did you say your name is?"

"I didn't mention my name. But surely your daughter did, Mr. - Fen!"

"Fen?" The word ripped from a taut mouth. The eyes above that mouth held a cold glitter. "Haven't you seen the name over the shop?"

"Oh, yes," the visitor admitted lazily. "I've also heard your daughter announced as Baby Doll, but I don't imagine they're her personal names! Both of you should answer to the family name of Fen. Didn't you have a son named Fen Tsi? The little monkey who deserted ship one night in Hong Kong -"

The goad brought an instant reaction.

"Not deserted!" the gaunt man corrected sibilantly. "He was murdered by his foul dogs of shipmates, and -"

"And his father in London," the visitor cut in, "learned about his son's death through inquiries instituted for him by a friend in Hong Kong. Inquiries which brought to light the story of a certain sampan-man who had missed one of his passengers when ferrying a party of seamen back to their ship!"

The visitor's gloved right hand was gently caressing the nape of the cat's neck. The curio dealer was crouched in his chair, glaring viciously, but poised as though temporarily paralyzed by shock and hatred.

Still caressing the cat, Rex Dimond went on urbanely: "There was no evidence to lay before a court, but Fen Tsi's father - appalled by the death of the only other male in his family - had no wish to bring the murderers before a legal judge. With the direct line of his family now doomed to extinction, he preferred a deadlier and more certain justice than the Law could provide."

Dimond's eyes were now narrowed, watchful. "The Law could not punish without evidence against the actual killers, but this man's vengeance had no such scruples. He didn't know the identities of the actual killers of his son, but he did know a way of making certain that the guilty men would die. On learning eventually that the *Tako Maru* was bound for London, he determined to slay the whole crew if possible, beginning with the Chinese seamen. While he brooded, the venom in his heart produced a devilish plan for wholesale murder. A plan which would make use of two subjects of his solitary studies. I don't know how much persuasion your daughter needed to co-operate in the plan -"

"There was no persuasion!" Fen snarled. "She shared my hatred of her brother's murderers - and in any case would obey my orders, whatever they might be."

"Even when the innocent had to die with the guilty!" Dimond gave a slow nod. "So you had two snares laid for seamen returning from the Far East. This shop itself would be a magnet, particularly to any unemployed seaman with Oriental souvenirs which might fetch a few pounds. You took over this shop, waiting like a spider in a web. And in case additional inducement should be necessary, your daughter took a job at The Golden Lotus."

As motionless as the cat on his thigh, Dimond went on evenly: "The Golden Lotus was on a list of places frequented by some of the *Tako Maru*'s crew, but this shop wasn't. Your victims made

only one visit here – the fatal one. How many of them did your daughter send here, Fen? I don't know where you've been getting the culture of live tetanus bacillus, unless from another relative – ”

Fen was grinning now, gauntly and malevolently. He was rising to his feet with his hands tensed. His lips moved.

“And neither, evidently, do you know the method of . . . administration!” He was coming fast towards his guest – and the cat.

Still Dimond's body did not stir, but his left leg had already straightened out horizontally to fend the killer off.

“Then why,” Dimond inquired blandly, “do you imagine I am wearing these gloves? And why do you think I've a length of cricket pad strapped to each thigh under these shabby trousers? Besides, now that I've confirmed my ideas it'll need something quicker than tetanus to prevent me leaving here and handing you over to the Law!”

“That I realize!” Fen, his face contorted with homicidal ferocity, had stepped back from the defensive foot. His right hand dived into a jacket pocket – and came out gripping a short-barrelled revolver. “I prepare for all eventualities when dealing with murdering seamen!” he mouthed, raising the revolver. “And unless you prefer to be shot immediately, I can keep you here till a tetanus infection takes effect!”

“Which is just about due!” Dimond said crisply. Without further warning, his lounging figure was galvanized into sudden and dynamic action.

His gloved right hand swooped under the cat's stomach, scooped the animal up – and flung it straight at the gunman. He hurled himself right after it.

Instinctively Fen veered to evade the spitting, clawing bundle flying through the air at him. The cat hit him waist-high. As Fen staggered away, the cat's claws scrabbled for a hold. From the gunman screeched a shriek of terror as infected claws raked down his exposed left wrist.

In the same instant, even before the cat hit the floor, Dimond's gloved left hand fastened on the gun. Dimond's gloved right hand bunched into a fist which smashed with concussive impact on the killer's raised jaw. Fen went down beside his cat, writhing.

