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Suspense

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Suspense

see page 59

A Fleetway magazine

NIGHTMARE

SHE was just tired and nervous, that was all. And it was late. That's why she'd decided, thirty miles back, to take the old road. It was shorter, and there was less traffic to contend with. In less than an hour now she'd be home; in ten minutes she'd be in Camberton, and all this would be over. Ten minutes... Jill's eyes flicked over to the illuminated face of the dashboard clock; past twelve o'clock now—

Her passenger's rugged profile, which





By G. VAN PELT

she half-glimpsed, sent her logical thoughts scattering like the fluffy heads of the dandelions she'd blown that afternoon at Connie's new home. Her pleasant weekend visit seemed days ago, not just hours. The man beside her so dominated and coloured the present that the past had faded. But she wouldn't allow herself to be mastered by the fear that was gathering in her, and she pushed it back.

The narrow sandy road unwound before her like a dirty ribbon. The occasional farmhouse she'd passed had lain quiet and deserted-looking under the pale moonlight. Here, on each side of the road, was a thick growth of trees. Dark, unfriendly woods . . .

"Don't go so fast; it makes me nervous when someone else is driving." Her passenger's voice was soft, but edged with authority.

Jill's fingers tightened on the steering wheel, but her foot eased on the accelerator. She could say, "I'll drive as I please. It's my car—" but she didn't, and she knew why she didn't. She was placating him, trying to keep things from coming to a head. But what things? Even as the thought whirled darkly into

her mind, she shut it out. Mustn't think, she cautioned herself. I must not appear afraid, but I'm not going to talk to him any more.

She knew the quality that alarmed her in this man. It was his incongruous air of assurance, of being in command, when by all the facts she was in that position. It was her car and he was only someone to whom she'd given a lift. But he had subtly dispossessed her shortly after he'd got into the car. How had it happened?

When she had seen him plodding along the road, with the little dog at his heels, she'd taken him for a workman or a farmer walking home from the small town she'd just passed. It was the dog that had deprived the man of any appearance of transience, that made him a resident. So when he turned and threw out his arm to her approaching car, she'd braked the car quickly, almost on impulse. From the back, and walking, as he'd been when she first saw him, she'd unconsciously thought "old," but as he got into the car she'd discovered that he wasn't old at all.

She'd had her first qualm of uneasiness when he'd shut the car door behind him, leaving the small dog outside.

"You're not going to leave your dog, are you?" she'd asked, looking at him carefully.

His body was short and powerful-looking; she'd mistaken this stockiness for the thickness of age. His head was long, his eyes deep-set, and his nose large and jutting. There was a stillness in his face; it looked as if it had never known animation.

"It's not my dog," he'd said. "Just a stray that followed me."

Jill hadn't liked the scrutiny he gave her, and abruptly started the car.

"Where are you going?"

"As far as you'll take me," he said.

"But you surely must have a destination."

"Just—south."

A man out of the night and going nowhere, Jill had thought apprehensively. Just a hitch-hiker, and she had been foolhardy enough to offer him a lift . . . because of a dog that, she'd realized belatedly, had evoked a small ghost of her childhood.

"I'll take you to Camberton."

"Thanks." She'd felt his eyes on her. "Nice of you to pick me up. Have you done this often?"

"No, never. I thought you lived nearby."

"Oh . . . No, I haven't lived round here for years—" Abruptly, he'd stopped, as though he'd said too much. "Pretty country," he'd added, "but lonely."

"I hadn't noticed."

"Awfully lonely. Why'd you choose the old road to Camberton?"

"It's shorter."

"M-m-m, yes, and hardly any traffic. But what would you do if you had a puncture, or—got into some kind of trouble?"

"I'm not expecting any trouble," she'd told him coldly.

"There's always trouble," he'd said softly. "It's best to expect it."

Had there been a warning in his words? Her pulse had quickened, her eyes darting to the mirror. There were no car lights behind her on the road and none ahead. She'd remembered seeing only three cars since she'd turned on to this road and they were gone from sight now.

"I never look for trouble," she'd told him calmly, but inside she'd felt a shiver of uneasiness. "Why did you pick such a deserted road if you were trying to get a lift?"

"A good question, but I wasn't really looking for a lift on the road. I was going to call on a relation of mine round here."

"I'll drop you off at your relative's house."

"No, I've changed my mind," he'd said. "This is better."

His words had come out so casually that Jill's mind had been momentarily relieved. "It is rather late to disturb people."

"I didn't intend to disturb them; just borrow their car. They always leave the key in. They're on the stupid side of the family."

The queer, sinking feeling in Jill's stomach had acknowledged the portent of his remark before her mind had assimilated it. The steering wheel had become slippery under her hands, and even though she'd kept her eyes on the road ahead, her consciousness had been centred on the man beside her: a bulky figure with large hands resting on his legs. She hadn't been able to answer, partly from fear of what he would say next.

Restlessly, she'd shifted her left leg and had seen his head turn quickly, peering down. She'd realized then that he was as aware of her as she of him.

"Where are you going?" he'd asked, his eyes still on her legs.

"Home."

"Been on holiday?"

"Yes."

"Have a good time?"

His persistence, his air of calm assurance, had suddenly angered her.

"The holiday was fine," she'd said calmly, "but I don't like to talk while I'm driving."

"All right, I'll drive."

There'd been so much finality in the words that she'd felt the panicky blood pound at her temples, had clutched the wheel tighter. "No, thanks."

When he hadn't insisted, she'd felt that she'd somehow averted trouble. He had switched his stare to her face and she'd wondered if he were getting emanations of her alarm. Almost childishly, she'd clutched at the hope that if she didn't think it, perhaps he wouldn't feel it, and that somehow, in a sort of dead calm, time would pass and they'd be in Camberton. She'd drive faster. . .

Only he wouldn't let her drive fast.

"It isn't that I mind fast driving," he said unexpectedly, almost apologetically. "It's just that *I* like to be at the wheel at any speed over fifty."

Jill sensed his waiting for her response, and tried for a commonplace. "I don't like to drive too fast," she said unevenly.

"Don't you? If you've never had this car up to ninety, you've missed something. At ninety a car like this floats. I know, I had one once, for a while. Expect to have another—before long."

The words were all right, but the tone was all wrong. Had he just finished telling her that he expected to have *her* car? The meaning was clear to Jill's suddenly craven body, but her mind refused to credit such boldness. Nevertheless, she couldn't ignore all the warnings. She should be making some plans of her own.

Here the road crawled up an incline and ahead she could see the white posts and low railings that marked a ditch. On the other side, there was only undergrowth and trees. What if she swerved suddenly and hit the railings?

Her flesh crawled at the thought. She might injure only herself, and on this desolate road, who would hear a crash? She could only wait and pray that she was exaggerating the menace of the man beside her, that a queer attitude of his had inflamed her imagination. She dare not wreck her car and risk injury, just because it was late and her body cried out in instinctive fear. Besides, they should be near the outskirts of Camberton soon.

The man shifted slightly and Jill realized her attention was still riveted on him, even though her eyes were on the road.

"You're awfully pretty to be out alone this time of night."

Twice Jill swallowed to ease the tightness in her throat. "What does being pretty have to do with it?"

"Well, usually pretty girls learn to be careful young, and then they generally have men with them when they're out late."

What he'd said was true, she thought in surprise. She usually wasn't alone. But was that bit about being careful a not very subtle way of telling her that she had been foolish? His next

remark made her reach back for the word "foolish," as though that description were safe and desirable.

"I like blondes," he'd said complacently.

She felt the blood surge to her face, burn at her ears. And like the vibrations of a sudden roll of drums, the aggressive masculinity of the man beside her hit her senses, almost overwhelming her. Her sudden impression of an animal-like sensuousness emanating from him was so vivid, it left her mouth too dry to speak, her mind whirling.

Those terrifying words of his dropped into her consciousness like a stone into still water, the circles spreading in her mind until, overlapping, they became filled with fearful pictures . . . the man overpowering her . . . taking the car . . . her body left in a lonely ditch . . .

The panic that welled up in her made her legs weak, her feet numb. In his mind, she was at his disposal, she and the car. It was as simple as that—and as horrible. To him, she was just a young woman, who was going to provide him with a nice car. A *pretty* young woman . . .

Then the man moved slightly and she heard a faint click. Out of the corner of her eye she caught a bright glint and glanced over at him. She swung her eyes back to the road, her mind blank with terror. He had a long-bladed knife in his hand, and with the point of it, was carefully cleaning his fingernails.

He neither looked at her nor spoke and Jill felt herself tightening until it became difficult to breathe. She was conscious of the movement of the car, wondering how he could prevent the knife point running too far under his nails. Why was he ignoring her, concentrating on his ill-timed manicure? She knew—oh, how well she knew!—the knife was intended as a threat, whether he mentioned it or said nothing about it. To say nothing was worse than open intimidation. The wheel under her hands was slippery with perspiration when she again heard the click. She knew he was looking at her now, but still he said nothing. She could only keep her eyes turned straight ahead, try to keep her lips tight to control the trembling.

They were running past a low hedge when the man leaned closer. Her nerves were so alert to him that she felt, rather than saw him lean.

"After we pass this hedge, there's an old quarry beyond, off to the right."

He paused and Jill held her breath painfully. This was it . . .

"Before we reach the quarry, there's a road to the right. Take it."

Jill let out her breath, gustily, dizzily. Now that it was out in the open, an acknowledged thing, it was somehow less terrifying. It was as though the confirmation of her fear lessened it.

"I won't do it," she said, and pressed harder on the accelerator.

She didn't see him move, but thick, muscular fingers were suddenly round her throat, tightening, hurting, making her gasp. The road danced in front of her tear-stung eyes.

"I could choke you with one hand," he said, close to her ear, "if you'd like to have it like that. I'm on my way out of this damned country, anyhow. You'd be wise to do as I say."

Then her throat was released, his hand slipped from under hers. She saw his other hand was on the wheel and realized that she'd forgotten all about driving when he attacked her. Automatically, her hands went back to the wheel, clutching it for control.

"Going to behave now?"

"What do you want?" she cried despairingly.

He didn't answer and she flung a glance at him. He was looking at her with that impassive strength in his face that gave him a tough unreality. Then the illusion of immobility was shattered by the flash of his deep-set eyes as they ranged over her. "You know what I want, well enough."

Jill shivered and swung her eyes back on the unchanged, unheeding road. This couldn't happen to her, not just for obeying a kindly impulse, for giving a stranger a lift. But logic told her that it was happening, that it happened again and again to people. She'd read of many such happenings—and there was the crux of the thing, she thought dully. She didn't identify herself with other people: she'd assumed that she had a special immunity.

The low hedge beside the road seemed to hem her in, show her only one course to follow. The course of destruction, she thought dazedly. Why couldn't she snap out of this deadly apathy?

Then, too soon, the hedge ended, and ahead she could see the buildings by the old quarry. They were close to the road and still she couldn't think, could hardly feel.

Beside her, the man leaned forward, peering. "Slow down," he said, and again she heard the click of the knife. He was afraid she might not do as he told her!

Jill felt an idiotic urge to giggle and clamped her teeth on her lower lip. She couldn't have hysterics, not now, when she needed all her resources.

"Turn right here," he said, and she felt something press against her side.

It's the knife, she thought wildly. He's got it right against

me. One part of her mind tried to imagine how the knife would feel plunging into her side, while another part silently shrieked with horror. Jill slowed the car, fleetingly thought about screaming for help. She knew her last bit of control would leave her once she started to scream. Besides, who would hear?

She turned into the side road.

Agonizingly, Jill looked at the road, the headlights picking out every bump in it. It was an old road that hadn't been used for a long time. She straddled the ruts, noticing that the bushes on each side looked unusually green, or was it because she felt she was having her last look? The car was picking up speed, but apparently it pleased the man, because the pressure was removed from her side.

Jill knew it was futile to look for help along this road—he wouldn't have picked it, otherwise—but she couldn't resist the ceaseless, searching looks. Then, ahead on the left, she caught the glint of moonlight on a flat surface. She strained to see through the bushes and trees. It was a roof-top, several hundred feet away from the road.

Without a conscious plan, other than escape, Jill suddenly jammed on the brake, her hand darting to the ignition key. The car skidded slightly, bucking, and she heard a grunt and a thud as the man was thrown against the windscreen when the car stopped.

Braced against the forward momentum, she pulled at the door and leapt out. She reached the road in a stumbling run, fighting for balance. Her run carried her across the road and into the bushes, before she recovered. She felt the slope of the ground beneath her and started down. There was a hoarse shout behind her.

A fierce exultation shot through her as she plunged down the incline. Let him have the car! Her body felt renewed, eager to run, heedless of the whipping, clawing undergrowth. She was free! And even if he followed, she would beat him to the house, where, if he were close, she'd start screaming to awaken the people.

Trees closed over her and she stared ahead for a glimpse of the house through the enshrouding branches. Then she broke through a clump of bushes and there in the moonlight was the house, surrounded by a high wire fence.

She skirted the fence, looking for a gate. When she'd run half-way round, she found it; a high, metal affair—locked. Then Jill looked at the house in the middle of the enclosure and her pounding heart skipped a beat.

It took her a few seconds to assemble the facts in her mind:

the flat roof, the concrete and brick walls with single, wire-netted dark windows, the concrete yard extending to the fence on one side, and the foul, unmistakable smell. It wasn't a house.

Weakly, Jill clung to the fence, her eyes on the dark building. It was a sewage station of some kind, and she knew that her screams would bring no one rushing to her rescue.

A movement on the far side of the fence made cold fear, like a heavy, immovable weight, settle on her. Then she saw him. He was standing still now, the moonlight dappling his coat with shadows.

Jill remained motionless, realizing that she was in shadow, deeply grateful for the dark clothes she wore that made her less conspicuous. She'd hoped that he would let her go when she escaped from the car. Why, oh why, hadn't he just taken the car and gone on?

Sickeningly, the reason came. Unnoticed till now was the feel of something hard in her left hand where it was pressed against the fence. In stupefaction, she moved her fingertips over the hardness, feeling the shape of the car keys. She had no recollection of removing them when she'd flipped the switch. A purely automatic action that had brought the man after her of necessity. If she dared, she would gladly have tossed the key to him, given him her car. But that wasn't all he wanted . . . She dropped the keys into her pocket.

She was on a slope and the undergrowth was thinner towards the top. She looked downhill and through the trees the moonlight picked out a narrow bridge that came almost to the fence. That way lay deep shadows, thick undergrowth and trees. If he came round here, she'd have to go that way, trust what she'd find on the other side of the bridge. Her eyes flew back to the man. He had gone.

Quickly, she peered about and then saw him again. He'd moved back from the fence into the cover of the trees and was circling towards her. She didn't know whether he'd seen her or not: she turned and raced downhill, towards the bridge.

She scrambled over a concrete ledge and was on the bridge. It was a peculiar bridge, about three feet wide. Trees grew so close that she had to slow down to get past large branches that hung over it. Then she reached a clear stretch and, glancing ahead, almost stumbled.

This concrete bridge stretched ahead interminably. In the clear moonlight, it seemed to dwindle away in the far distance. She sobbed once and fought back the tears. She could only run, trying to quell the panic that threatened to rob her legs of

strength. Once, she glanced back. The man, too, was on the bridge.

On each side now, the moonlight showed undergrowth below, but no trees. The ground seemed a long way away. Farther ahead, where the ground sloped sharply up again, she saw deep woods on each side of the bridge, with an occasional overhanging branch.

She began to run again . . .

A pain, needle-sharp, started throbbing in her side. It was a pain dimly remembered out of her childhood, when she'd run too much. Dared she slow down? She risked a quick glance over her shoulder. Her toe caught on something and she felt herself falling.

Wildly twisting, she fell on her knees on the concrete. A round, metal disc set in the concrete, the thing she'd stumbled over, had the familiar look of a manhole cover. She realized then that this must be an elevated sewer, a large pipe encased in concrete, running from the building to empty out at a disposal point in some isolated spot.

Jill was on her feet before she'd completed her thoughts. She reached the part where the trees were growing and saw the glint of water below her. A swift glance showed a little stream, tree-lined and peaceful under the moonlight. Then she was past it and there were just trees on each side of her. She was gasping for breath now, her lungs seeming too large for her chest, and the pain was back. She slowed to a walk.

It was then that she saw something at one side of the concrete. She stopped. It was the curved top of a narrow metal ladder extending down the side. Unhesitatingly, Jill swung herself over and started down. Her left ankle hurt; she must have twisted it when she fell.

She reached the ground and found that her idea of a covered pipe was correct. There was room for her to stand upright beneath it between the supports. She chose the side farthest from the ladder and hurried between the supporting pillars. A bird fluttered close by and Jill's heart sickened when the bird gave two or three startled squawks before it flew away.

She stopped, staring up at the top of the bridge. A stillness seemed to hold everything petrified. She felt the perspiration on her skin, the trembling of her legs, the parched dryness of her throat. But more important, there was no thudding sound from the bridge, and she knew the man had stopped, too, and was listening for her.

She'd stared so long at the clear section of bridge where she might see him that her eyes ached before he appeared. He was

walking softly, examining both sides as he came. She knew it would be only minutes before he found the ladder.

She was crouching now, like an animal—a hunted animal, but without an animal's instincts for survival. She straightened. She had intelligence, hadn't she? Think, she implored herself. He'll be down here in a few minutes. If she ran, he'd hear her because of the dead twigs on the ground. She looked up at the trees. Even if she could climb up, which she doubted, he'd see her once his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness.

But—her eyes being already adjusted was one advantage she had, and a plan occurred to her. Turning her back on the bridge, she ran for a short space, choosing her path where last year's leaves still lay thick. The rustling leaves and snapping twigs sounded shockingly loud. Then she stopped. In the quiet that followed she could hear only the thudding of her heart.

Swiftly, she took off her shoes, and stepping only on bare ground or green things, she retraced her steps. She reached the bridge, saw the man a short distance back, and passed under it. On the other side, she crouched low, still picking her way carefully. The trees weren't as thick over here, but the undergrowth was heavier. She'd just reached a thick clump when she heard the man's feet rasping on the ladder.

She settled there, and held her breath when the man stopped at the foot of the ladder. He seemed to be staring directly at her. He was so close she could see the flash of his deep-set eyes that the moonlight made cavernous. He was so close that fear caught her and set her head throbbing, pulled her muscles and nerves unbearably taut, held her at an impossibly tense pitch. Why was he standing there when the sounds she'd made had been on the other side? Was she holding him there with some kind of fear vibrations?