Looking down at them both, Dimond hefted the gun on the palm of his hand, and murmured: “It would appear, Fen, that you did *not* prepare for all eventualities! From that screech of yours I infer that you haven't been inoculated with anti-tet.

HARVEST OF HOMICIDE

Fortunately I have, but one can't be too careful. These other safeguards of mine are like the braces a cautious man wears with a belt."

Fen was now sprawling on the carpet, glaring viciously up at Dimond while sucking frantically at his lacerated wrist. Ming, the Siamese cat, was now fastidiously licking at his ruffled coat.

Covering the terrified multiple murderer with his own revolver, Dimond warned him: "I'll have no compunction about shooting you in self-defence if you try anything!"

With his other hand Dimond drew from his pocket a small spray.

"Sorry to have to do this, Ming!" he apologized. Stepping nearer to the cat, he sprayed its chest with a fine jet of diethyl ether. Its chill made the cat gasp. Then, as the heat of its body caused the volatile liquid to vaporize, the vapour rose around the cat's face. Ming's head drooped; his body went slack. Dimond said softly: "Your second anaesthetic today, old fellow? First you were drugged so that your claws could be smeared with the culture. And now -"

Still keeping the killer under the menace of his own gun, Dimond gently lifted the unconscious cat into its basket, closed the lid and strapped it down. Then he crossed to the telephone on the low table. Deftly he picked it up.

A minute later he was saying into the mouthpiece: "Okay, Birdy! You can have Baby Doll picked up now. And the path. boys can try disinfecting the cat's claws. Pity to have the cat destroyed if it can be avoided. There've been too many innocent victims already. Oh - also bring an ambulance for one more tetanus patient. No, not me. Mister Wholesale Homicide himself."

Hastily Dimond held the receiver away from his ear as a blistering question from Superintendent Avery rasped in the diaphragm.

"Afraid so, Birdy," he confirmed, without sounding at all regretful. "The killer has been hoist with his own pet!"

TRUE CRIME

**"I've got a job for you,"
said Sam. "It won't take
you long, and you'll be well
paid."**

THE MAN WHO PAID TO DIE

**re-told by
Arthur Kent**

HE lay face down in the sand in a crumpled brown mohair lightweight suit, and despite the violence of his dying, there seemed to be a touch of contentment, of satisfaction, of achievement on his pain-twisted lips.

It was the third of March, 1962, and the scenery of the Arizona desert always looks its best in early spring. Multi-coloured wild flowers bloom crimson. Colonies of song birds screech and flap above the purple sagebrush.

A local resident, out horse-back riding with his children, found the murdered man. Within thirty minutes the sheriff's cream-and-black car arrived and the law-men roped off the area. The reporters arrived, too, and didn't show any great interest.

After all, it looked a straightforward case. Murder for robbery. The victim had been strangled, and his pockets were turned out. Rings were missing from his fingers, for the deputies saw the marks left on them. Two rings, expensive clothes. It had to be robbery.

The as yet unidentified man was taken back to Phoenix, the town made famous in Western novels, and a laundry mark was found in the jacket of the brown suit. It said just one word: Resnick.

Resnick. A name which will

live in the history of crime, and will be argued about, wherever police detectives and psychologists meet together. For this was no pedestrian murder-robbery. Police were to uncover one of the most bizarre murders in history – if murder, and not suicide, you can call it. For this was no murder in a capital sense, no murder with malice. It was murder as an act of kindness.

There was money involved, of course. But the financial considerations were only secondary – a small payment for the trouble and the time taken!

The Phoenix police searched their records. They soon discovered they had a “Missing Person” report on wealthy 61-year-old Samuel L. Resnick, a retired New York jeweller.

Resnick’s had been a success story. Energetic, likeable, shrewd, he had started with one store in New York and by the time he retired, in good health, he had ten stores in a chain. He was wealthy, had good health, was popular, and numbered among his friends such household names as Thomas E. Dewey and Averell Harriman. He was happily married and religious.

When the Arizona police checked back with New York, they could find nothing to unravel the mystery they soon found themselves in. Resnick had sold his business in 1959 and decided, like many other wealthy Americans, to retire to the sun. He chose Arizona.

The deputies called on Mrs. Resnick at her neat and expensive bungalow, and tearfully she told them how her husband had left home for his usual after-dinner stroll on the night of 1st March – two days before his body was found. She said he had been happy, apparently without a worry in the world. Yes, there were two expensive rings on his fingers. No, she doubted whether he was going to meet anybody. If he had been, she felt sure he would have told her. They had no secrets from each other.