Jill waited, while the unreal scene—the dark bushes, the darker trees, the white bridge with the motionless figure of the man below it—became etched in her mind. There was an air of brooding hostility in the silence round her, and even the bushes seemed to withdraw, as though willing to expose her to the seeking moonlight and the waiting man.

At that moment, the man turned and disappeared under the bridge. She waited for long moments before a faint crackle assured her he was on the far side.

Quietly she felt her way over to the ladder. The rungs were rusty and rough under her stockinged feet and she had to fight the impulse to hurry. When she reached the top, she stooped low to take advantage of the cover offered by the trees that grew close to the bridge at this point. Behind her, there was no sound

to tell her where the man was and she could only assume that he was still looking for her in the woods below.

Then she reached the clear space on the bridge where, from down below, she had seen the man, and she knew this was the critical stage of her flight. She eased over to the far edge and got down on her hands and knees. Below her, as she crawled along, she could see muddy, flat surfaces and now that she was no longer hurrying with a cool push of air against her, she could feel the sweat glueing her slip to her back, the tiny insects that stuck to her face. Her hands and knees felt raw by the time she reached a tree-sheltered stretch of the structure where she could stand up again.

Glancing back, the bridge stretched empty and white under the moonlight and the cold feeling at the back of her neck warmed a little. It was only when she stepped on something rough that bruised her foot that she remembered her shoes. She had left them somewhere, back there in the woods.

At last she reached the end of the bridge. She scrambled over the ledge and limped up the slope, round the fenced-in building. When she pushed through the bushes to the road, she noticed how her feet cringed at sharp contacts and her ankle was stiff and throbbing with pain.

There was her car. A sudden heady excitement shot through her, submerging her aches and weariness in a tidal wave of triumph.

She'd done it! Only now did she realize how hopeless she'd felt back there, never counting on actually getting away, not looking any farther ahead than the moment.

Jill fumbled for the key in her pocket, then frantically searched the other one. A feeling of inevitable doom buckled her knees. *The key had gone.*

Weakly, she sank down, futile tears blinding her. Why hadn't she been more careful with the key? But it had seemed so unimportant back there on the bridge. Stubbornly, she fought for control of the sobs shaking her and forced herself to stand. The pain in her ankle was acute. She could run no longer. And soon the man, too, would come back here searching for her. She looked round for a hiding place.

The uncompromising brilliance of the moonlight mocked her. The bushes were much too scanty here for concealment. There was nowhere to hide. She shivered violently, remembering the man's powerful fingers, his queer, still face. If only she had a weapon— Her eyes raced along the road for a stone, anything . . . There was nothing.

Doggedly, she limped to the back of the car. In there, with her suitcase, were nice, heavy tools, weapons of a sort. Her forlorn hope vanished. The boot was locked. In a brief fury of impotence she shook the handle of the boot, then beat on the lid with her fists.

She caught back a sob and went round to the door. Nothing inside the car but her handbag. Her eyes went to the illuminated face of the dashboard clock—incredibly, it was only one-fifteen! The last time she'd looked at the clock, when she was driving, was only an hour ago. How could a lifetime of terror be compressed into so short a time?

A small sound from the undergrowth sent her thoughts spinning. The man was coming! In the urgency to find cover, she started to get into the car. She could lock the doors—then her mind went into a trance of horror in which she saw him break the glass of the door, and herself inside, helplessly confined. She glanced over her shoulder and saw the man hurrying up the slope, heard his gasping breath.

At the sight of him, the frenzy of terror mounted until it blanked out her mind, leaving in its place something crafty and animal-like. She picked up her handbag, a heavy leather one, from the seat. She stood away from the car, the bag hanging from her hand.

The man reached the road and walked towards her, his head out-thrust. "Thought you'd give me the slip, did you? You'll pay for that little run." His voice rasped, his eyeballs glittered in the moonlight.

She waited, hardly hearing him, her whole being concentrated on one idea. He took another step and she told herself: *Now!* She swung her handbag up, aiming the corner at his temple. The man grunted, and her bag was almost wrenched from her hand with the force of the blow.

One of his hands dived into his pocket, the other grabbed for her. He caught her sleeve, and there was the loud sound of a rip as she jerked back. She swung the bag once more, barely conscious that she was sobbing again. The bag hit his ear and flew open, strewing its contents over him. The man staggered up against the door.

Past the man, Jill saw the lights of a car sweep up the track from the direction of the main road, then heard the purr of its engine. She stood, transfixed.

The man shoved himself away from the car, turned dazedly and looked at the approaching headlights, then stumbled off into the undergrowth, swearing viciously.

The car pulled round hers and stopped. A man came towards

her. Jill staggered forward a few steps, saw that he was a policeman and stopped, while road, car and man slowly revolved. Her hand closed on his sleeve, and she shut her eyes against the dizziness.

"What in heaven's name—brought you?"

"Brought us?" a competent voice asked. "Saw your car lights from the main road. What are you parking here for—?" Jill tried to open her eyes, and he leaned down, peering at her. "Mitchell!" he called out. "Better come here. This girl's passed out: something's wrong."

Jill's eyes swung over to her car. The lights, she thought dully. Yes, the lights must have been on ever since she'd jumped from her car and started running from that man.

"That man!" she gasped, fighting for coherence. "He just left—that way—He's got a knife—"

"What man?"

"I gave him a lift—back there—I thought—"

The horror flooded back, strangling the words in her throat. A wave of blackness lapped at her, and she felt a strong arm go round her.

"Better call in for help, Mitchell," a voice said, close to her ear. "He can't get far." The voice changed as the blackness settled over her. "A hitch-hiker! Women never learn, do they?"



TOO MANY HAVE LIVED

By DASHIELL HAMMETT

THE man's tie was as orange as a sunset. He was a large man, tall and meaty, without softness. The dark hair parted in the middle, flattened to his scalp, his firm, full cheeks, the well-fitting clothes, even the small, pink ears flat against the sides of his head—each of these seemed but a differently coloured part of one same, smooth surface. His age could have been thirty-five or forty-five.

He sat beside Samuel Spade's desk, leaning forward a little over his Malacca stick, and said, "No. I want you to find out what *happened* to him. I hope you never *find* him." His protuberant green eyes stared solemnly at Spade.

Spade rocked back in his chair. His face—given a not unpleasantly satanic cast by the v's of his bony chin, mouth, nostrils, and thickish brows—was as politely interested as his voice.

"Why?"

The green-eyed man spoke quietly, with assurance: "I can talk to you, Spade. You've the sort of reputation I want in a private detective. That's why I'm here." He added, "And any fair price is all right with me."

Spade nodded non-committally. "But I've got to know what you want to buy. You want to find out what's happened to this—er—Eli Haven, but you don't care what it is?"

The green-eyed man lowered his voice. "In a way I do. For instance, if you found him and fixed it so he stayed away for good, it might be worth more money to me."

"You mean even if he didn't want to stay away?"

The green-eyed man said, "Especially."

Spade smiled and shook his head. "Probably not enough

more money—the way you mean it.” He took his long, thick-fingered hands from the arms of his chair and turned their palms up. “Well, what’s it all about, Colyer?”

Colyer’s face reddened a little, but his eyes maintained their unblinking cold stare. “This man’s got a wife. I like her. They had a row last week and he ran off. If I can convince her he’s gone for good, there’s a chance she’ll divorce him.”

“I’d want to talk to her,” Spade said. “Who is this Eli Haven? What does he do?”

“He’s a bad egg. He doesn’t do anything. Writes poetry or something.”

“What can you tell me about him that’ll help?”

“Nothing Julia, his wife, can’t tell you. You’re going to talk to her.” Colyer stood up. “I’ve got connections. Maybe I can get something for you through them later.”



A small-boned woman of twenty-five or six opened the apartment door. Her powder-blue dress was trimmed with silver buttons. She was full-bosomed but slim, with straight shoulders and narrow hips, and she carried herself with a pride that would have been cockiness in one less graceful.

Spade said, "Mrs. Haven?"

She hesitated before saying "Yes."

"Gene Colyer sent me to see you. My name's Spade. I'm a private detective. He wants me to find your husband."

"And have you found him?"

"I told him I'd have to talk to you first."

Her smile went away. She studied his face gravely, feature by feature, then she said, "Certainly," and stepped back, drawing the door back with her.

When they were seated in a cheaply furnished room overlooking a noisy children's playground, she asked, "Did Gene tell you why he wanted Eli found?"

"He said if you knew he was gone for good maybe you'd listen to reason." She said nothing.

"Has he ever gone off like this before?"

"Often."

"What's he like?"

"He's a fine man," she said dispassionately, "when he's sober; and when he's drinking he's all right except with women and money."

"What does he do for a living?"

"He's a poet," she replied, "but nobody makes a living at that."

"Well?"

"Oh, he pops in with a little money now and then. Poker, races, he says. I don't know."

"How long've you been married?"

"Four years, almost"—she smiled mockingly.

"San Francisco all the time?"

"No, we lived in Seattle the first year and then came here."

"He's from Seattle?"

She shook her head. "Some place in Delaware."

"What place?"

"I don't know."

Spade drew his thickish brows together a little. "Where are you from?"

She said sweetly, "You're not hunting for me."

"You act like it," he grumbled. "Well, who are his friends?"

"I don't know. There's a fellow named Minera, and a Louis James and somebody called Conrad."

"Who are they?"

"Men," she replied blandly. "I don't know anything about them. They phone or drop by to pick him up, or I see him around town with them. That's all I know."

"What do they do for a living? They can't all write poetry."

She laughed. "They could try. One of them, Louis James, is a—a member of Gene's staff, I think. I honestly don't know any more about them than I've told you."

"Think they'd know where your husband is?"

She shrugged. "They're kidding me if they do. They still call up once in a while to see if he's turned up."

"And these women you mentioned?"

"They're not people I know."

Spade scowled thoughtfully at the floor, asked, "What'd he do before he started not making a living writing poetry?"

"Anything—sold vacuum cleaners, tramped around, went to sea, worked on the railroad, in factories, lumber camps, carnivals, worked on a newspaper—anything."

"Have any money when he left?"

"Three dollars he borrowed from me."

"What'd he say?"

She laughed. "Said if I used whatever influence I had with God while he was gone he'd be back later with a surprise for me."

Spade raised his eyebrows. "You were on good terms?"

"Oh, yes. Our last fight had been patched up a couple of days before."

"When did he leave?"

"Thursday afternoon; about three o'clock, I guess."

"Got any photographs of him?"

"Yes." She went to a table and pulled a photograph from a drawer.

Spade looked at the picture of a thin face with deep-set eyes, a sensual mouth, and a heavily lined forehead topped by a disorderly mop of coarse blond hair.

He put Haven's photograph in his pocket and picked up his hat. He turned towards the door, then halted. "What kind of poet is he? Pretty good?"

She shrugged. "That depends on who you ask."

"Any of it around here?"

"No." She smiled. "Think he's hiding between pages?"

"You never can tell what'll lead to what. I'll be back some time. Think things over and see if you can't find some way of loosening up a bit. 'Bye."

He walked down Post Street to Mulford's book store and asked for a volume of Haven's poetry.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "I sold my last copy last week—" she smiled—"to Mr. Haven himself. I can order it for you."

"You know him?"

"Only through selling him books."

Spade pursed his lips, asked, "What day was it?" He gave her one of his business cards. "Please. It's important."

She went to a desk, turned the pages of a red-bound sales-book, and came back to him with the book open in her hand. "It was last Wednesday," she said, "and we delivered it to a Mr. Roger Ferris." She gave him an address on Pacific Avenue.

"Thanks a lot," he said.

Outside, he hailed a taxi-cab and gave the driver Mr. Roger Ferris's address . . .

The Pacific Avenue house was a four-storey, greystone one set behind a narrow strip of lawn. The room into which a plump-faced maid ushered Spade was large and high-ceilinged.

Spade sat down, but when the maid had gone away he got up and began to walk around the room. He stopped at a table where there were three books. One of them had a salmon-coloured jacket on which was printed in red an outline drawing of a bolt of lightning striking the ground between a man and a woman, and in black the words *Coloured Light, by Eli Haven*.

Spade picked up the book and went back to his chair.

There was an inscription on the flyleaf—heavy, irregular characters written with blue ink:

*To good old Buck, who knew his coloured lights, in memory
of them there days. Eli.*

Spade turned pages at random and idly read a verse:

Statement

*Too many have lived
As we live
For our lives to be
Proof of our living.
Too many have died
As we die
For their deaths to be
Proof of our dying.*

He looked up from the book as a man in dinner clothes came into the room. He was not a tall man, but his erectness made him seem tall even when Spade's six feet and a fraction of an inch were standing before him. He had bright blue eyes undimmed by his fifty-odd years, a sunburned face in which no muscle sagged,

a smooth, broad forehead, and thick, short, nearly white hair. There was dignity in his countenance, and amiability.

He nodded at the book Spade still held. "How do you like it?"

Spade grinned, said, "I guess I'm just a mug," and put the book down. "That's what I came to see you about, though, Mr. Ferris. You know Haven?"

"Yes, certainly. Sit down, Mr. Spade." He sat in a chair not far from Spade's. "I knew him as a kid. He's not in trouble, is he?"

Spade said, "I don't know. I'm trying to find him."

Ferris spoke hesitantly: "Can I ask why?"

"You know Gene Colyer?"

"Yes." Ferris hesitated again, then said, "This is in confidence. I've a chain of picture houses through northern California, you know, and a couple of years ago when I had some labour trouble I was told that Colyer was the man to get in touch with to have it straightened out. That's how I happened to meet him."

"Yes," Spade said dryly. "A lot of people happen to meet Gene that way."

"But what's he got to do with Eli?"

"Wants him found. How long since you've seen him?"

"He was here last Thursday."

"What time did he leave?"

"Midnight—a little after. He came over in the afternoon around half past three. We hadn't seen each other for years. I persuaded him to stay for dinner—he looked pretty seedy—and lent him some money."

"How much?"

"A hundred and fifty—all I had in the house."

"Where was he going when he left?"

Ferris shook his head. "He said he'd phone me the next day."

"Did he phone you the next day?"

"No."

"And you've known him all his life?"

"Not exactly, but he worked for me fifteen or sixteen years ago when I had a carnival company—Great Eastern and Western Combined Shows—with a partner for a while and then by myself, and I always liked the kid."

"How long before Thursday since you'd seen him?"

"Lord knows," Ferris replied. "I'd lost track of him for years. Then, Wednesday, out of a clear sky, that book came, with no address or anything, just that stuff written in the front, and the next morning he called me up. I was tickled to death to know he was still alive and doing something with himself. So he

came over that afternoon and we put in about nine hours straight talking about old times."

"Tell you much about what he'd been doing since then?"

"Just that he'd been knocking around, doing one thing and another, taking the breaks as they came. He didn't complain much; I had to make him take the hundred and fifty."

Spade stood up. "Thanks then, Mr. Ferris. I—"

Ferris interrupted him: "Not at all, and if there's anything I can do, call on me."

Spade looked at his watch. "Can I phone my office to see if anything's turned up?"

"Certainly; there's a phone in the next room, to the right."

Spade said "Thanks," and went out. When he returned his face was wooden.

"Any news?" Ferris asked.

"Yes. Colyer's called the job off. He says Haven's body's been found in some bushes on the other side of San Jose, with three bullets in it." He smiled, adding mildly, "He *told* me he might be able to find out something through his connections . . ."

Morning sunshine, coming through the curtains that screened Spade's office windows, put two fat, yellow rectangles on the floor and gave everything in the room a yellow tint.

He sat at his desk, staring meditatively at a newspaper. He did not look up when Effie Perine came in from the outer office.

She said, "Mrs. Haven is here."

He raised his head and said, "That's better. Send her in."

Mrs. Haven came in quickly. Her face was white and she was shivering in spite of her fur coat and the warmth of the day. She came straight to Spade and asked, "Did Gene kill him?"

Spade said, "I don't know."

"I've got to know," she cried.

"Here, sit down." He led her to a chair. "Colyer tell you he'd called the job off?"

She stared at him in amazement. "He what?"

"He left word here last night that your husband had been found and he wouldn't need me any more."

She hung her head and her words were barely audible. "Then he did."

Spade shrugged. "Maybe only an innocent man could've afforded to call it off then, or maybe he was guilty, but had brains enough and nerve enough to—"

She wasn't listening to him. She said earnestly: "But you're not going to drop it like that? You're not going to let him stop you?"

While she was speaking the telephone rang. Spade picked up the receiver. "Yes?... Uh-huh... So?" He pursed his lips. "I'll let you know." He pushed the telephone aside slowly and faced Mrs. Haven again. "Colyer's outside."

"Does he know I'm here?" she asked quickly.

"Couldn't say." He stood up, pretending he was not watching her closely. "Do you care?"

She pinched her lower lip between her teeth, then said "No," hesitantly.

"Fine. I'll have him in."

She raised a hand as if in protest, then let it drop, and her white face was composed. "Whatever you want," she said.

Spade opened the door, said, "Come on in, Colyer. We were just talking about you."

Colyer nodded and came into the office. "How are you this morning, Julia? You ought to've phoned me. I'd've driven you back to town."

"I—I didn't know what I was doing."

Colyer looked at her for a moment longer, then shifted the focus of his expressionless green eyes to Spade's face. "Well, have you been able to convince her I didn't do it?"

"We hadn't got around to that," Spade said. "I was just trying to find out how much reason there was for suspecting you. Sit down."

Colyer sat down somewhat carefully, asked, "And?"

"And then you arrived."

Colyer nodded gravely. "All right, Spade," he said; "you're hired again to prove to Mrs. Haven that I didn't have anything to do with it."

"Gene!" she exclaimed in a choked voice and held her hands out towards him appealingly. "I don't think you did—I don't want to think you did—but I'm so afraid." She put her hands to her face and began to cry.

Colyer went over to the woman. "Take it easy," he said. "We'll kick it out together."

Spade went into the outer office, shutting the door behind him. Effie Perine stopped typing a letter. He grinned at her, said, "Somebody ought to write a book about people some time—they're peculiar... Find out where I can find Tom Minera."

He returned to the inner office.

Mrs. Haven had stopped crying. She said, "I'm sorry."

Spade said, "It's all right." He looked sideways at Colyer. "I still got my job?"

"Yes." Colyer cleared his throat. "But if there's nothing special right now, I'd better take Mrs. Haven home."

"O.K., but there's one thing: According to the *Chronicle*, you identified him. How come you were down there?"

"I went down when I heard they'd found a body," Colyer replied deliberately. "I told you I had connections. I heard about the body through them."

Spade said, "All right; be seeing you," and opened the door for them.

When the corridor door closed behind them, Effie Perine said, "Minera's at the Buxton on Army Street."

Spade said, "Thanks."

On his way out he said, "If I'm not back in a couple of months tell them to look for my body there."

Spade walked down a shabby corridor to a battered green door marked "411." The murmur of voices came through the door, but no words could be distinguished. He stopped listening and knocked.

An obviously disguised male voice asked, "What is it?"

"I want to see Tom. This is Sam Spade."

A pause, then: "Tom ain't here."

Spade put a hand on the knob and shook the frail door. "Come on, open up," he growled.

Presently the door was opened by a thin, dark man of twenty-five or six who tried to make his beady eyes guileless while saying, "I didn't think it was your voice at first." The slackness of his mouth made his chin seem even smaller than it was. His green-striped shirt, open at the neck, was not clean.

"You've got to be careful these days," Spade said solemnly, and went through the doorway into a room where two men were trying to seem uninterested in his arrival.

One of them leaned against the window-sill filing his fingernails. The other was tilted back in a chair with his feet on the edge of a table and a newspaper spread between his hands. They glanced at Spade in unison and went on with their occupations.

Spade said cheerfully, "Always glad to meet any friends of Tom Minera's."

Minera finished shutting the door and said awkwardly, "Er—yes—Mr. Spade, meet Mr. Conrad and Mr. James."

Conrad, the man at the window, made a vaguely polite gesture with the nail file in his hand. He was a few years older than Minera, of average height, sturdily built, with a thick-featured, dull-eyed face.

James lowered his paper for an instant to look coolly, appraisingly at Spade and say, "How'r'ye, brother?" Then he returned to his reading.

"Ah," Spade said, "and friends of the late Eli Haven."

The man at the window jabbed a finger with his nail file, and cursed it bitterly. Minera moistened his lips, and then spoke rapidly, with a whining note in his voice: "But on the level, Spade, we hadn't none of us seen him for a week."

Spade seemed mildly amused by the dark man's manner.

"What do you think he was killed for?"

"All I know is what the paper says: His pockets was all turned inside out and there wasn't as much as a match on him. As far as I know he didn't have no dough. He didn't have none Tuesday night."

Spade, speaking softly, said, "I hear he got some Thursday night."

Minera, behind Spade, caught his breath audibly.

James said, "I guess you ought to know. I don't."

"He ever work with you boys?"

James slowly put aside his newspaper and took his feet off the table. His interest in Spade's question seemed great enough, but almost impersonal. "Now what do you mean by that?"

Spade pretended surprise. "But you boys must work at something?"

Minera came around to Spade's side. "Aw, listen, Spade," he said. "This guy Haven was just a guy we knew. We didn't have nothing to do with rubbing him out; we don't know nothing about it. We—"

Three deliberate knocks sounded at the door.

Minera and Conrad looked at James, who nodded, but by then Spade, moving swiftly, had reached the door and was opening it.

Roger Ferris was there.

Spade blinked at Ferris, Ferris at Spade. Then Ferris put out his hand and said, "I *am* glad to see you."

"Come on in," Spade said.

"Look at this, Mr. Spade." Ferris's hand trembled as he took a slightly soiled envelope from his pocket.

Ferris's name and address were typewritten on the envelope. Spade took out the enclosure, a narrow slip of cheap white paper, and unfolded it. On it was typewritten: *You had better come to Room No. 411 Buxton Hotel on Army St. at 5 p.m. this afternoon on account of Thursday night.*

Spade said, "It's a long time before five o'clock."

"It is," Ferris agreed with emphasis. "I came as soon as I got that. It was Thursday night Eli was at my house."

Minera was jostling Spade, asking, "What is all this?"

Spade held the note up for the dark man to read. He read it and

yelled, "Honest, Spade, I don't know nothing about that letter."

"Does anybody?" Spade asked.

Conrad said "No" hastily.

James said, "What letter?"

Spade looked dreamily at Ferris, then said, as if speaking to himself, "Of course, Haven was trying to shake you down."

Ferris's face reddened. "What?"

"Shake-down," Spade repeated patiently; "money, blackmail."

"Look here, Spade," Ferris said earnestly; "you don't really believe what you said? What would he have to blackmail me on?"

"'To good old Buck'"—Spade quoted the dead poet's inscription—"who knew his coloured lights, in memory of them there days." He looked sombrely at Ferris from beneath slightly raised brows. "What coloured lights? What's the circus and carnival slang term for kicking a guy off a train while it's going? Red-lighting. Sure, that's it—red lights. Who did you red-light, Ferris, that Haven knew about?"

Minera went over to a chair, sat down, put his elbows on his knees, his head between his hands, and stared blankly at the floor. Conrad was breathing as if he had been running.

"Well?"

Ferris wiped his face with a handkerchief, put the handkerchief in his pocket, and said simply, "It was a shake-down."

"And you killed him."

Ferris's blue eyes, looking into Spade's yellow-grey ones, were clear and steady, as was his voice. "No," he said. "I swear I did not. Let me tell you what happened. He sent me the book, as I told you, and I knew right away what that joke he wrote in the front meant. So the next day, when he phoned me and said he was coming over to talk about old times and to try to borrow some money for old times' sake, I knew what he meant again, and I went down to the bank and drew out ten thousand dollars. You can check that up. It's the Seamen's National."

"I will," Spade said.

"As it turned out, I didn't need that much. He wasn't very big-time, and I talked him into taking five thousand. I put the other five back in the bank next day. You can check that up."

"I will," Spade said.

"I told him I wasn't going to stand for any more; this five thousand was the first and last. I made him sign a paper saying he'd helped in the—in what I'd done—and he signed it. He left some time around midnight, and that's the last I ever saw of him."

Spade tapped the envelope Ferris had given him. "And how about this note?"

"A messenger boy brought it at noon, and I came right over. Eli had assured me he hadn't said anything to anybody, but I didn't know. I had to face it, whatever it was."

Spade turned to the others, his face wooden. "Well?"

Minera and Conrad looked at James, who made an impatient grimace and said, "Oh, sure, we sent him the letter. Why not? We was friends of Eli's, and we hadn't been able to find him since he went to put the squeeze on this baby, and then he turns up dead, so we kind of like to have the gent come over and explain things."

"You knew about the squeeze?"

"Sure. We was all together when he got the idea."

"How'd he happen to get the idea?" Spade asked.

James spread the fingers of his left hand. "We'd been drinking, and he told a yarn about once seeing a guy boot another off a train into a canyon, and he happens to mention the name of the guy that done the booting—Buck Ferris. Somebody whistles and says, 'I bet that's the Ferris that owns about half the cinemas in the state. I bet you he'd give something to keep that back trail covered!'

"Well, the idea kind of hit Eli. You could see that. He asks what this movie fellow's first name is, and when the other guy tells him 'Roger,' he makes out he's disappointed and says, 'No, it ain't him. His first name was Martin.' We all give him the ha-ha and he finally admits he's thinking of seeing the gent, and when he called me up Thursday around noon and says he's throwing a party at Pogey Hecker's that night, it ain't no trouble to figure out what's what."

"What was the name of the gentleman who was red-lighted?"

"He wouldn't say. He shut up tight. You couldn't blame him."

Spade agreed.

"Well, he never showed up at Pogey's. We tried to get him on the phone around two o'clock in the morning, but his wife said he hadn't been home, so we made Pogey charge the bill to him, and beat it. I ain't seen him since—dead or alive."

Spade said mildly, "Maybe. Sure you didn't find Eli later that morning, take him riding, swap him bullets for Ferris's five thou, dump him in the—?"

A sharp double knock sounded on the door.

Spade's face brightened. He went to the door and opened it.

A young man came in. He was very dapper and very well proportioned. He wore a light topcoat and his hands were in his pockets. Just inside the door he stepped to the right, and stood with his back to the wall. By that time another young man was

coming in. He stepped to the left. Though they did not actually look alike, their common dapperness, the similar trimness of their bodies, and their almost identical positions—backs to wall, hands in pockets, cold, bright eyes studying the occupants of the room—gave them, for an instant, the appearance of twins.

Then Gene Colyer came in. He nodded at Spade, but paid no attention to the others, though James said, "Hello, Gene."

"Anything new?" Colyer asked Spade.

Spade nodded. "It seems this gentleman"—he jerked a thumb at Ferris—"was—"

"Any place we can talk?"

"There's a kitchen back here."

Colyer snapped a "Take care of anybody that moves" at the two dapper young men, and followed Spade into the kitchen.

When Spade had told him what he had learned, the green-eyed man asked, "Well, what do you make of it?"

Spade looked thoughtfully at the other. "You've picked up something. I'd like to know what it is."

Colyer said, "They found the gun in a stream a quarter of a mile from where they found him. It's James's—got the mark on it where it was shot out of his hand once in Vallejo."

"That's nice," Spade said.

"Listen. A kid named Turber says James comes to him last Wednesday and gets him to tail Haven. Turber picks him up Thursday afternoon, sees him go into Ferris's place, and phones James. James tells him to wait and let him know where Haven goes when he leaves, but some nervous woman in the neighbourhood complains about the kid hanging around, and the cops chase him along about ten o'clock."

Spade pursed his lips and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

Colyer's eyes were expressionless, but sweat made his round face shiny, and his voice was hoarse. "Spade," he said, "I'm going to turn him in."

Spade switched his gaze from the ceiling to the protuberant green eyes.

"I've never turned in one of my people before," Colyer said, "but this one goes. Julia's got to believe I hadn't anything to do with it if it's one of my people and I turn him in, hasn't she?"

Spade nodded slowly. "I think so."

Colyer suddenly averted his eyes and cleared his throat. "Well, he goes."

Minera, James and Conrad were seated when Spade and Colyer came out of the kitchen. Ferris was walking up and down. The two dapper young men had not moved.

Colyer went over to James. "Where's your gun, Louis?" he asked.

James moved his right hand a few inches towards his left breast, stopped it, and said, "Oh, I didn't bring it."

With his gloved hand—open—Colyer struck James on the side of the face, knocking him out of his chair.

James straightened up, mumbling, "I didn't mean nothing." He put a hand to the side of his face. "I know I oughtn't've done it, Chief, but when he rang up and said he didn't like to go up against Ferris without something and hadn't any of his own, I said, 'All right,' and sent it over to him."

Colyer said, "And you sent Turber over to him, too."

"We were just kind of interested to see if he did go through with it," James mumbled.

"And you couldn't've gone there yourself, or sent somebody else?"

"After Turber had stirred up the whole neighbourhood?"

Colyer turned to Spade. "Want us to help you take them in, or want to call the wagon?"

"We'll do it regular," Spade said, and went to the wall telephone. When he turned away from it his face was wooden, his eyes dreamy. He made a cigarette, lit it, and said to Colyer, "I'm silly enough to think your Louis has got a lot of right answers in that story of his."

James took his hand down from his bruised cheek and stared at Spade with astonished eyes.

Colyer growled, "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Spade said softly, "except I think you're a little too anxious to slam it on him." He blew smoke out. "Why, for instance, should he drop his gun there when it had marks on it that people knew?"

Colyer said, "You think he's got brains?"

"If these boys killed him, knew he was dead, why do they wait till the body's found and things are stirred up before they go after Ferris again? What'd they turn his pockets inside out for if they hijacked him? That's a lot of trouble and only done by folks that kill for some other reason and want to make it look like robbery." He shook his head. "You're too anxious to slam it on them. Why should they—?"

"That's not the point right now," Colyer said. "The point is, why do you keep saying I'm too anxious to slam it on him?"

Spade shrugged. "Maybe to clear yourself with Julia as soon as possible and as clear as possible, maybe even to clear yourself with the police, and then you've got clients."

Colyer said, "What?"

Spade made a careless gesture with his cigarette. "Ferris," he said blandly. "He killed him, of course."

Colyer's eyelids quivered, though he did not actually blink.

Spade said, "First, he's the last person we know of who saw Eli alive, and that's always a good bet. Second, he's the only person I talked to before Eli's body turned up who cared whether I thought they were holding out on me or not. The rest of you just thought I was hunting for a guy who'd gone away. He knew I was hunting for a man he'd killed, so he had to put himself in the clear. He was even afraid to throw that book away, because it had been sent out by the book store and could be traced, and someone there might have seen the inscription.

"Third, he was the only one who thought Eli was just a sweet, clean, lovable boy—for the same reasons. Fourth, that story about a blackmailer showing up at three o'clock in the afternoon, making an easy touch for five grand, and then sticking around till midnight is just silly. Fifth, the story about the paper Eli signed is still worse, though a forged one could be fixed up easy enough. Sixth, he's got the best reason for anybody we know for wanting Eli dead."

Colyer nodded slowly. "Still—"

"Still nothing," Spade said. "Maybe he did the ten-thousand-out-five-thousand-back trick with his bank, but that was easy. Then he got this feeble-minded blackmailer in his house, stalled him along until the servants had gone to bed, took the borrowed gun away from him, shoved him downstairs into his car, took him for a ride—maybe took him already dead, maybe shot him down there by the bushes—frisked him clean to make identification harder and to make it look like robbery, tossed the gun in the water, and came home—"

He broke off to listen to the sound of a siren in the street. He looked then, for the first time since he had begun to talk, at Ferris.

Ferris's face was ghastly white, but he held his eyes steady.

Spade said, "I've got a hunch, Ferris, that we're going to find out about that red-lighting job, too. You told me you had your carnival company with a partner for a while when Eli was working for you, and then by yourself. We oughtn't to have a lot of trouble finding out about your partner—whether he disappeared, or died a natural death, or is still alive."

Ferris had lost some of his erectness. He wet his lips and said, "I want to see my lawyer. I don't want to talk till I've seen him."

Spade said, "It's all right with me. You're up against it, but I don't like blackmailers myself. I think Eli wrote a good epitaph for them in that book of his—'Too many have lived.'"

KEY TO THE FUTURE

Undeterred by the failure of his first novel, Mark Derby spent most of the 'thirties touring England and Europe, mostly on foot. He wrote, worked on farms, and studied explosive situations in close-up—he was arrested four times in one day during the Munich crisis! After an exciting war as a Guards officer he moved into a village of ex-head-hunting savages in Central Celebes, and six of his seven thrillers have a South-East Asian setting. A bachelor, he dislikes fuss, milk and cowboys—as opposed to Indians.

By MARK DERBY

A KEY turned and the door inscribed MADAME FILIPOVA: CONSULTATIONS swung open. A second's pause and the grey man stepped into the room that was heavily curtained and lit by crimson-shaded lamps although it was noon. He stood in the bloodshot gloom while the veiled woman who had unlocked the door propelled her wheel-chair back behind the heavy black lacquer desk.

Through the veil she said then, in German: "It is usual to telephone for an appointment. But no one will be coming before lunch, so . . ."

He was a heavy, grey shadow of a man—hair, eyes, skin and clothes, all grey. He didn't look the sort of man who'd consult a fortune-teller; but then, there were quite a few of Anny Filipova's visitors who didn't. He said, sinking into the deep crimson chair, "So they pay you to stare into that crystal thing and read their futures, eh?"

She raised the black gauze veil to reveal dramatic dark eyes and silver hair. "But you've not come for that?"

"No, I'm one of the others." He said it in Russian.

As she heard him her eyes dilated in shock. He watched while a fit of coughing convulsed the small body and shaking fingers took a tablet from the phial standing beside the crystal globe. Frowning, she washed it down with wine from the glass of Loibner at her elbow and the fit passed.

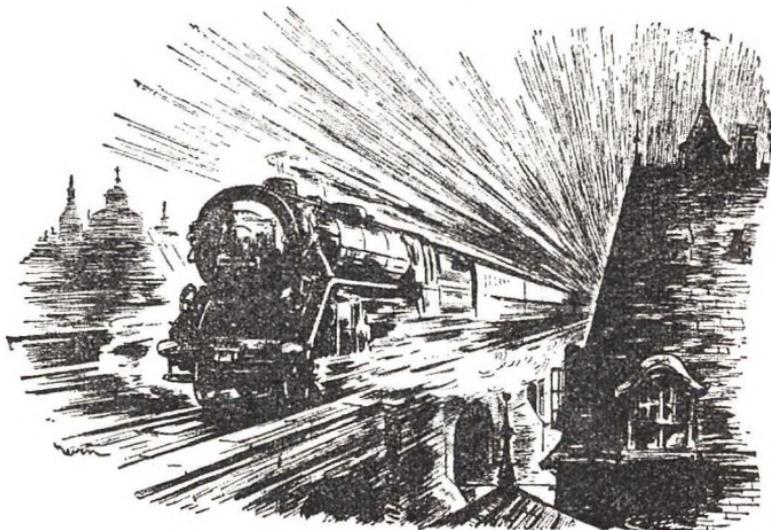
He leaned forward. "Yes, we know it all. At last! How long has it been—twelve years? thirteen?" His rage exploded. "All that time the dirty Western spies and agents enjoying this secure base in Vienna. All that time our devoted diplomats and brave counter-espionage agents spied on and preyed on, our fatherland invaded, our allies corrupted . . . all from this cursed secret headquarters and report centre. With you, the black widow, crouching in the centre of the web. You and your vicious grandson!"

His contorted face relaxed very slowly into an ugly smile. "But you made a mistake in the end. It was a bad mistake to kill Zhubin."

"There was no choice," she said.

Her fingers moved over the desk-top from the phial of cough tablets to the bunch of keys and then to the silver-framed photo of a dark, smiling youth. "He found things out and tried to kill Stefan. My grandson."

"But," he cut in eagerly, "before he was murdered Zhubin mailed a report. *Stefan Filipov, locksmith, and Anny Filipova, fortune-teller, at present under investigation.* Just that. But enough."



Either from habit or to avoid his grey stare she was gazing deep into the crystal. She heard him say, "No doubt you can see in there what happened to your grandson an hour ago."

She whispered "Stefan!" and closed her eyes convulsively. But in that moment her fear left her. With Stefan gone nothing could frighten or hurt her any more... not even the gun, elongated by its black silencer, in the executioner's hand.

He said, "Do not touch the telephone. And to scream would be useless."

Yes, useless. The rest of this top floor was a dancing studio, open only at night; in the flat below a radio was blaring a waltz. "But," she ventured, "they will hear the gun."

"While the next train crosses the bridge? Never!"

No denying that. Her fingers idled with the bunch of keys and the phial of tablets. Then, "Tell me," she asked in detached wonder, "what *is* it that can turn a man into a professional murderer?"