Police next discovered that the jeweller, more as a hobby than for monetary gain, still did a little trading in jewellery. And they learned that two negroes had called upon him at his home earlier on the day he disappeared. They also discovered that he had been visited by another negro two days before that, and Resnick had told his wife that this negro had wanted to buy a ring but couldn’t meet the price.

When they questioned the neighbours, police discovered that other negroes had been seen loitering about the avenue in this upper-class district. One neighbour actually remembered seeing

two negroes sitting in a battered Studebaker outside Resnick's home.

Police showed the housewives hundreds of pictures of negroes with criminal records. No luck. They checked negroes owning Studebakers. No luck. Meanwhile, the post mortem showed that the elderly jeweller had been strangled with a rope or necktie. Apart from a slight heart condition, which was confirmed by Resnick's family, he was found to be in good shape, with many years of active life left before him.

And then the bizarre element entered the case – the peculiar psychological twist which gave this seemingly mundane murder the world headlines.

A deputy remembered. He recalled being told a strange story six weeks before the murder. A man seeking employment had told him casually over a beer one day that he had advertised in the local newspaper for work – adding “*anything considered.*”

He had received a call and made an appointment to see a man. He had kept the date, and met a well-dressed elderly man – whose name he thought had been Sam.

“I've got a job for you,” Sam said. “It won't take you long, and you'll be well paid. I want you to kill me.”

“At first I thought he was kidding,” said the job-seeker. “But when I was convinced he wasn't joking, well, I never went back.”

The deputy hadn't reported it at the time. It seemed like just another crank story, and you heard them every day.

But the murder squad, looking for new leads on a crime that had suddenly died on them, checked back over the “jobs wanted” advertisements in the local newspapers. They checked out each applicant, and they were astonished to find four men who claimed they had been approached by a man named Sam and offered a fee to murder him. It didn't take long for the men to identify Resnick as the Sam who wished to pay for his own assassination.

Like the other man, all four had refused; but now the police began to look for the *sixth* – the one who had agreed to take on the chore!

They made their first contact eleven days after Resnick had been found. A negro lieutenant, with hundreds of coloured informers on his books, finally tracked down a twenty-year-old negro who had been seen using a battered Studebaker. He was R. E. Jackson, a mill-worker, who lived in a board-and-tin shanty town outside Phoenix.

The police had come across Jackson's name once before. In

the classified ads. Five short days before Resnick disappeared, Jackson had advertised "*Service station attendant or anything else. BR 6-3908.*" The ad had been placed by Clemmie Jackson, aged 19, brother of R. E. Clemmie had left for Texas, but they questioned R. E. and also searched his car. On the floor of it they found shredded paper, similar to that found at the scene of the crime. They also found two long lengths of rope, and a grocery store slip from a place near Resnick's home.

R. E. Jackson was clever and evasive, but Clemmie, picked up by Texas police, talked on the car trip back. He confessed knowledge of Resnick's death but claimed he had not participated in it. He named his brother and three other coloureds as the killers.

The others - Ernest Spurlock, 29; Jesse Tillis, 19; John Henry Jones, 21. Tillis was the best educated; Spurlock the eldest; Jones was illiterate. Although interrogated separately, all told basically the same story. They had just done Mister Sam a favour. He wanted to be killed; so they killed him. After four refusals, they said, Resnick was desperate. Clemmie had been called as soon as the newspaper appeared on the streets.

Clemmie Jackson and Tillis had gone to see Resnick in his brother's Studebaker. Leaving Tillis in the car, Clemmie had gone up to the house and spoken to Resnick alone. He said Resnick had hit him with his astonishing suggestion right away. Said Clemmie, "Mister Sam wanted me to kill him, suh. He said he'd pay good for the job."

Clemmie added that Resnick had tried to convince him and gain his sympathy. He told Clemmie he had incurable cancer, and was suffering pain. Clemmie helpfully suggested suicide as a way out, but Resnick, he claimed, told him about his £20,000 insurance with Lloyds of London, which wouldn't be payable in the event of natural death or suicide.

"It's got to be accidental death or murder," Resnick explained.

Saying he would think it over, Clemmie left. He discussed it with the others. They decided that Resnick was a "nut", and agreed not to do anything about it. But two days later Resnick phoned Clemmie again. He was now desperate. He told Clemmie he had been terribly hurt because he hadn't contacted him. Clemmie went over to see Resnick again because the jeweller kept insisting. This time he took Spurlock with him.