"You are hysterical." She had stung him. "There are policemen always and everywhere. There have to be."

"You call yourself a *policeman*?" Contempt blazed in her dark eyes. "And they were policemen, were they, who liquidated my husband in Moscow in thirty-six? And policemen who shot my son in the back when they found him here in Vienna in forty-five?"

Dramatically she pointed to the window. "Draw that curtain and look down. That's a police station you'll see across the road, but you'll never see any policemen there of your kind. Protectors, helpers, trusted friends of every decent man and woman in Vienna—that's what you'll see." Her eyes softened. "Listen. Every day three of them come up here at lunch-time to help me and my chair down all those stairs and along to the café where I eat. That's the sort of thing you'll find policemen doing in a civilized country."

He didn't stir from his chair. "They'll be saved that chore today," he sneered. "Though there'll be certain other duties for them—not quite such sentimental ones!" He looked at his watch, listened for an approaching train and sighed as if bored. Then the ugly smile again. "Since we have time, perhaps you could read *my* future. Can you see that in your crystal, I wonder?"

"Clearly," she told him. Another fit of coughing choked her for a moment and her hand went up to her lips and then reached urgently for the glass. Frowning and closing her eyes, she gulped at the wine.

Savagely he sprang up. Suddenly he had remembered the Rumanian consul who had baulked him in Cairo, swallowing a cyanide tablet before he could draw his gun. But she pointed to the phial of cough tablets and said scornfully, "Do not expect me to do your work for you!"

Back in his chair he sneered, "You see my future clearly, eh? Though you did not foresee your own today, nor Stefan's."

"No, but I see yours," she insisted, "as clearly as you see mine. And for the same reason." The old brown eyes were rock-steady. "The same reason. My future is completely in your hands now, but yours is completely in mine . . . Mine and Stefan's."

Before he could reply the train roared on to the bridge.

As he raised his gun she raised her head, throwing back the veil from her contemptuous eyes.

Only in the final moment, as his trigger finger contracted and the building shook with the train's momentum, did she turn aside for a last grave glance at the youth in the silver-framed photograph.

Within ten minutes he was ready to leave, his despatch case full of papers from the lacquer desk that had several times made his eyes glint frostily. He had forgotten the old woman's last words when he reached the door and found that the handle didn't turn and that there was no latch or moving part on the big stainless steel lock.

He did remember, though, that she'd had to unlock the heavy door on his arrival and he remembered something else . . . the grandson had been a locksmith.

The key. One glance at the keyhole told him that no key on the bunch would fit it—it was far too small for any of them. Tiny. It was an absurdly small keyhole for a lock of that size and massiveness.

Irritably he dropped his case and began searching the rifled desk.

He was an expert searcher, but he found no key. The wheelchair, then? Nothing there. The body?

Anny Filipova's face was calm, the bullet hole hidden and only one red stain on her silver hair. He had just torn the frail chain from her neck, to find only a thin gold cross on it, when his eye fell on the phial of cough tablets and shock froze him.

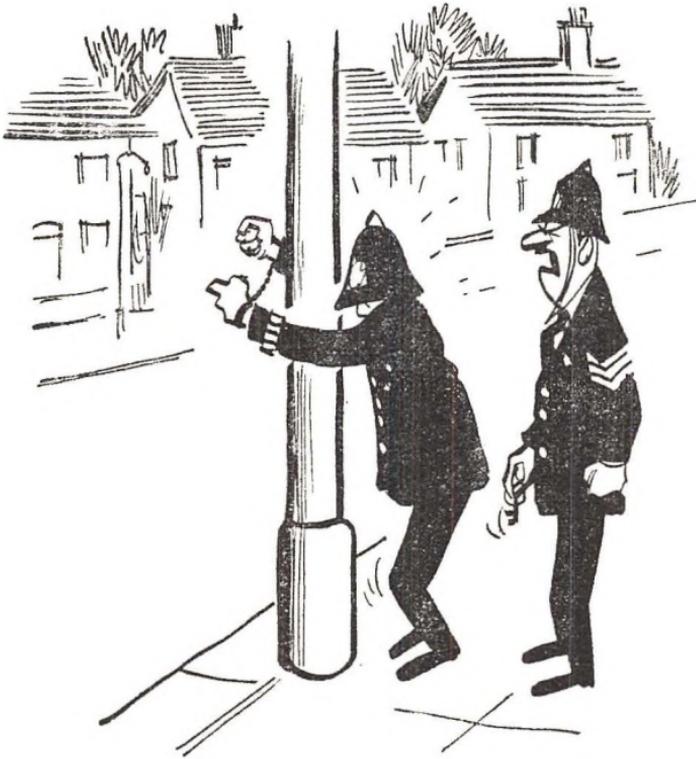
He had remembered how, facing his gun, she had swallowed something with difficulty and he had suspected a poison capsule. No, a cough tablet, she'd said, but . . . suddenly he knew beyond any doubt what it must have been.

He tore back the curtain and saw the sheer drop below and he drew his gun, though with no hope that it could shatter Stefan's massive lock. But then he heard heavy footsteps on the stairs and he remembered the policemen who fetched the old woman to her lunch every day.

He stared from the smiling photo of the young locksmith to the calm dead face of the old fortune-teller and heard the echo of her last words:

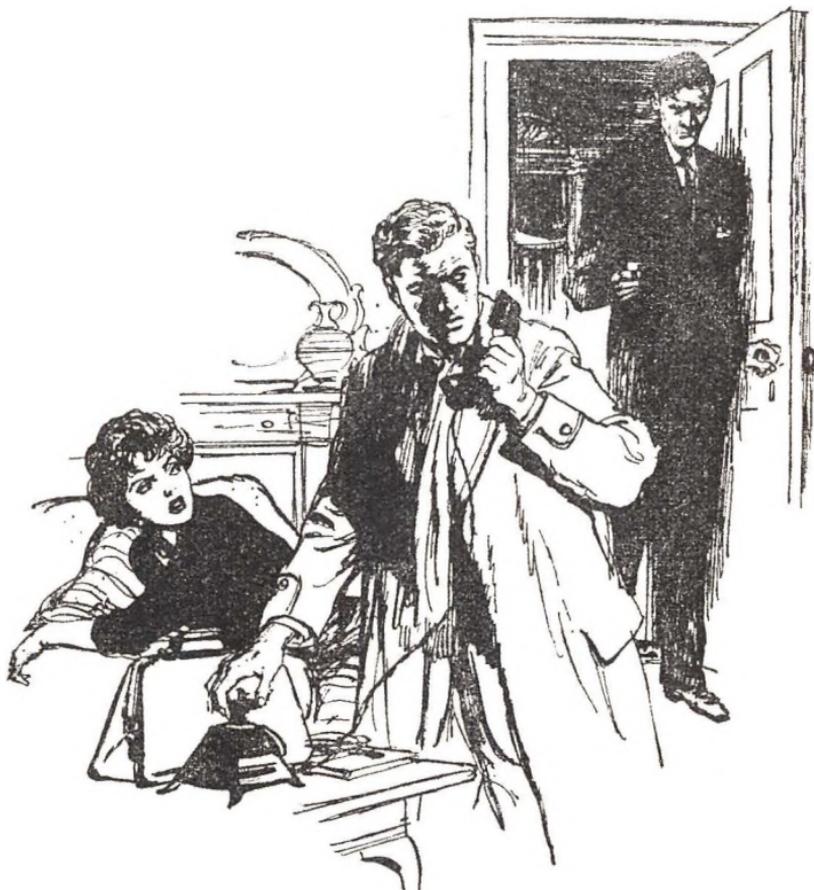
My future is completely in your hands; but yours is completely in mine, mine and Steĵan's . . .

© Mark Derby 1959



"I take it you didn't get a description of him?"

NIGHT CALL



THE phone rang, loud in the dark. Young Doctor Blain summoned his faculties from sleep, as he had trained himself to do, picked the phone up on the fourth ring, and said his name crisply.

“This is Connie Miller. Do you remember me?”

He cast back for remembrance, through the years of practice, through university, all the way back to school. Yes, the pretty one. The gay and popular one.

★ **Dramatic new thriller—
exclusive to **SUSPENSE****

By CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

Once upon a time a shy youth named David Blain had been permitted to take her to a dance. A painful and bewildering experience, for she had been a queen in that vanished world, and he a curiosity.

"Oh, yes, Connie," he said in his grown-up voice. Then, because it was four-thirty in the morning, he asked her what the trouble was.

"It's Mike. He's sick!" Now he could hear the choke of fear that so often came over the telephone in the night. "David, could you please come? Quickly? We are out at the old Benton farm, on the highway. Please?"

"What seems to be the matter with him?" he asked in the calm voice of the doctor who needed to know.

"He hurt his hand. It's infected and he's feverish. He isn't even making sense and I'm scared. Please hurry."

"Be right there."

Doctor Blain began to dress, wasting no movement. It must be ten years, he thought, since Connie Miller had married Michael March, the good-looking young man with the cleft in his chin, the restless pushing one, the one who was going places.

He hadn't heard anything about the Marches for a long time. Whatever they were doing now, back here, out at the old Benton farm, he couldn't imagine.

Well, he needn't imagine. He had been called out there. His grey eyes in the mirror caught his own grey eyes in his snub-nosed homely face with a grave reminding glance.

He left the apartment, and got his car out of the garage. His big powerful car. Twenty-nine-year-old, very human David Blain knew that it was not altogether "for the sake of his patients" that the doctor kept a new, mechanically perfect, very powerful automobile. It took off, smooth as silk. Very good business for the doctor—if it pleased the young man, too, so much the better.

He slid swiftly through the sleeping town. Out in the country, the fields were dark, the sky held only the daintiest hint of dawn. He passed a lorry or two, and a few people going to work.

David sometimes told himself that he must have stumbled on a key, a secret—something. People supposed that a doctor found it difficult, a constant ordeal, to rise and go whenever, wherever he was called. But this was not so.

When he had taken an oath, when he had subjected himself to a leading idea, he had made his life not difficult, but easy. To know exactly what he ought to do made everything simple. There were no questions to ask himself now, for instance—no doubt and no choice. No wondering whether he really wished to be responsible for the well-being of Michael March.

Couldn't a doctor's wife, he wondered, accept the idea, too, and find that the burden was easy? He had heard girls say that a doctor's wife let herself in for a terrible life. This had made him a bit cautious with girls. It would have to be the right girl. She would have to understand how simple it was. She would have to agree.

The big car ate up the highway. He soon came to the narrow side road that crossed some fields and led in to the old Benton place. The farmhouse was off the road, tucked back against a low hill.

David drew right up to the door. He got out into silence and darkness. No light showed in the house. It might have been deserted.

As he put his foot upon the low porch, the front door opened. "David? Oh, good. Oh, I'm glad!" She drew him in and as the door closed behind him, he found he could see dimly. She had her hand on his forearm, leading him to a place where light spilled through a doorway.

There was something frightened, furtive, a whispering quality, a tip-toeing about her. The ten years that had tightened and integrated David Blain had loosened and somewhat scattered the force of that neat, smart, pretty little high-school girl. Connie was a woman subtly blowzy.

Of course, she was anxious, and he made allowances. Yet her brown eyes did not quite meet his directly. They shifted. He realized with a bit of a shock that they were by no means friendly. They were distraught, haunted. Her hand told him how tense she was.

She was trying to smile, but the smile was a performance. "I'm so glad to see you. How are you, David?"

He was reminded of the queen, throwing a scrap of her attention to him, years ago.

He didn't tell her how he was. "Where's the patient?" he asked gently.

Michael March was in a back bedroom downstairs. Michael March, the one who had been going places, had come here. And this was no home. The furnishings were old and shabby and not particularly clean. The whole atmosphere reflected the taste of another generation.

It was only a temporary perch. So temporary that the patient, lying on the bed, was not even *in* the bed. He wore his clothes—a soiled shirt, wrinkled trousers. The cleft was still there in March's chin, but he was a sick man now, dishevelled, muttering with fever. His right hand was wound around with gauze. David looked at it and was appalled.

"This should have had attention long ago," he said gravely. "When did it happen?"

"Monday," murmured Connie. "Oh, David, please fix it . . . The doctor's here," she said to the man on the bed. "You'll be all right now."

"How did it happen? What did this?" David demanded.

"It was an accident," she said vaguely. Her hand touched Mike's forehead and David could see how the fingers trembled. "Oh, he is so sick. Can you do something quickly?" Her backbone, as he could see under the taut fabric of her rumpled dark dress, was rigid, as if it waited for a blow.

The doctor worked over the messy hand. He cleaned it as best he could, bound it, shot in an antibiotic and straightened from the task. He said quietly, "He'll have to go into hospital, Connie."

"No," she said rather stupidly. "We are going away this morning."

The patient's head moved and he murmured, "Connie—"

As she bent over, David rose and walked into the sitting-room next door.

He found the light switch, flicked it on, picked up the phone and dialled the hospital. Staring at a picture of somebody's ancestor, he wondered sadly how the Marches came to be in this strange place.

Maggie's jaunty voice said in his ear, "Memorial Hospital." Maggie Fowler was on the switchboard at the hospital from nine-thirty in the evening to five-thirty in the morning. She always said "Memorial Hospital" in that gay and liting manner, as if to assure whoever called by night that the hospital was wide awake and cheerfully ready for anything.

"Maggie? Dave Blain." He did not say, impersonally, "Doctor Blain," because he could so vividly imagine her nice square face bent into the light, the twist of the corner of her eyebrow. He took Maggie out, in the infrequent hours when

they were both off duty. Maggie was a dear girl. Maybe she was the right girl. The trouble was, David knew, that Maggie herself wasn't sure. She saw many things from her post in the hospital, and she wasn't altogether sold on the idea of joining permanently the ranks of those to whom "night" was not private and inviolate.

"I'm bringing in a patient," he told her now on the phone. "May need surgery. Will you try to get hold of Doctor Wilson?"

"Right away. Don't you want the ambulance?"

"No, I—"

Behind him Connie screamed, "No!" She flew through the door and flung herself upon him. "No, no."

David lowered the instrument and his right arm caught her shaking body around the shoulders.

"You can't telephone!" she said, hoarse with fear. "You can't call anybody! Put it down!"

He did exactly that. He put the phone down on the table. But not into its cradle. It lay there, alive.

He used both hands to hold Connie a little away so that he could look at her. "I'm afraid you don't understand," he said patiently. "That hand is a real mess, Connie."

"But you fixed it. He's better now. You've got to go."

"I haven't fixed it," he said quietly, shocked by this childishness. "I can't fix it. Not here. He's very sick, Connie. I'm sorry to have to tell you—but he may lose that hand."

"No." She didn't seem to take in his words at all.

"Or lose his life," the doctor said more sharply. "It's serious, Connie."

"You mustn't be seen here. Take your car. Go *away*. Hurry."

Patiently he started all over again. "You don't understand—"

"You're the one who doesn't understand," she cried frantically. "You don't know about John. He's gone into town, but he's coming back. If he finds you here he'll kill you!" Her voice was a shriek. "He'll kill us all!"

He slapped her cheek lightly. His right arm held her shoulders with all his strength until their shuddering, under his hard physical support, began to lessen. "All right," he said. "Now tell me quietly. What is all this? Who is this John?"

"He—he's Mike's boss. He hired Mike. He's gone out, but only for a while. You mustn't be here when he comes back."

"Hired Mike to do what?"

"To make—to work with explosives. Mike was in demolition work in the services. He—David, we haven't got time to talk. You've got to go. And hurry." He was still as a rock and she

gave him a push. "Now, please. If John finds out that I called you—or that anyone was here—" She began to try a softness in an effort to appeal to him, and it was a somewhat sickening softness. "I'm thinking of you, David," she said meltingly.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," the doctor said.

"Nothing to be afraid—" Her head went back. The cords of her neck were ugly with strain. "Why do you think we couldn't call a doctor long ago?" she cried. "Because John wouldn't let us. John wouldn't have anybody here. Or let us go anywhere. This is the first—I took a terrible chance! Well, you came. You did what you could. Now go—please. You don't understand—"

"Explosives injured that hand?"

"Yes. Yes, the first one. A part of it went off."

"The first what?" he said flatly.

"The first bomb," she said.

The doctor reached through confusion for his own steady guiding purpose that would tell him what he ought to do. "Mike is going to the hospital," he said sternly. "I'll take him there. I'll take you too. What is there to fear?"

"We can't"—now her eyes looked sick—"can't go into town."

"Why not?"

"We're only waiting for the money. Mike's pay. Then we're going away."

"Mike isn't going anywhere except to hospital with that hand," said David sharply. "Now stop this nonsense and go and get him ready."

Then she screamed at him: "You don't understand who John is! Mike can't go to town because—after this morning—" Her face broke. "Oh, David, help me. I don't know what to do."

The rigid spine had broken now; if he had not held her she would have fallen.

"The only way you can help me is to go away," she sobbed. "Right now. Before it's too late." Panic stiffened her and she pushed at him. "John won't be much longer."

"Connie—"

She looked into his eyes with a false, a grotesque coquetry. "Why should you be killed, dear David?"

He felt a great pity for her, who lived by nothing but the same old petty power of being a female.

"Who is this John? What is he doing in town?"

"I can't tell you."

"But you will."

"He's placing the bombs," she said in a high, hard voice. "The booby traps."

"Placing—where?"

"Oh, I don't know." Connie turned her head. "I wouldn't let them tell me. I didn't want . . . It has nothing to do with me. We had to have some money. We were in a jam. But John won't pay until after—then we are leaving."

David wasn't listening to the dreary voice. Bombs! In town? Where? Bombs set to go off? In a public place? For some reason he had a vision of mangled children. *He had to find out where.*

He said quietly, sadly, "Mike has been making bombs for this John to use?"

She was breathing in long panting sighs.

"For pay?" he said.

Her face flushed. "It was just a job. Mike didn't know, at first—"

"But now you do?"

"John would have killed us if we hadn't gone on. We couldn't do anything. Now please . . ."

David made no more reproach. There was too little to say and it was too late to say it. He felt great pity for Connie, and for Michael March. Sorry for all those who were lost, who had been going places, and taken short cuts, and had arrived here.

He said, "I'll take you both into town, right away. Mike to the hospital. You can go to the police. If you tell them quickly, and they stop this John— What is the rest of his name?"

She shook her head.

He helped her gently into a chair. "One minute, then we'll go. We'll get right out of this. Don't be afraid."

She sat like dough, sinking into herself.

The girl on the switchboard had listened in on the open line as much as she could, though now and then she had to deal with other calls. She had heard a woman screaming "No." Afterwards she had heard voices, but not the words. At last she caught Dave's voice again. "Maggie?"

"Yes, Dave?"

"I'm out at the old Benton farm. Evidently with some criminals." Her heart jumped, but she made no sound of alarm. "One of them is in town, right now, with a bomb or bombs. He is placing them somewhere. Like booby traps. I can't find out exactly where. Call the chief, Maggie. Right away. The man's name is John. That's all the information I can give him." His voice changed. "What . . .?"

Maggie could almost see his head turn. She waited, her heart beating slowly and steadily, her ears aching with listening.

In the farmhouse, Connie had lifted her drooping head. She

was saying in a mourning voice, "It's too late. Didn't you hear the car? He's come back. He's out there. He will have seen your car. Oh, David, it's too late. He'll kill us. He went into town to kill one man. What's going to stop him now?"

"Keep still," said David. "Don't speak." Into the phone he said, "Keep listening, Maggie. I'll try to find out more."

"I'm here," Maggie said.

David let the phone hang loosely a little away from his ear and poised his right hand over the dial. He listened. Yes, someone had come. The front door was opening. Now there were footsteps in the hall.

David looked down at the dial and began to make motions with his forefinger, as if only now was he trying to make a connection. This was deception, because the phone was open and Maggie Fowler was listening at the other end.

A man's voice said, "Better drop that."

David stiffened, as if he were startled, and lifted his head. He saw a tall, thin, dark-skinned man with cruel lips and too much white in his eyes. He held a gun in his hand.

"Drop it, I said."

David said icily, "Who are you?"

The wicked snout of the weapon kept steady. The man did not say who he was. "Drop it," he snarled.

"Put that gun away."

"Drop the phone, I said. Now."

Maggie, in the hospital, heard the line close as the phone went into the cradle. But she had also heard David's voice, saying, "Put that gun away."

Maggie Fowler's hands flew.

A phone shrilled in the thinning dark. The chief of police was in his bed. He woke and with elephantine patience he turned over and picked up the phone. "Yes?"

"Dad," said Maggie, and her voice was clear, incisive. "Dad, I had a call from David. He is out at the old Benton place. With some criminals. He says one of them, a man named John, is in town now, planting a bomb. Or more than one. Booby traps. And somebody is holding a gun on David."

Chief of Police Fowler blinked and reached for the light switch. The clock said five-ten. "The Benton place?"

"Yes, dad. Can you send—"

"Hold on. What's Dave doing there?" The chief's feet were already feeling for his shoes.

"He has a patient," Maggie told him. "Dad—"

"Bombs, eh?" the big man said. "Doesn't know where?"

If Maggie had known where she would have told him. "John, eh?" said the chief in some disgust. "I'll go myself, Maggie. Take it easy."

"O.K., Dad." She cut the connection, swiftly and sensibly.

She sat in her safe nook in the hospital, her nook that was, nevertheless, a clearing point for trouble. Maggie Fowler knew quite well that she was falling in love with David Blain. She also knew, and she had known a long time, that there was a decision to be made. There was a commitment that she must make with all her heart or not at all. And it was difficult.

But now David stood where somebody had a gun and had to be told to put it down. Someone who was a criminal. It was no time for self-examination, no time for nerves or lamentation. It was time to be cool and steady. It was time to *stay*, to *be* where she was, on duty. For Maggie Fowler, the world rolled towards the sun, slowly, slowly.

Chief Fowler rubbed the back of his head, dialled headquarters and gave orders. "Squad car better nip out to that farm. Take enough men and watch out—somebody is armed. And they are holding a gun on the doc, possibly. Get going. Meantime, put Nelson on this line . . .

"Nelson? There's some joker with a bomb or bombs loose in this town. Name of John. Big help, eh? Don't know what he's after. He's planting them somewhere. Turn out everybody. Check the schools first . . . Yes, we're working blind. It's a small chance we'll find anything. But do the best you can. I'm going out to the farm."

He rose from the edge of his bed and reached for his clothes. A minimum of twenty minutes, he estimated, for the car to get out there. A lot of bullets could leave a gun in twenty minutes.

The chief had been through some tough years and he did not get excited. Still, he would go to the farm himself. Because it was David Blain out there, in a jam, and the chief thought well of young Doctor Blain. Because the chief also loved his daughter Maggie very much, and he had a dream for her, in a careful, parental sort of way.

But it was the bomb business that really worried him. Booby traps? Some unsuspecting souls would set off some bombs? It was his business to see that nobody got hurt; but a bomb is a small object to find in a town, even in a small town. If he went to the farm, it might be the best and quickest way to find out where the bombs were.

David Blain put the phone down. He was taking the measure

of the man with the gun all the while. He was a criminal, David judged, in a vicious, reckless mood, on the verge of some triumph. He had just planted some bombs. Now his objectives would be, first, to make sure nobody found the bombs too soon, and second, to get away free. What was there to be done with a man in such a mood?

The first thing was to convince him that David knew nothing about any bombs. So David stood up very straight, very cold, very calm. "I am a doctor," he announced. "There is a sick man here. It's my business to see that he is taken care of. What are you doing here?"

"Who you calling?" the man growled.

"The hospital, naturally," said David icily. "This man must go to hospital. We may have to cut off that hand."

This was sharp and brutal. David was pulling his rank, his prestige, his authority. And projecting an idea of ignorance and indifference about anything but his patient.

"Too bad," said the man with the gun. His eyes turned suspiciously. "How did you get here?"

"The sick man called me, of course," said David with cold scorn. He didn't even look at Connie. "As he should have done days ago. Whoever you are, put that gun away. Get it into your head, please, that I'm not a burglar. I'm a doctor."

The gunman moistened his lips. His head turned. He looked at the woman. Connie was slumped in the chair. She had given up. Something about her utter passivity seemed to relax the man.

David saw that the gun was not quite so sure of itself now. *Something*—some second thought that weakened the man's resolution—worked in the mind behind the small sharp eyes in the long thin face.

The gunman said, "Look, doc, I'm a friend. I mean, I'm staying here too. I—"

"If you live here, why didn't you call me?" David cut in, attacking, keeping the advantage. "Do you know you have neglected that injured hand until it's very serious? He may not even live."

"Pretty sick, eh?" the man murmured, and the gun was no longer the extension of a stiff and hostile hand, but slanted down.

"He's delirious," snapped David. "That's how sick he is. Now I'm taking him to the hospital where we can do something for him. I'll take the lady too."

The man said, "Listen, I got a car. I'll take him in to the hospital." This was craft of some kind. Perhaps it was the second objective. Get away.

"My car," said David immediately. "Have some sense, man.

My car's got the doctor's sign on it. I could get him there long before you."

"You mean"—pale lids came down slyly—"the cops would let you go as fast as you want, eh? That your car outside?"

"Certainly it's my car," David said impatiently. "This is an emergency. A life is at stake. Try to understand that. Get a blanket," he barked at Connie, "and your coat."

The gunman had lowered the gun entirely now. "Look," he said, smoothing his face to an expression of innocence, "I'm sorry, doc. I didn't know, see? I mean, a stranger walks in at this time of the morning—you can't blame me."

"I understand," snapped David. He took two long strides towards the bedroom door. So far, so good. But perhaps he had put a wrong idea about his car into the gunman's head.

"Hold it a minute," the man said, and David looked back. The man's face was all sly again. Suspicious. The gun still hung slack in his hand, but it was ready to come up. *Now where did I make a mistake?* David wondered.

"Calling the hospital, you said you were. So how come, now, you're *not* calling the hospital, doctor?"

David snapped his fingers. "Right." He forced a quick smile, a nod of thanks. "You put me off, waving that weapon around," he said rather crossly. "Excuse me."

There was no way out of it. He had to call the hospital. And now the gunman came sidling to stand very close. David could smell a sour, evil purpose about him. The gunman was going to be listening in, going to be sure who was called and what was said on both ends of the line. A wrong word would swing him back to the hostile side.

David dialled with a steady finger. *Oh, Maggie*, he thought, *don't go all female—don't ask curious questions—not now*. Three lives could be hanging on the exact tone of Maggie Fowler's voice.

"Memorial Hospital," she sang out blithely.

"This is Doctor Blain," said David in his coldest, most staccato manner. "I am coming in with an emergency."

"Yes, doctor." Maggie's voice was staccato too.

Bands across David's chest relaxed. "This may be an amputation," he went on in the same cold, quick way. "Notify the necessary people, will you?"

"Doctor Pater is on call, doctor," Maggie said crisply.

And David's heart leaped up and danced in his breast. There was no Doctor Pater, but "pater" means "father." So the chief of police had been called already, and Maggie—bless her—was telling him so!

David's mind worked like lightning. The gunman was still

listening—yet if more were needed to be told David knew the intelligence, the steady understanding with which he was connected.

What other information could David send into town? "He wanted to kill one man," Connie had said. One man. That could mean that the bombs might not be in a public or crowded place. They would be waiting somewhere for an individual.

David said into the phone, "You might tell Doctor Pater to look at the case history of a man named Francis. Francis Ferdinand. Give him an idea of what we are up against."

"Francis," Maggie repeated flatly, obediently, as if she were writing this down. "Ferdinand."

The thin man was watching him. By David's side the gun twitched. "It's a moot question whether we can save this thing," he said. "But we can try."

"Yes, doctor."

"Right." The doctor put the phone down safely. He wanted to grin. How many times had he and Maggie, when one friendly argument or another had come to an impasse, said to each other, "Well, it's a moot question."

And how many times had he or Maggie said to the other, "Let's look it up in the moot." So for the big unabridged dictionary in Chief Fowler's den they had their private name. The dictionary was the "moot." Maggie would catch on.

The impulse to grin was wiped away from David's mind. "I'll get the patient into my car," he said.

The man said, "I'll be going along with you, doc. Maybe I can help, eh?"

"As you wish," said David coldly. He walked past the thin man, past the gun, seeming preoccupied, purposeful, going towards his patient. He swung into the back bedroom. The thing to do, now, was stall a little bit until the police came.

On the bed, the patient lay with bright eyes. David marched over to him and then glanced back. The gunman had not followed him. This was odd. Yet it was something to be grateful for, and to be used.

David slipped the stethoscope around his neck—it was what the layman forever saw a doctor do in the movies. He did not put the earpieces into his ears. He bent and said softly, "Buck up, Mike. We'll get you to the hospital pretty soon now."

"John's back." The patient was lucid.

"Right. I'll get you out of this somehow."

"Never make it."

David fussed with the stethoscope.

"Not if John goes with us," Mike March said.

"Maybe." David glanced behind. "But I'll stall. The police are on their way. The chief's been notified already."

"Chief Fowler?" Mike March's green eyes with the brown flecks in them showed a flicker of bitter amusement. "Chief Fowler won't get out of his house alive," Mike said.

"What do you—"

"There's a booby trap wired to his back door and another one to his front door. He won't get out alive through any door."

"Fowler!" David's heart took a swing.

"That's John Barca in there. Been in prison for armed robbery. While he was in prison his kid brother's gang robbed a tailor's shop. The kid got shot, running away. Fowler did the shooting. The kid died. So Barca is after Fowler."

David stared into the green eyes.

"The kid's gang beat up the tailor so he's paralysed for life. But John isn't worrying about that. He wants to avenge his brother. I guess he's a little crazy."

"You knew this—"

"I took on the job," Mike said, "before I knew any of this. John's got money and the pay was fine. I figured I'd never know, but I was told, and then I was a prisoner. Didn't have the guts to . . . take a crack at getting out."

The bright green eyes made no excuses. They accepted guilt and folly. "Connie shouldn't have . . . called you," Mike said. "Too bad. You're in it now."

"I've got to let them know," David said.

It was perfectly possible to think of two things at once. Part of his brain had continued to listen to Mike's low mutter. Another part considered what was happening in town.

Chief Fowler had been called up. Maggie had said so. What would he do? He'd dress. He'd sally forth. If he had already gone out of the back door, towards his car— David looked at his wrist watch.

Then he felt something hit him a mental buffet that was staggering.

There was worse, if worse there could be.

It was now twenty-two minutes past five—and Maggie would be leaving for home in eight minutes.

Maggie! Mangled and bleeding! *No*, he cried in his head.

"We've got to get word," he said.

"How?" asked the sick man. In his eyes, brightly, ruin and tragedy and defeat were accepted.

David thought furiously. Get to the phone, of course. But how? Against a man with a gun who was even now in the very

act of murder? Get to the phone and tell the police, in *his* hearing? Not likely.

Overpower him? But how?

Stall until the cops came, if indeed they were coming? No, not now. No *time* to stall.

Go out on the highway with a sick man and a woman so frantic as to have been stricken stupid, and a gunman who wanted the doctor's car? Would David get to another telephone? Not likely. To town in time? No, never make it. Would he get to town at all?

If he could only make an excuse to call the hospital once more, save Maggie anyhow. Yes, that was it—he must try.

The patient said in a whiney voice, "Will I lose my hand, doc?"

David glanced behind him. The gunman was standing there. The gun was not in sight.

"We'll do our best to save it," said the doctor soothingly. He straightened up. "I'm going to bring him out," he said as casually as he could. "You came in a car, didn't you? Will you get it out of the way of mine, please?" Orders—firm and polite, but doctor's orders.

"Guess I better do that," the gunman said meekly. He turned, went through into the hall, and David actually heard the front door slam. *Telephone!*

He brushed past Connie, who was standing in the way with a blanket on her arm, helpless, passive, dazed and dependent. The lights were off in the sitting-room and he did not turn them on. He snatched up the phone. It came up with a strange lightness. The phone had been cut from its moorings.

Chief Fowler had his shoes laced and had started through the house towards the back door when his phone rang. He turned in his tracks, put on the living-room light again, and went to answer it.

"Dad? Dave called again."

"What happened?"

"I don't know," said Maggie. "Somebody was listening, I could tell that by the way he spoke. I think he's fooled somebody. I told him you were on the job. He had a message."

"Go ahead."

"He said to tell you to look up the case history of Francis Ferdinand."

"The case history of *who*?"

"A man named Francis. Ferdinand. That's what he said. Dad, it's got to mean something."

"*What* does it mean, then?"

"Dave was there with some criminal. Dad, he wouldn't have said a single word that didn't mean *something*."

"Well, I don't get it. I've got to move, Maggie, if I'm going to make it out there."

"Wait. Dad, you better look it up in the dictionary."

"Dictionary?"

"Dave wants you to. I know that. David wants you to look it up in the dictionary."

"Look what up, for the love of Pete?"

"He meant something," she insisted. "I'm telling you—everything he said must have meant something. Dad, has anybody gone out there?"

"On their way, right now."

"Will they—will they be care—"

"If Dave's O.K. so far," the chief said, "you don't need to worry too much, honey. You come along home."

Maggie said "Yes." The chief could almost hear her swallow down her fear. She's a good kid, he thought proudly. "But the message," she said. "Francis Ferdinand. Look it up, dad. Please."

"Some message," the chief grumbled. "O.K., Maggie." He hung up.

Sounded ridiculous, that message. Was Dave trying to tip him to the identity of this criminal? Was there a case in the police files—anybody named Francis? Or Ferdinand? "Look it up in the dictionary." Now that *was* ridiculous.

In the corner of his den on its stand was the huge book. Chief Fowler chewed on his mouth. Then he walked into the den, put the light on. It would only take a minute. Francis—Francis Ferdinand.

But names wouldn't be in the dictionary. Frowning, he turned away. Better get on out there, where the trouble was. He started back through his house towards the kitchen door, to his car in the garage. He stopped. Wait a minute—yes, there were names in the dictionary. A whole long list of them. A Pronouncing Biographical—

He turned back and went swiftly through the rooms. His thick forefinger turned pages.

"Francis of Assisi . . . Francis I . . . Francis II . . . Francis Ferdinand: Archduke of Austria. Nephew of Francis Joseph I. Heir presumptive . . . Assassinated."

Was this the message? Why? What did it mean? To assassinate meant to kill somebody, like maybe an archduke or president or big shot. The chief stood still, pushing his lips in and out.

Pretty soon he moved to the phone and called Nelson at head-

quarters. "Listen, I got reason to believe this bomber is trying to assassinate somebody. Who's in town that's a big shot? Better take a run out, cover the mayor. And how about Judge Fox? Who else is there?"

The chief listened patiently while Nelson thought out loud about prominent men. He glanced at his watch. Wouldn't catch up with the squad car now. So they'd manage without him. He would simply go on down to headquarters in a minute. Take over there.

At five twenty-seven, Connie went numbly out of the farmhouse, carrying the blanket. After her came David, supporting most of the weight of a staggering man. It was getting light. The stubble in the fields made lines across the land. There was some traffic moving on the highway.

The gunman had moved his car, and in the growing dawn David could see him leaning in at the doctor's car, studying the dashboard. "What are you doing?" David said.

"Checking the petrol."

Without the key, the petrol gauge wasn't registering. David guessed that the man was actually working out how to run this car when he eventually took it over. He said, "Open the door."

The gunman did so. Waited. The gun, no doubt, was waiting in his pocket.

"Get around the other side and help me put him on the seat."

The gunman obeyed the doctor's orders. For now. For how long?

David's brain, scrambling, touching and leaving a hundred wild ideas, had settled on one.

At five twenty-nine Maggie's relief came sauntering along.

"Bad night?" she asked cheerfully.

Maggie said, "Kinda." She got up and unhooked herself from duty.

"Go on home and get some sleep," said Joan Dixon, yawning.

Maggie said, "Do something for me, Joan? Call this number?" It was the number of the old Benton place. "If anybody answers, just say you are calling to confirm Doctor Blain's call."

Joan looked up at her curiously, but did as she was bidden.

"The line is out of order," sang the operator. Maggie sighed.

"You look terrible," said Joan, disconnecting. "You don't catch me taking night duty. Nights are for sleeping. Why don't you join the human race?"

Maggie smiled feebly.

"Go on home, I said." Joan went to work.

Maggie looked at the clock. Her eyes were large in her face. She had done all she could. There was no connection any more. She put her jacket over her arm and walked away.

David heaved and struggled to get the sick man into the car and lying down on the back seat. Mike March was in pain and did not seem to care, one way or another, about the place or time or anything. David, most vividly aware of place and time, took the blanket from Connie and tucked it around her husband. "Now," he said to her, "I want you to help me."

In the faint light she looked as if all her brains were limp in her head. She went where she was told to go, did what she was told to do, and had no hope of anything.

"Can you sit on the floor?" asked David.

Connie got into the back and sat on the floor.