The jeweller spoke to both of them. Educated and eloquent, he convinced them of the easiness of it. They would be doing

him a great favour, he said; and also they would be picking up a few hundred dollars in the transaction. He showed them the two huge rings on his fingers. "You can have these too," he said.

He said he was going for his customary stroll that night – and suggested they be waiting in a car nearby at eight o'clock. "Shoot me," he smiled, "then rob me."

Clemmie Jackson and Spurlock, two very worried negroes, returned to shanty town. They hated to let a guy down, especially as he was in so much pain – and especially as there was good payment involved. There they talked it over with the others and agreed to do it. At the last moment, however, Clemmie lost his nerve. Pleading a prior important engagement, he shot off to take his aunt to church.

With Spurlock driving, the remainder went to meet the jeweller.

At his luxury home Sam Resnick had a leisurely dinner. He was in a gayer mood than his wife had noticed for some time. Not that he had really shown he was worried. Just a little pre-occupied. He lit an after dinner cigarette and told his wife, Lillian, that he thought he would take a stroll.

Sam Resnick enjoyed his walks. The weather here was different to New York. You couldn't get regular nightly strolls in New York, not with the icy winters, the over-hot summers and the all-seasonal rains.

Sam forgot only one thing as he left. He forgot to peck at his wife's cheek as he usually did before any brief parting. His wife last saw him walking sprightly down to the sidewalk, puffing on his cigarette.

Down the street Sam saw the Studebaker and the waiting men. And he walked more quickly and he walked past it, for he had suggested that they shoot him as he passed the auto – and then rob him. So Resnick paced on, but no shot came. He turned with annoyance as the Studebaker, which was following slowly, came to a stop.

The jeweller crossed to the car. "What's wrong?" he grumbled.

They told him that they couldn't shoot him because they didn't have a gun. "But we got rope, Mister Sam," one said eagerly.

"Good," said Resnick. He got quickly into the car, in a hurry now, it seemed. "Look, boys, drive on. I know a secluded space. Just up the street a bit."

But the boys didn't like that. Too risky. They suggested the desert and, reluctantly, Resnick had to go along on the ride. Spurlock made quick time leaving the city limits. Resnick sat

in the back, puffing on a cigarette. There was little common ground for conversation, so nobody spoke.

They stopped on a deserted patch of track which was shielded by cacti and greasewood. It was very dark and somebody said they could use some moonlight.

Resnick was first out of the car. The boys followed him reluctantly. He trod his last cigarette – a king-size – into the track. He quipped, “Don’t worry, boys, I’m not going to change my mind, and I won’t scream.”

Spurlock got an eighteen-foot length of cotton rope from the car boot. He looped it once round Resnick’s neck. The four men took up position, two on either side of the jeweller, and then they tugged together. Resnick positioned his legs apart so that he wouldn’t fall until he was dead.

The boys tugged, Resnick squirmed a little, and then the rope broke.

The boys became panicky. Resnick calmed them. “Not to worry, I’ll tie it,” he said.

After he had knotted the rope, he doubled it, and then he handed it to the boys. He knelt down, saying, “I’ll sag when you pull. That should help. Do a good job, boys. Don’t let me suffer.”

But there was another error. Understandably, the boys were nervous. The rope caught on his nose, marking it. The boys straightened it, then tugged. They said they heaved on the rope for three minutes before letting go. When they released it the jeweller slumped to the sand, dead.

They took the rings from his fingers, like he had told them to. But they got a shock when they came to take his money. There was only small cash; not the several hundreds of dollars Resnick had promised them. The jeweller had cheated his own assassins out of the promised fee, leaving them only the two rings which, he must have known, would eventually be traced to them. Obviously he wanted it to look like murder. And he must have reasoned that if the negroes told the truth, nobody would believe them.

They took the rings and the small change, worth together about £1,200. On the drive back to Phoenix Spurlock scratched the window of the car with the big diamond ring, checking whether it was real. Clemmie was in bed when his brother got back. He helped him bury the loot in the yard.

Clemmie was found not guilty at the trial. The others got life imprisonment, a little harsh when you consider the influence

the prosperous jeweller must have had on them. They were almost penniless and ill-educated, while Resnick was a man of great charm and personality.

But why did Resnick do it? He didn't have cancer, and his health, providing he lived carefully, should have caused him no concern – no more than anybody's on reaching sixty.

His family confirm he was neither short of money nor had financial worries. Said his son, "If he wanted to cheat Lloyds that bad on the policy, he could have done it by losing a limb or an eye. He would have still collected £20,000."