"Put your back against the seat back, that's it. Now—" He took her flaccid left hand and put it against Mike's hip. He put the lifeless right hand against Mike's shoulder. He said, "I want you to hold hard. I shall be in a hurry and I don't want him bounced off that seat. Brace yourself and hold hard. Can you do that?"

"Yes," she said listlessly. He was very sorry for her in a submerged part of himself. Connie was only a pawn and he must help her. He did not judge her. He did not give her any hope either. It was better if she stayed in that lethargy.

"Now"—he glanced at the gunman—"you don't absolutely have to go," he suggested.

"Oh, I want to go," said the man quickly. "Friends of mine. Yes, I'm going."

The man was transparent. Concern for a friend was so obviously the last, the least likely thought that would enter his mind.

"Get in front with me then," snapped David. He was still giving the orders. But not for much longer.

David's mind had gone well ahead and made its prognosis. He knew that the gunman would bring out the gun before they got to the end of the narrow side road. By the time they got to the end, the gunman would be giving the orders. The gun would be rammed into David. David would obey or die.

If he obeyed, the big fast car would be sent turning to the right, not to the left. The left was the way along which the police might be coming, the way to town, to the hospital. Oh, no; the gunman who wanted to get away free would make David turn to the right, and they would fly off into deep country and if the sick man died of his poisoned blood, what did the gunman care?

And the bombs would be set off. Nobody would have been warned.

Yet if David defied the gun it would simply go off. Then who would save the sick man's hand or life? Or try—if it were not already too late—to save the chief? Who would save Maggie?

David had to stay alive; stay intelligent; stay acting and being. He had to think ahead and he had thought ahead. He had chosen a plan.

Now he had a few more moments. A part of the length of this side road.

"Hold on, now," he said to his passengers, "because I'm not going to spare the horses."

"Nice car," the gunman said. His meekness was false. He exuded danger. He bided his time and his time was soon. He watched David press buttons.

David backed and turned the car. Then the big beauty moved off, smooth as silk. David got her up to speed as if she had been a rocket. He was tearing down the narrow way. At this speed, he could make no turn into the highway traffic. But the gunman hadn't thought of that yet.

Now? David wondered. He stepped her up, went faster. *Now!*

He pulled his elbows in across the wheel and made his two hands into a cup of flesh to receive his own skull. Then he stepped hard on his power brakes.

The jolt was phenomenal. John Barca, the gunman, unbraced, flew forward into the windshield. The windshield did not break, but Barca's head possibly had. David did not care very much if it had. The gunman was out. The menace of him was suddenly gone.

David took in a breath. "You all right, Connie?" He turned to see. He had placed her where she would be hurt the least. The jolt had only rammed her back into the upholstery. His patient, he saw over his shoulder, had slid off the seat on top of her. But she broke the fall for him, just as David had planned it.

So far, so good. He didn't even wait to reach back and unscramble them.

Five thirty-five. Maggie would be on her way, surely. Walking home, going up the path, feet on the porch.

There was nothing to do but ask his big beauty for speed again. The car responded. He skidded into the highway, screeching left by an indignant lorry. What now? What was quickest? Telephone? Where was the first telephone?

Then he saw the police car. It was humming along fast, without a siren. He touched the brakes gingerly, wrestled the wheel, and swerved crossways into its path.

The police car screamed to a stop and men with cold, angry faces tumbled out.

"I'm Doctor Blain. Here is your bomber." David wouldn't even let them speak. There wasn't time. "You got communication? Get on it. Quick. Two bombs are planted at Chief Fowler's house. Back door. Front door. Hurry. And stop his daughter. She'll be just coming home. Right now!"

A man in uniform stared for a fraction of a second, then ran back to his seat and picked up his communicator.

Two others stood beside David's car, looking a thousand questions.

"Take this man out and hold him," David said. "He's had his head bashed, but he is no patient of mine. His name is John Barca. Fowler, in the line of duty, shot his brother. He planted the bombs on Fowler's doors."

Strong hands pulled at Barca's body. David was just as glad the man was unconscious. He could see the officer in the police car, talking, talking—sending the warning through the air to other minds.

David got out and hauled Mike March's body back upon the seat. The doctor's patient was in agony. "Doctor?" he said. It was a cry for mercy, help and mercy. It was the cry that David Blain must not ignore.

"Got to get him to the hospital," David said to the police, "right away."

"O.K., doc," they said with a certain respect. "We'll take care of Barca. We'll see you."

David backed, turned and went ahead. He could hear behind him the sound of pain, the sound of weeping. His patients.

But had it been in time? Had the chief met injury or death? Had Maggie gone running home? Into what? *Had* he been in time?

Doctor Blain did not know and had not waited to be informed. Bitterly, he knew what it was he must do. *He* couldn't hang around out on the highway waiting for messages to return. He couldn't go haring to the chief's house, either, to see for himself what had happened to his girl. Other men, dedicated to other things, had their own directing ideas. He must trust to his. As other men must trust him. It was the meaning he saw in his life.

This time, it wasn't easy.

Five forty-five.

He pulled into the receiving dock for emergency patients at six in the morning. Attendants came and helped get Mike March

out of the car. March was as good as unconscious now. Connie was just a ghost, walking in a mist. A meaningless ghost, haunting nobody unless it was herself.

David helped her into the emergency room. Doctor Parker was there. He and David bent over the injured hand. Decisions were to be made. This was the work and it had to be done.

Oh, God, where was Maggie Fowler? Whatever had happened, it was over. All that was left was to know.

Doctor Parker agreed that they might give the hand another twenty-four hours. Perhaps the new drugs . . . The patient would be watched, and in any case he was in the right place.

Connie lay back in a chair against the wall. Spent. David put his fingers on her wrist. "What now?" she asked him, gasping. Floating. A pawn. Nothing to direct her.

"Just rest," he said to her kindly.

He went to a phone and called Connie's father. "Mr. Miller? David Blain. Connie is here at the hospital. In very bad trouble, I'm afraid."

"I'll be right down. Is she ill, Dave?"

"It's her husband, but Connie needs you."

"I'll be there. Thanks. Thanks very much, Dave." Connie's father seemed to have a direction.

David turned from the phone. A nurse was giving Connie a cup of coffee. David sent her the responsibility with a nod, and the nurse, with a nod, accepted it.

David had now done all that he ought to do. He ran up the stairs to the hospital's first floor. Joan Dixon was at the switchboard. "Where's Maggie?"

"Oh, she's gone home, doctor. A long time ago."

David turned away. The foyer was dim; very little daylight could get in. The sounds of the working hospital clattered in the branching corridors. But there was nobody here in the dim and silent foyer. He started towards the front portal. He saw a big form coming through, blotting the light.

"Hey, Dave!" Then Chief Fowler was holding David's right hand hard. "You had me on the phone to every big shot in this town. Who'd have thought the big shot was me? But it worked out. The word got to headquarters and I got out of the window. Say, March is here, is he? And listen, where is Maggie?"

David swallowed in a dry throat. "Did they get the bombs?"

"They sure did. Two of them. Mean little gadgets."

"Then she's all right! She must be all right!" David felt a trembling begin.

"She mightn't have been," Chief Fowler said, and his big voice wasn't perfectly steady. "But she didn't come home."

"Dave! Dad! Dave!"

Maggie came running out of a dark corner. David opened his arms and Maggie, without any hesitation whatsoever, walked into them. "I was in the phone booth—talking to headquarters. So I know . . . what happened. Dad's all right! Dave, you—"

"Sure I'm all right," the Chief said. Then he sent his big feet stepping around them. He had tact. He also had business. He was going to talk to March.

David held on to the girl in his arms. He wasn't going to let her go. "It was you, Maggie, that had me crazy. I found out where the bombs were—I knew you'd be going home."

"How could I go home?" she said. Tears were in her eyes. "I happen—happen to need to be sure that *you're* all right."

"Me, too," he said. "Need you." And he did. She was his need and his desire. "Maggie, why was it you didn't go home? That you just stayed here?"

"That's simple!" Her square face was illuminated and beautiful. "I knew where you'd be. If you could be."

"You knew—" He choked.

Maggie curved her hand at the back of his head. "Oh, Dave, of course I knew. You had a patient for the hospital. Don't I know what you live by? Don't you think I understand?"



Suspense Prize Crossword

From the many entries for the Prize Crossword Competition published in the February issue of *Suspense*, the first five correct solutions opened have won a Guinea Book Token for each of the following: R. Keane, The Covert, Orpington, Kent: Mrs. N. G. Holdsworth, Bell Hall Terrace, Halifax: Michael Sarafian, Chipping Sodbury, Glos.: Miss R. Ward, Penhill Rd., Bexley, Kent: W. A. Bailey, Tyne St., Hull.

Correct Solution: Across: 1, *Berkely Mather*. 10, *Regular*. 11, *Read her*. 12, *Nine*. 13, *Sever*. 14, *Clod*. 17, *Custody*. 18, *Spinney*. 19, *Nominal*. 22, *Salamis*. 24, *Evil*. 25, *Atoms*. 26, *Asta*. 29, *Climate*. 30, *Radical*. 31, *Egotistically*.

Down: 2, *Engines*. 3, *Kill*. 4, *Larceny*. 5, *Murders*. 6, *Trap*. 7, *Echelon*. 8, *Transcendency*. 9, *Friday usually*. 15, *Coins*. 16, *Dials*. 20, *Mailing*. 21, *Lateens*. 22, *Samurai*. 23, *Musical*. 27, *Bait*. 28, *Idea*.

REAL GONE MAN



By PATRICK ALDERMAN

Hi, Herbie . . . Oh, sure, if you want to know what happened, I'll tell you—you won't believe me, mind. Let's just light another weed . . . Aah, that's better.

Now let's see . . . It was about two months ago, Saturday night. I remember because I was driving my Mum mad with my new record—you know, the new E.P. of Skittzie Freeman's Hot Five—real cool stuff. Well, Danny come round and suggested going down to the club—not having much else to do, we trailed along there.

On the way he told me about some new bops that Louey Schnider had made up. Danny-boy reckoned it was the latest. You know Louey, he's really got it. He's so Hi Fi he don't jive with the girls; he reckons they spoil the motion. He bops by himself in the corner. A real smooth cat all right, that boy. He's real gone.

Well, we gets down to the club, and there's Louey having a Coke with the boys. We had a round and then Danny asks Louey to show us his routine. With Ernie on drums and Bugsie on bass, we turned off the main lights and threw a spot on Louey. We lounged about and then Louey started.

Man, it was real—the greatest! He really threw it, boy. Slowly Ernie built up the beat on the drums, and Bugsie followed up. As it got more so, we seemed to go hippo, like a rabbit when it watches the serpent dance.

By this time Louey was going round faster and faster. The

place seemed to get darker, all shadowy, but Louey was carried away by the beat. The jive came to a frenzied climax, Bugsie really pouring his heart out into that bass, Ernie giving the drums all he had . . . Who is this Gene Krupa guy, anyway? And all the time Louey spinning round and round, up and down, eyes closed, then staring open, and the room seemed to move round with him, everything spinning round with Louey, his shadow leaping and jumping on the walls.

By this time I got a bit scarey like, I can tell you. There was something wrong with the jive now. Louey had left Ernie and Bugs behind, was going it alone, like a madman trying to find a way out. I got real uneasy sitting there—it was as if Louey had stumbled on some old savage jive, some wild dance that had been buried in the past. Then I was clenching my teeth, scared stiff, willing the music to stop. At last Ernie brought out a final terrific roll on the drums.

This may sound daft, but suddenly the floor sort of opened up and swallowed Louey. We ran and switched on the lights and found that the floor was O.K. but Louey had gone—not a trace of him—and we haven't seen him since.

He was real gone, all right.

You say you want me to go down to the club, Herbie? Sorry, boy—I don't go there no more. Matter of fact I've joined a musical appreciation class. Yes, I'm just going out to get an L.P. of Beethoven's 6th. Got to go? Well, see you, Herbie.



WHAT'S THE CRIME, PLEASE ?

It was nine-fifteen one fine, light summer's evening when Bill and Mary Jackson, keeping their well-planned date with crime, together approached the house of Lady Brassock in a London mews.

Its front door was conveniently unlocked and Bill lifted the latch, his thoughts on the famous Brassock stamp collection. All was silent and they slipped into the living-room. Suddenly a voice barked out.

"All right, you people," snapped her ladyship's butler. "Over against the wall and be quick about it!"

"We've done nothing against the law," whined Mary.

"We haven't stolen anything," protested Bill. "And anyway the door was unlocked."

What offences, if any, have been committed by Bill, and by Mary? Check your verdict with our Crime Expert's, on Page 125.

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Catch the Killer!

A HUNDRED MILES UP

By FRANK HARVEY

WHEN Tony Revere stepped into the conference room of Dillingham Aviation Company, and saw Colonel Jim Coy's face, he knew it was going to be rough. Colonel Coy was Air Force liaison officer on the X-17 rocket plane—a grim looking man with a chestful of ribbons, who was never happy even when things were going well. When things went wrong—and from Coy's expression they were going wrong right now—he could be as nasty as anybody Tony Revere had ever dealt with.

But Colonel Coy didn't fire the gun this morning. J. T. Dillingham, president of the company, fired it.

"Tony," J. T. said, "I've got some bad news. Very bad. Dave Silk has just quit."

Tony Revere was smoking a cigarette. He took it out of his mouth and stubbed it in an ash-tray, looking at Dave Silk's empty chair at the conference table. He could feel his body tightening all over, like the coiling down of a heavy spring. Dave Silk was project pilot for the X-17, the rocket plane the Air Force was counting on to gather heat data for its inter-continental ballistic missiles.

Those missiles would slash down out of space at thousands of miles an hour. Unless their nose cones could withstand the savage temperatures developed by the friction of the air, the warheads would disintegrate or explode long before they reached the target.

The X-17 was designed to zoom up to five hundred thousand feet—a hundred miles out in space—then turn around and come screaming back at a fantastic speed, with a man in it, gathering heat data as it came. Up to now this job had been handled by



huge, unmanned missiles at a million dollars a shot, and the results had not been satisfactory.

There was, of course, one great drawback with the X-17. It was fitted with a cockpit cooling system which could chill a thirty-storey building on a blistering August day, and a thrust reverser which slowed it as if a giant hand had caught it in mid-air. But flying a hundred miles straight up was not a piece of cake. Tony Revere hadn't tried to minimize the danger when he had hired Dave Silk. But Silk hadn't seemed scared.

"Look, J. T.," Tony said now. "I drove Dave Silk home last night. He didn't say a word about this. Are you sure there isn't some mistake?"

"No mistake," Colonel Coy said curtly. "We had Silk here ten minutes ago. He's quit, all right."

"It was money, Tony," J. T. said. "Dave wanted more—a two-hundred-thousand-dollar bonus to fly the high-altitude test."

Colonel Coy laughed in the nasty way he had. "Oh come on, J. T. Let's not play games. It wasn't money. It was guts. I knew Silk couldn't handle this the first day I laid eyes on him. I tried to tell you people, but . . ." He looked at Tony Revere.

"I can even tell you the exact point when Silk began to panic," Coy went on in his flat, rather husky voice. "It was when old Dr. Strughold began to brief him on the dangers of outer space—"

"Well, Colonel," Tony Revere said, "it's not exactly a picnic."

"Of course, it's no picnic!" Coy said harshly. "Nobody ever said it was! But Silk was so busy combing his hair for the TV cameras that he didn't realize it until now." He paused. "Now," he said, "it may be too late. Silk was ready to make the five-hundred-thousand-foot test this week. It took him a year to get ready, and I'll be frank. We can't waste another year. This missile programme won't wait."

"Colonel Coy." It was Major Clark Jennings, one of the chase pilots, who spoke.

"Yes, Jennings?"

"I've got two thousand hours in jet fighters, sir. I'd like to volunteer for the X-17."

"Had any rocket time, Jennings?"

"No, sir."

Colonel Coy shook his head. "Last summer," he said, "Captain Milburn Apt was killed in his first powered flight in the Bell X-2 rocket plane. There's no substitute for rocket time, Major Jennings. And you can't get it quick or cheap."

Rocket time, Tony Revere thought.

A soft pressure enveloped his heart and his fingers tightened in his palms. He wet his lips, but did not speak. There was one man in this room who had rocket time: fourteen powered flights in the Navy Meteor in 1950. His name was Tony Revere, now fifty years old, now vice-president of Dillingham aviation, rusty in his flying, soft as mush.

"The only pilot who could jump into the X-17 in a hurry," Colonel Coy went on, "is Pete Everest. But Pete's leading an outfit in Germany at the moment."

Tony Revere said, "It won't be necessary to get Everest, Colonel. I'll fly that five-hundred-thousand-foot mission myself."

In the sudden stillness he saw Colonel Coy's flat, fighter-pilot's eyes watching him, and the two chase pilots, Jennings and Fox, looking at him as if they had never really seen him before.

And then J. T. Dillingham said, "That's crazy, Tony. You're fifty. And the X-17 is not a toy."

"I know I'm fifty," Tony said. "And I know what the X-17 is. But have you a better suggestion?"

J. T. Dillingham looked down at the table. Tony Revere knew that the big boss had five million dollars of his own money, over and above the Air Force appropriation, tied up in the X-17.

The Air Force wanted a plane to probe the heat barrier, but J. T. had additional plans. He had in mind a transport rocket which could jump across the Atlantic Ocean, a hundred miles up in the wild black yonder, in less than half an hour.

"How about you, Colonel?" Tony said. "Do I have the Air Force's blessing?"

"I know about the Navy Meteor at Edwards," Coy said. "I wasn't there, but I heard it was a fine show." He whistled soundlessly through his teeth, not taking his eyes off Tony Revere, then said, "I want a younger pilot, naturally, but I'll have to admit I'm like J. T. I don't know where to find one." His eyes hardened. "O.K., Revere. But don't drag your feet. We're in a hurry."

When Tony told Lois in the kitchen of their Apple Valley home, later that day, she did not faint or threaten to leave him, or do any of the other things which test pilot's wives were always doing in stories. She looked at him and bit her lower lip. "Well," she said, "for once I have to agree with that horrible little Colonel What's-his-name. I didn't think Dave Silk would do it, either. He was too pretty . . . I won't sleep for a month."

She was a slender, blonde woman, very pretty—prettier, he thought, than when they were married and he was flying upside-down at air shows. It hadn't been aviation that brought them together—Lois said aviation was for the birds. She had just happened to fall in love with a crazy test pilot named Tony Revere.