There was no domestic problem. He was happy with his wife. He didn't kiss her good-bye. Had he been frightened that he would break down, and lose his resolve, if he kissed her, knowing it was for the last time? Or was it complete indifference?

Surely Resnick, a sophisticated man, would know that the negroes would soon have been tracked down and charged with his murder. Was he completely indifferent to their fate, knowing that it would be a capital charge, and that it was unlikely the police would believe the fantastic truth? Was that the reason – or was it just meanness – that his billfold didn't contain the several hundred dollars he had mentioned as fee? For the rings would be more easily traceable than money, and the negroes would be picked up almost as soon as they tried to sell them in Arizona or Texas. Or, alternatively, did he want the true story to leak out eventually, and his mysterious death to go down as an enigma?

We don't know. Nobody knows.

And what of his killers, surely more sinned against than sinning. Spurlock said the four of them decided to do it together because no one of them had sufficient nerve to do it alone.

"Do you feel responsible for Resnick's death?" an officer asked young Clemmie Jackson, who engineered it, but who took his aunt to church while it was done.

Clemmie only shrugged. "No, because if we hadn't done it, somebody else would have. Mister Sam sure was in a hell of a hurry to die."

LETTERS

POPULAR AUTHORS

Dear Sir,

I shall certainly be a regular subscriber to your new magazine, for without seeing the first number, the names of the authors writing for you are enough for me!

I have a number of old detective magazines in my library which feature Edgar Wallace yarns, and were published during the twenties. They still make fair reading.

We could do with many more good crime and mystery series, and I wish the best of luck to the new magazine.

Mr. J. R. Swan, 3 Fifth Avenue, Paddington, London, W.10.

LOOKING FORWARD . . .

Dear Sir,

I should like to have two copies of EWMM when it is published. The second copy is for a friend.

There has been a gap in the field of British crime fiction magazines since the Sexton Blake series was discontinued last year.

I hope your authors will create central characters who will appear from story to story. Such characters, once established, command an enthusiasm of their own. The viewing figures of such TV programmes as "Coronation Street" prove this. Fleetway Publications' successor to "Sexton Blake Library" - "Blackbacks" and "Redbacks" - did not attract any attention because, I think, they were just ordinary paperbacks without any continuity apart from a serial number.

I do hope your venture will be successful, and I look forward to seeing the first issue in due course.

Sgt. M. J. Davey, R.A.F. North Front, Gibraltar.

SPLENDID NEWS

Dear Sir,

I am delighted to receive the splendid news of your new magazine. Words cannot express my feelings!

Please send me the magazine as soon as possible - and arrange a yearly supply!

Mr. Stanley Moore, 51 Coedcae Road, Abertridwr, Caerphilly, Glam.

WELCOME

Dear Sir,

Please send me a copy of EWMM. I am in the midst of re-reading some Edgar Wallace's, so your stories will be welcome.

Mr. E. R. Heaton, 42 Farway, Holme Wood, Bradford 4.

THANK YOU!

Dear Sir,

Very many thanks for your letter. It is good of you to draw my attention to the new magazine, and I am grateful to you.

Several of the authors' names you mention ring a bell. Yes, the EWMM should help to fill a gap, and I will be pleased to have it. The information concerning your first Edgar Wallace story and its British Museum origin, is most intriguing.

Will your magazine have a letters section? I shall be passing on the good news to my old reader pals. They'll be interested, too.

Mr. Ernest O. Finch, 11c Peabody Estate, Vauxhall Bridge Road, Victoria, London, S.W.1.

EXCHANGE OF OPINION

Dear Sir,

I should welcome a copy of EWMM. As a keen reader of "traditional"-style mystery fiction, I shall like especially "The Ghost of Down Hill".

I hope to see the magazine having a readers' page, where views on the stories can be exchanged, and opportunities offered for pen friendship.

Mr. Charles E. Gouge, Preston College, Paxhill Park, Lindfield, Sussex.

COLLECTOR

Dear Sir,

I will certainly be subscribing to EWMM.

I have several copies of the old "Readers' Library", containing the original printings of stories by Edgar Wallace, Agatha Christie, and others.

Perhaps you will be able to feature some Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee yarns in future issues?

Mr. L. S. Elliott, 17 Langdon Crescent, London, E.1.



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A scene from the Edgar Wallace film, FIVE TO ONE, an Anglo Amalgamated presentation, now on general release.