Now, in the kitchen, Lois said, "You know what I wish, Tony? I wish I could fly one of those insane projectiles, and you had to sit here while I was up flying at nine million miles a second!"

Tony grinned at her.

She looked at him wanly, and smiled. "You're hopeless," she said. "But I guess I'm stuck with you."

The X-17 was a long needle of stainless steel with razor blades for wings. On its nose was the all-important gadget the Air Force wanted to test. It was a heat deflector, a knob of ceramic material almost as hard as diamond, which could glow like the sun if it got hot enough, but not melt or vaporize. It would punch a cool hole in the lower atmosphere around the earth, so that a big missile could sneak through without blowing up from the heat of the friction.

Tony did not have to study the X-17. He knew it by heart. It had a conventional jet engine and controls for flying below seventy thousand feet. Out in space, of course, conventional

power and controls would be useless. There would be no air to feed the motor or to react on the ailerons, elevators and rudder. So the X-17 had a separate set of controls and power for outer space. It carried liquid oxygen and boron—fuel which made mere high octane seem weak as water—and the plane was guided like a missile. The rocket motor swivelled inside the tailpipe in response to the directional control in the cockpit. Finally, there was a speed brake—a clam-shell device which sprouted out of the fuselage and locked in place behind the rocket blast, reversing thrust.

Tony went into training like a prize fighter. He cut out alcohol, took regular exercise, and even put his cigarettes—the hardest act of all—on the top shelf of the china cupboard. He went up in a Lockheed F-104 and practised “weightless flight”—which was possible by pushing over the top of a screaming climb and holding the stick forward. You were on top of a high-speed parabola—the plane’s force cancelled out gravity—and you floated up into the seat belt like a balloon.

Out in space, when he made his turn back towards the earth, he’d be weightless in the cockpit of the X-17. The X-17 was not fitted with an ejection seat—for a very good reason. If something went wrong a hundred miles above the earth, there was no point in ejecting. You’d be just as dead outside the plane as in it.

After a few days of flying the X-17 at low altitude on jet power, Tony announced he was ready to go high, and they moved the test over to Edwards Flight Test Centre. At Edwards, Tony would have Rogers Dry Lake—eight miles of sunbaked mud which was smooth as a super by-pass—the world’s safest landing strip if something went wrong.

Nothing did. The X-17 was tame as a kitten. Tony flew it fifteen hundred miles an hour the first day, on ordinary jet powers, and the second day he flung it to a hundred and twenty-five thousand feet, turned her round, and brought her straight down. Then he cut in the thrust diverter to see if it would work.

It was smooth as silk. In the fully closed position, it slowed him as if he’d thrown out a drag chute. He passed through fifty thousand feet and the two chase pilots, Jennings and Fox, closed in with their F-104s.

“Hey, Tony,” Clark Jennings, the Marine major, called over his radio. “See any angels up there?”

“Didn’t get high enough,” Tony said, grinning at Jennings across the narrow gap.

“Never mind the angels,” Cliff Fox’s voice said from the other side. “Just put my name on the list to fly that bird. She’s the sweetest fighter these old eyes have ever seen.”

Tony grinned and eased out of his dive. Those ancient eyes of Cliff Fox's must be all of twenty-seven years old; but you didn't judge age, in this business, by how many years a man had been alive. He and Jennings had been hand-picked by the Air Force for this project.

But on the morning of the big test, when Tony crawled into the cockpit of the X-17, the fact that he had two good chase pilots didn't buoy him up much. He adjusted his dark glasses inside his face plate and went over his check list with slow care. He felt old, weak, flabby—even though he'd knocked off twenty pounds and was fitter than he'd been in years. He knew what was wrong. He was scared. Every test pilot was, before a really dangerous flight, though he'd never admit it. If he had a cigarette, Tony thought, even if he just held it in his mouth unlighted, it would help.

A voice in his earphones said, "Jennings to X-17. Radio check. How do you read me, Tony?"

"Loud and clear," Tony said.

"Ready?"

"About two more minutes, Clark," Tony said. Then he called Cliff Fox. "You all set, Fox?"

"All set," Fox radioed.

Tony was sweating heavily. It was very hot in his pressure suit and face plate, and the Mojave Desert, in the distance, quivered like the open door of a blast furnace as he and the chase planes rolled out for the take-off. They were using the fifteen-thousand-foot concrete runway and taking off towards the west.

"X-17 to chase," Tony said. "I'm rolling."

He advanced throttle and the X-17 moved sluggishly down the runway, and with him, as one plane, rolled the two fighters. He passed the big green glass hangar and peered out of his wind-screen towards the highway where Lois would be parked to watch the take-off. He broke ground, sucked up the wheels, and the X-17 surged to four hundred miles an hour in the clean configuration; but he held low. He went over Lois' car at five hundred miles an hour, about thirty feet up, caught a flash of her waving hand, tipped her a salute, then he and the fighters went up in the blue like three blazing little bullets.

Tony lit sixty thousand feet in a straight climb, reached the California coast, and flipped the switches which would close his air scoops. He heard the servos grind, felt the scoops thump shut, and cut his jet power. The X-17 moved in silence, like a shell in flight, and his gloved hand moved swiftly along the fuel panel. He was too high to run on the earth's atmosphere. From now on he must use his rocket fuel.

He said, "Revere to chase pilots. I'm headed upstairs. Try to stay under me at all times, if you can."

He moved the throttle to full power. He was over the Pacific. Directly below was the dark face of the sea, and out ahead was a white, opalescent haze line, a kind of horizon of its own, high above the water. He was at Mach 2.8—about eighteen hundred miles an hour—and he eased back on the stick and the haze line fell away and he was looking up into the deep purple of outer space.

The sound of the rocket engine, at full power, began to fade away and presently was lost completely. The engine was wide open, but there was no air to transmit its blast. He was in the utter silence of deep space.

A voice, surprisingly close and warm, spoke in his earphones: "Ground control to X-17. You're doing nicely, Tony. Passing through two hundred thousand now. Prepare to reduce power."

He rogered.

He was looking down at the altimeter when something struck the plane like a shell and flung him viciously into his seat harness. He yelled involuntarily, in pure terror, tense for the sudden blinding flash of disintegration. The plane did not explode. It began to flatten out, at tremendous speed, and a voice in his earphones said sharply, "X-17! You all right? You're off course!"

Tony struggled erect, peering frantically about. "I—took a meteor—I guess . . ."

"Are you in control?"

He didn't answer. The altimeter in front of him stood at four hundred and forty thousand feet. The Mach meter must be cockeyed; it was at 5.8.

"Abort mission," the radio said faintly. "If you have control, turn back."

Frozen, unable to think, he looked out. He was in the middle of night. Below him, the sea curved in a huge, luminous ball striped with bright streaks—various cloud formations—and there was no sight of land.

He co-ordinated—or tried to co-ordinate—his stick and rudder, but the controls seemed to have jammed. And then he realized that stick and rudder would do him no good at this altitude. He was not in an aeroplane now; he was in a missile—a missile moving at five thousand miles an hour towards the rim of the world.

Then, quite suddenly, Tony got his wits back. He flicked on the thrust diverter. There was a remote jar in the eerie silence as the clam-shell device locked shut. Then, very abruptly—too abruptly—he gave the X-17 full reverse power. It shuddered

violently and tried to get away from him, but he caught it with the switch and got it turned back east, towards the coast of California, and the speed dropped quickly: Mach 5 . . . Mach 4 . . . Mach 3.

Then, just before he got down to the level of the atmosphere, the speed brake seemed to let go, suddenly, and he surged forward. His gaze raked frantically along the panel. The lox gauge was on zero. He was out of exotic fuel, and the thrust diverter was inoperative.

A ghostly voice, very remote and weak, said, "X-17 from ground radar. We have you again, Tony. You're about three hundred miles from shore. Do you read?"

He was in the atmosphere now, travelling at terrific speed. He tried to move the stick. It seemed to be locked in concrete. He yanked on it frantically without results and then, through the right side of his canopy, he saw what the matter was. The right wing-tip was gone. The meteor had blown it off and had hopelessly jammed the right aileron by locking the stick. And now, nightmarishly, the X-17 began to roll slowly, lazily over on its back, and Tony shouted into his mike, "Ground control! I'm in trouble! Send me chase! Send me chase, quick!"

There was no reply. The X-17 rolled over and over and the G-loads became savage. It was no longer possible for Tony to speak or move. The world was a steady alternation of sickening lightness and grinding, crushing weight as the rocket plane tightened its death spiral.

He was down to thirty-eight thousand feet, moving at great speed, and blacked out, when the 104s found him. They had been keeping under him as best they could, and were within twenty miles when his call for help went out. They had come towards the speck on their cockpit radar scopes at fifteen hundred miles an hour, and as they got close to it, Clark Jennings began to peer out for a visual contact.

He would have missed it, but for the X-17's spiral. One of its razor-blade wings caught the sun in a bright wink and Jennings' voice said tautly, "O.K., Cliff. One o'clock down. Let's go get him!"

The two fighters plummeted downward together, both pilots staring with terrible intentness into the haze—for if they overshoot the crippled X-17, there'd be no second try. It was Jennings, again, who saw the tell-tale flash of a wing in the sun.

"Got him," Jennings said. "Follow me in."

"Roger," Cliff Fox said. "With you, Major!"

Major Jennings missed his try. The X-17 twisted over and

slipped away from his groping wing as the three planes screamed towards the sea at a thousand miles an hour, yet, in relation to each other, moving almost lazily.

Cliff Fox was luckier. He rolled carefully with the crippled rocket, through a complete cycle, and then moved in, cold as ice, and stuck his wing under the wing of the X-17. And, quite suddenly, the X-17 was not spiralling. It was in straight and level flight, and Tony Revere was coming slowly out of the dark, full of pain and nausea, unable, as yet, to see or think.

Cliff Fox snapped: "Other side. Quick!"

"Be right there," Major Jennings said.

It was not a new manoeuvre and it worked now. The two chase pilots held the X-17 solidly between them, headed inbound.

Finally, when they'd hit the coast-line and were over the San Gabriel Mountains, Tony's brain began to function and his eyes came into focus. By the time they were over the Dry Lake, he was sitting up and talking. But he wasn't saying much. Because he had a passenger with him now: death.

Major Jennings said, "Fox, fuel check?"

"Ten minutes. How about you?"

"About the same."

Tony knew what the score was. After ten minutes they'd have to land. Death was very close behind him now. He could almost feel its clammy breath on his neck. The instant the chase pilots turned him loose, the X-17 would go back into its graveyard spiral.

Major Jennings' voice came to him then, and through his terrible fear the drawling, almost bored delivery took him by the throat. "Hello, base control," Major Jennings said. "Get the fire trucks and the ambulance out on the lake. We're going to bring in an airplane piggy-back, and slide her on."

It was a deadly business, for to make it work the two chase planes would have to be very low and very slow, and if the slightest thing went wrong there would be three huge fireballs cartwheeling down the white surface of the dry lake.

Fox and Jennings made the approach from the south, to give them the longest part of the lake for jockeying. They eased down, lower and lower, until they were skimming the smooth, cracked mud with their wing-tips. They held the X-17 delicately and precisely between them, until they were about a mile short of the fire trucks, and then Jennings said, "Mark!" and they slammed their throttles wide open and pulled ahead and held their breath, for if the X-17 dug a wing it would be the end.

The X-17 hit and bounced, turning slightly sideways, but her stubby wings saved her. They didn't dig in. The fuselage

banged heavily, cocked at an angle, and began to spin slowly in circles, as it skidded towards the frantically manoeuvring trucks at two hundred and fifty miles an hour.

And then, in a plume of white dust, the X-17 slid to a stop.

Tony didn't remember getting out of the plane. That part was a blank. He did remember people crowding around him and the drive to the locker room to be peeled out of his pressure suit. Colonel Coy gave Tony the bad news at once.

"I'm sorry, Tony," Coy said, "but I might as well be frank. No pilot in his right mind would take the X-17 out in space today. Even if we'd let him—which we wouldn't. We knew there were meteors, but we didn't know they were thick as hailstones."

"You don't want the X-17?"

"No. We do not."

The door to the locker room opened and J. T. Dillingham came in with a big red-faced two-star general, whom Tony recognized as General Burke of Air Defence Command.

Tony stood up, knees quivering with reaction from the flight.

J. T. was grinning as if he'd just stepped out to dig his garden and had hit pure uranium.

"Don't keep the poor fellow in suspense, General," he said.

General Burke smiled slightly. "Well, it's like this. The Air Defence Command has been watching the X-17 for a long time. You've heard of the big economy drive in the Air Force?"

Tony made himself smile at this obvious and unpleasant bit of history. He didn't get it.

"The Ballistic Missile Division is not only loaded with money," General Burke said. "It's the white-headed darling of everybody from the President down to my own barber. So we just sat back and let the missile boys pay out on the X-17 and waited to see what they'd come up with. Today we found out."

Burke hesitated, and Tony felt a wild and crazy kind of excitement building up inside.

The General smiled. "I won't tease you any longer, Revere. We like the X-17. It'll kill any bombers or fighters we're likely to meet. And the little rascal will run down certain kinds of supersonic missiles, the ones with wings. We want it in big production as soon as you fellows can get your lines set up."

"What the General means," said J. T. Dillingham, grinning happily, "is that we've hit the jackpot."

Tony Revere didn't say anything at all for several moments. Then, "Does anybody happen to have a cigarette?" he asked gently. "I haven't had a cigarette for over a month."

THE DEVIL

THE fox did not raise its head from between its paws, but its two large, luminous eyes spoke to the man who had just stopped in front of the cage.

The fox knew that he could understand. It had known the moment their eyes had met, when the man, strolling away from the crowded beach, had suddenly found himself in front of the old trailer caravan that had once been painted red, the silent old gipsy woman who had once been attractive, and the cage in front of her that had once been a strong packing-case.

In the other part of the home-made cage—for a captive fox needs very little room indeed—a monkey with black, intelligent human eyes was scratching itself thoughtfully. Although this shook the whole box, the fox took no notice. All its attention was concentrated on the man, and in its eyes the man could see the sky and the winds, the trees and the fields, the rivers and the lakes the fox was telling him about.

By GEORGE LANGELAAN



HIS DUE

"Show me your hand," said the gipsy suddenly, leaning over the cage.

"No, thank you," mumbled the man.

"Show me your hand. I shall not tell your fortune or ask you for money. You are an animal man and there is something I want to see."

She was right. He was an animal man in the sense that not only did he love animals, but he also understood them and they understood him. Even when he was a little boy—in the days when there were still plenty of horse-drawn vehicles—he had always been able to make a fallen horse get up from a slippery road, then simply talk to it softly until he had driven the fear out of its eyes and its limbs no longer trembled.

"How do you know? Are you an animal woman?"

"Of course. How else could I recognize you and read your thoughts?"

"What thoughts?"

"Your thoughts about that fox. Now show me your hand."

"What do you want to know?"

"Something I feel about you but which I do not understand," said the old gipsy woman, grasping the back of his hand and drawing it, palm up, almost to her chin.

She no more than glanced at it, it seemed, before dropping it and spitting out the stub of her cigarette.

"And now you know?"

"Yes. You killed your dog."

"It was sick and suffering."

"You killed it for another reason."

"Perhaps. So what?"

"Nothing. It hurts because you are an animal man and it was useless murder."

"It was not murder!"

"Call it what you like; it is murder in your hand, therefore in your heart."

Is it murder to have an old and sick dog put to sleep? Perhaps it is for an animal man. But there was also Angela, blonde and frail Angela who kept whimpering about coming home to a house full of dog's hair. The doctor had been categorical—no dogs or cats, or furry animals of any sort, ever again. A relapse would be fatal. After Angela had been taken away to hospital he had gone

to the local library and read about asthma and some of its causes.

Poor Angela had had a terrible time. One night they had called him out of bed; for an hour or two they had feared the worst. The next day Angela, though still very weak, had smiled and squeezed his hand when he had told her that he had had the vet put old Tom to sleep. It had been a ghastly business. Tom had known that the vet was putting him to death, but he had died quietly in his master's arms, since that was what was wanted of him.

That same night he had again been called urgently to the hospital, but death had beaten him to it. Angela looked a little paler and seemed very small, but never before had he seen that calm happiness on her face. He had sobbed like a child, and the matron had dragged him away and tried to be kind to him. Her attitude might have been different had she known that he was sobbing because of Tom, his faithful dog.

"How do you know all these things?" he asked at last, looking up into the wrinkled face of the old gipsy.

"The devil can always read evil."

"That does not make sense. Besides, you are not the devil."

"Are you so sure that the Evil One is a man? You men are so inordinately proud, that even in wickedness the most wicked must of necessity be a man! How do you know that I am not here to tempt you?"

"In what way, may I ask?"

She eyed him for some time before answering. "With a little pact, of course. Another chance, in exchange for your soul."

"What do you mean by another chance?"

"You were thinking of giving my fox another chance, weren't you?"

"Perhaps I was."

"He does not need it. He has had several. You also do not need another chance, but you feel that if you had one, you would act differently, don't you? Therefore, I offer you another chance in exchange for your soul."

"Sorry—I'm afraid I don't believe in the devil."

"Fine! That makes the bargain all the easier, doesn't it? You get another chance, yet you don't feel you are really giving anything in exchange."

"How do I know you can give me another chance?"

"You don't have to worry about that. If I don't, our contract doesn't hold, that is all."

He looked at her for a full minute without saying anything as she lit another cigarette and drew on it first with one nostril, then with the other.

"All right," he said at last, with a sheepish grin. "Just for the fun of it, where do I sign?"

"In here," said the old gipsy, opening the back door of her caravan. She climbed up without even looking round to see if he was following.

There was very little standing room between the folding table, the stove and the huge bed. Clawing into a basket full of ribbons and balls of wool and what looked like the skeleton of a tortoise, she at last produced an old-fashioned quill pen and a broken penknife, with which she sharpened and split it anew.

"Sign here," she said, handing him the pen. She held open the bottom of a roll of parchment which she appeared to have drawn out of her apron pocket.

"With what ink?"

Shrugging her shoulders, she drew a long pin from the red silk kerchief on her head. With an impish grimace she jabbed the tip of his left thumb deeply and cruelly. He jumped and repressed a cry as the blood welled up. He felt both angry and foolish as with what little pride he had left, he dipped the pen in his blood and signed.

"Were you christened?" she asked.

"No. You see, nothing can save me." He grinned. "Now what?"

"Nothing. Go back to your hotel and start again."

"Start what?"

"Go. You will soon find out," she said, opening the door.

He jumped down. As he walked away he noticed that though the fox had not moved it seemed to be grinning from ear to ear. He walked quickly away.

It was three months since Tom was put to sleep and Angela died. He had thought of asking for a transfer but somehow he had been unable to drag himself away from their little Paris flat. When the date for his holidays had come round he had simply driven off to the Brittany seaside resort where they had stayed for the last five years. He had gone to the same hotel and asked for the same room, number twenty-seven. "Madame will be coming later?" the proprietor had asked, not noticing his black tie. He had not answered.

It was only on going for a stroll after dinner on the night of his arrival that he had at last discovered what it was that had made him come back. It was Tom, of course; Tom, whose happy little ghost he could almost see running ahead of him.

He did not miss Angela half as much as Tom. On getting back to the hotel that first night, he had glanced at Angela's bed as he

slid into the one nearest the window. He felt no particular emotion. But then, looking down at the carpet between the two beds, he had felt the sting of tears in his eyes; it was the carpet on which Tom had slept, snoring loudly, after days on the beach.

"The key is not here, monsieur," the porter said, when he came in from his meeting with the old gipsy.

"Oh, it's all right. I probably left it in the door," he said, walking over to the lift.

As he went along the second-floor corridor towards his room he heard a sniffing. It reminded him of the way Tom used to sniff eagerly under the door whenever he heard his master's footsteps.

The key was not in the door, but now a desperate sort of whining and scratching seemed to be coming from under it. White as a sheet, his heart thumping madly, he turned the handle and opened the door. In a flash, yapping and almost frantic with joy, Tom was jumping up against him.

"Tom . . . Tom! My dog!" he gasped, collapsing into an armchair.

"Oh John—don't let it! It's ruining your suit."

"Angela!"

"John—what on earth is the matter? Don't look at me like that. Anybody would think you had just seen a ghost. And anyway, why didn't you come to meet me at Saint Malo? I had to get a taxi and it cost goodness knows how much—"

"But Angela—Angela, my darling!"

"John! Let go. You're crushing the life out of me. Let me look at you. John, have you been drinking or something? Where on earth did you get that black tie? It's horrid. And what have you done to your hand? Look, your handkerchief is covered in blood."

"Oh, yes, of course . . . No—I mean—it's nothing. The tie? I don't know, really. I suppose I could find no other." Tom rushed into his arms again.

"That dog! I've just done up your bed—as soon as you'd gone it got up on to it as usual. And the quilt is full of dog's hair! Where were you that you couldn't take Tom with you?"

"I—er—I just went for a stroll. . . By the way, Angela, how is your asthma?"

"My what? What *are* you talking about? You know quite well that I have liver trouble and my heart is weak. Where on earth did you get the idea that I suffered from asthma?"

"I'm sorry, dear, but I was so worried when you were in hospital . . ."

"That was six years ago, when I had my appendix out, and you weren't a bit worried. As a matter of fact, I remember the only thing that worried you was when Tom started scratching, and that was because you had both been living on tinned lobster."

He did not answer. He just stood, looking and trying to understand. He had never suffered from hallucinations before. It was all simply impossible. He found himself gazing into Tom's eyes. Without a doubt, Tom knew and understood. He suddenly wanted to take him out, out somewhere where they could be alone. He gazed with wonder at the long leather leash which he had just found in his raincoat pocket.

"Yes, that's right. Take the dog down to the beach while I unpack and get changed. I'll join you later."

"Yes, all right." With his back to Angela he opened the wardrobe and took his passport out of the pocket of his other suit. Tom would have to wait a few moments longer. He had remembered the two documents which he had slipped into the back of his passport—he would soon know whether he was crazy.

The sweat moistened and seemed to tighten his collar as he unfolded Angela's death certificate and the hospital bill. Both documents were dated April the thirteenth! And today without a shadow of doubt was July the eighteenth.

He had fought it off as long as he could, but now he had to admit that his adventure with the gipsy must have been more than a joke. He had to admit that— God! he did not want to think about it. He must see her again. Stuffing the papers away, he ran down and out of the hotel.

The large field at the back of the beach was empty. The grass was crushed and trodden where the caravan had been. Tom growled and circled round a patch of burned grass.

After a while he walked on to the beach and sat down, watching his dog race to the water's edge. Seeing that his master had not followed, Tom raced back, rolled over wildly in the sand, shook himself, then settled down with his head on his master's knee.

"Where on earth did you get to?" asked Angela, joining him a little later. "Of course, I know your dog comes first, but . . ."

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't think—"

"You never seem to think of others at all, do you?" said Angela, lighting a cigarette.

He did not answer. He thought of what Angela had said. He had heard it often. He usually denied that Tom came first, even though he knew full well that she only said it out of spite. She had apparently not noticed that, for the first time, he had not made his usual protest. He doubted, however, that his silence

would be sufficient. If this was really to be his second chance he must decidedly do something—otherwise, sooner or later, he would again find himself sacrificing the dog.

"You are quite right, Angela," he said at last.

"Of course I am . . . What are you talking about?"

"About Tom. You are quite right. He does come first, Angela, and—there's not a lot you can do about it."

"So! I was right all the time then?"

"Yes, you were right."

"You're a beast!"

"I was . . . Not this time, though." He patted his dog as his wife stamped out her cigarette and then got up and walked away.

When he got back to the hotel that evening, Angela was changing for dinner. She completely ignored him, and he knew immediately that he was in for what he termed a "silent storm." They usually lasted two or three days and most times ended in a first-class row. This time, however, he made no effort to be pleasant or to talk as if nothing was wrong—a method which had occasionally succeeded in averting these moods. He simply took no notice of Angela.

Angela took great pains with her make-up and hair-do, and then stood waiting by the door while he made Tom settle on the rug by the bed—dogs were not allowed in the restaurant. Once outside, Angela put on her ravishing and irresistible smile, making it quite impossible for anyone to guess that they were not a laughing, happy couple. He tried to play up and look unconcerned but knew that it was hopeless.

No sooner had they settled down at their usual table, by the window overlooking the sea, than one of Angela's acquaintances came across the room.

"How lovely to see you back again, Angela," she almost screeched. She barely nodded at John. "I noticed your husband yesterday, but I knew that he would not be without you for long. I'm sure he must be quite miserable without you."

"Oh, no. Men get along very well without us, you know. And he has his dog. I have only just returned from a three months' stay with my mother and I am not at all sure that he is really pleased to have me back," explained Angela, with a sweet smile for her husband who knew perfectly well that it did not count. Such public smiles never counted when a "silent storm" was raging.

"And how was your dear mother?" asked Angela's friend.

"Still alive, worse luck," said John.

"John, dear! You really musn't say such awful things,"

laughed Angela—but without looking up, he knew that her eyes were blazing.

When he lit his pipe at the end of the meal, Angela delicately gathered up her handbag and scarf, and with another extremely tender smile she swept out of the room.

Five minutes later he went round by the kitchen to collect the bowl of soup and meat for Tom's dinner. But when he got back he found that Tom was not there. He stood still for a minute wondering what it meant. He put the food down and then ran downstairs. Yes, the porter had seen Madame going out with the dog a few minutes before. Just another part of Angela's game, he thought. People had to realize that although it was an impossible dog she was its slave, partly because she was kind to animals and partly because it belonged to her dear husband.

Annoyed, he filled and lit another pipe and waited on the hotel steps. He was still there when she appeared, alone, at the end of the street. She was running awkwardly in her ridiculously high heels. "Tom—Tom fell off the cliff!"

Without a word, without a look to see if she was following, he started running towards the sea. Panting and gasping, he scrambled over the rocks at the end of the beach. Night was falling—it would soon be too dark to see.

His trousers were torn and wet, and one of his knees was bleeding, when he at last saw Tom in a sandy hollow between two rocks. Stretched out on his side, the dog seemed to be sleeping, but on reaching it, he saw that a drop of blood was trickling from its nose. . . exactly as it had trickled at the vet's three months earlier, when it had gasped its last sigh.

Tom was cold and heavy and stiff in his arms when at last he got back to the hotel.

"Oh, John—is it . . .?"

"Yes, Tom is dead," he said, laying his dog down on the counter in front of the horrified porter. "Have it put in a box of some sort, please. I shall bury it myself later."

"Oui, monsieur," said the porter, beckoning the lift boy.

"John! Don't touch me. . . You are filthy with blood and mud—and look at the dog's hair all over you!"

"All right, all right! But now you are going to show me what happened." Holding her by the wrist, he dragged her towards the car park.

Without a word he unlocked their car, made her get in, and drove off. He went carefully through the village, then sped quickly up the steep, twisting road that led to the cliff-top.

He parked, then dragged her out of the car, and grasping her wrist he almost made her run down the cliff path. Other people

were strolling along the path, enjoying the evening air and watching the lights twinkling across the bay.

"Where did it happen? Show me," he said quietly.

"There, at the end of the path."

"Where?"

"Here," she said, walking to the edge of a rocky platform and pointing at the grass slope that bent out of sight some ten feet further down.

"What happened exactly?"

"I don't know—Tom was running around and went too near the edge, over there, where it wasn't able to get up again."

"Why had you untied his leash, Angela?"

"Because it was pulling and yanking at my arm, as usual."

"Where did you unleash him?"

"Before we reached the car park up above."

"And what did you do with the leash?"

"I—I don't know. I must have let it drop somewhere later. . . I was in such a state."

"Angela, you're lying."

"John! How dare . . ."

"The leash was still tied to Tom's collar when I picked up the dead body from the rocks down below. Also, Tom's body was on the other side of the cliff-head. He couldn't possibly have fallen from here."

"Well, he did . . . I've had enough of this! I'm going back."

"No, you don't," he said in a low voice, again grasping her arm. "Angela, you killed Tom—you murdered the poor beast!"

"John—you're hurting me!"

"I say you picked him up where the path narrows and you deliberately threw him over!"

"John! You're mad! But if it satisfies you, yes—yes, I did throw your beastly dog over the cliff! Now leave me alone!"

John said nothing. Instead, he twisted her arm back, and in spite of her screams, he lifted her over the safety fence and made her run down towards the grass slope . . .

One after the other the five witnesses who had been standing on the path explained to the police how, as the slope got steeper, the English gentleman had given his wife one tremendous push that had sent her shrieking and stumbling, before she had finally dropped down out of sight.

"She was a murderess," he had explained to the stunned, horrified witnesses. He had then driven quietly back to the hotel, where he had been arrested an hour later.

"My dear monsieur, you cannot tell a French jury that you

killed a ghost!" expostulated the little French lawyer, walking up and down the cold, musty-smelling parlour of the big provincial prison. "We can prove that your wife died three months ago. All right, good! Then it was your mistress you killed. We can tell the jury that you loved her, that you were jealous, that she no longer loved you, that she was going to run away with another—anything like that is feasible and they will listen and understand. Of course they will want to know why she tried to pass as your wife, how she got a passport that seems to prove she was your wife. There will be difficulties—but nothing impossible, you understand. But if you try to tell them that you killed a person already dead and buried, they will think you are trying to fool them."

"I don't care—they can think what they like," said his client, accepting one of his cigarettes. "How about that gipsy woman? Have you been able to trace her?"

"No. Besides, she would only make your case worse. And monsieur—for heaven's sake, leave the dog out of it. That would be disastrous . . ."

Almost a year and a half later—French criminal procedure is slow, perhaps the slowest in the world—on a cold, foggy November morning, the priest, the lawyer, and the British Consul who had come specially from Brest the night before, walked out of the provincial prison. In the main courtyard that morning a man had been guillotined.

Not a word was exchanged as the three men walked along the silent street. The priest was still holding the little wooden cross which the condemned man had kissed.

"Excuse me," he said, bowing slightly to his two companions. "I must give the devil his due, as the English say."

He went across the street towards an old gipsy woman leaning against a wall, drawing on a cigarette which she had stuck up her nostril.

"You want to know about the Englishman, don't you?" said the priest, stopping in front of her. "He died bravely."

"That is not what I want to know. What have you been doing with him?"

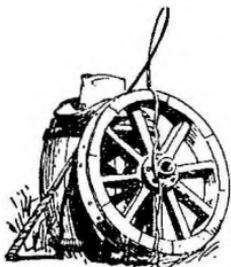
"This morning, I christened him."

"The cheat!" hissed the old woman, puffing viciously at her cigarette as she walked away.

Although the walls were dripping wet and the street slimy with mud the spot where the old gipsy had stood was quite dry, and near the dry patch of ground the priest saw a little heap of ashes—the sort of ashes which a burnt piece of parchment might have produced.

THE MIKE HALLIGAN STORY

In the trek westwards the fight against death increases with every mile. The further from civilization the tougher the men who have survived. Mike Halligan is such a man—and he stands between the Wagon Train and the West.



IT was Flint McCullough who first suggested that the wagon train should take the Halligan Pass. Both Seth Adams and McCullough knew the risk, but they had to have water. The drought that year had been worse than usual.

McCullough had scouted the usual water holes, but the rains hadn't come. The water holes were dry, the water barrels were low, and the horses needed watering—needed it bad. Adams had outriders scouting every day, but when dusk came and the wagons were rounded up, their stories were all the same—streams dried out.

So Flint voiced what they were both thinking. Spooning beef tea into his mouth, he said: "We'll have to turn south, Major—head for the Halligan place. He's got plenty water."

"Halligan won't exactly welcome us." Major Adams cupped his tin mug of coffee. A man needed his brew after a day's trek.

"No other way out of it," McCullough replied. "Turn south and we'd make it day after tomorrow. Then we could take the wagons through the pass."

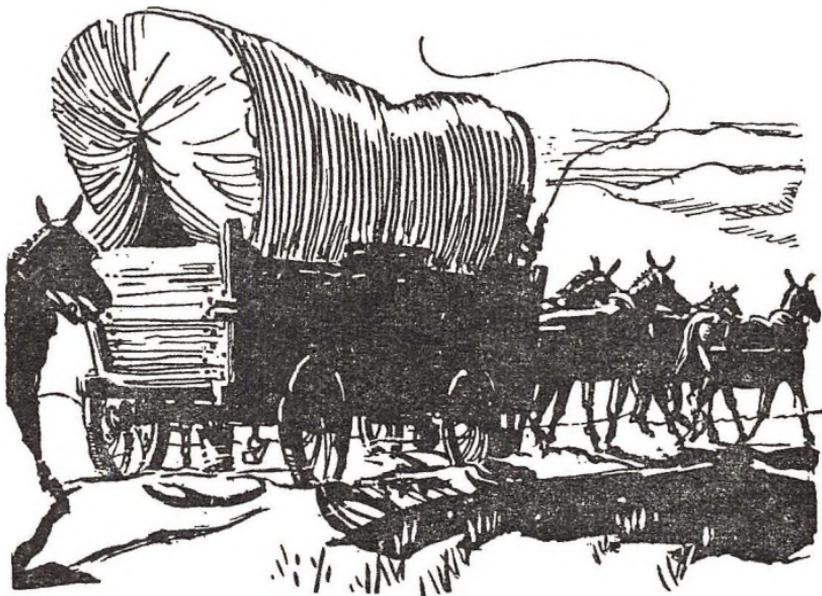
Adams sighed. "O.K., you ride ahead. And McCullough—take it mighty careful."

Flint might have pulled it off if Dan Brady hadn't ridden out on the second day, when they were bordering the range. Dan Brady was a bull of a man, large-boned, harsh, hard drinking. Adams could never figure him out. Sometimes he would work like ten men; sometimes he would be as gentle as a lamb. Like the way he was with his kid brother, Tim. Brady seemed to sense that Tim was a weakling who needed the strength of a brother to lean on.

Other times Brady would pick a fight for no good reason, and he was too quick to use his gun. Major Adams distrusted the man—he could be a trouble-maker.

That day Brady, tired of the hanging around, had suddenly headed away from the train. He'd dug his spurs into the flanks of his horse and galloped out towards the Halligan spread.

Mike Halligan let no one ride his range. So when Brady came in at a gallop, Rory Halligan, out with some of the riders, did as his father had taught him. He pulled his gun and fired over the rider's head. Brady wheeled his horse to a standstill, pulled his Winchester from the saddle holster, aimed and fired. Rory



Halligan was dead before he hit the ground. Brady never made cover. Half a dozen guns blazed at his retreating figure; when McCullough got there, he reckoned none of them had missed.

McCullough didn't wait to argue with the men. He rode back to stop the train and tell the major what had happened.

"I'll ride over to see Halligan," Adams said.

"I'm comin' with you."

Adams shook his head. "Won't serve no purpose. I know the man; he'll be out for trouble. Maybe I can talk reason into him."

As Adams rode out in the dusk he thought about Halligan. Halligan had been a sergeant in Adams' outfit during the war. He was a hulk of a man, made like a bull with a temper to match. He'd joined the Union forces because he liked a fight. He'd had little cause to join, being more Irish than American, but he'd fought and fought well. Adams had liked him but Halligan didn't make friends easy. He had only once really talked to Adams and that had been after Bull Run.

Halligan had said: "This war had better be worth fightin'. I got a boy who's going to be the richest man in the country."

Adams laughed. "That sounds fine, Mike. How does it figure?"

"Soon after he was born, Mary and I got us a wagon and four calves and we travelled into the west further than white folks had ever been. Mary was the fairest, prettiest little thing you ever seen. We found us a valley where the grass was so green we thought we'd crossed the ocean back to Ireland.

"Well, we got to breeding cattle. After a while we got some Mexican help, and soon we was sittin' on a glorious piece of prosperity. Then comes this war and I reckon I owed plenty to the country that had been so good to us. One day, Major, I hope you'll visit our way and meet a lucky, happy man."

That had been years ago. On Adams' first wagon train west, he had remembered Halligan and had ridden out there. It had nearly cost him his life for—just like Brady—a bullet had greeted him. Adams had ridden up to the gunman with his hands in the air. The rider had been Halligan—but a different Halligan.

The story came out in bits. When Halligan got back from the fighting, he found his wife had died. One of the Mexican boys had taken over the range, and had no intention of letting Halligan have it back. He found his son had been kept alive, but only just. He took the boy and rode out to find men to help him get back what was his. He had found them all right. After the war, there were too many men who wanted to live by the gun and this fight was all they were looking for. Halligan had killed the Mexican

with his own hands, dragging him to death behind his horse. He now held his land by the gun.

His world was Rory; Rory was going to be the biggest cattle-rancher in the west. What had once been large enough for Halligan wasn't big enough, wasn't good enough for his son. Halligan didn't have a ranch any more—he had an empire.

Now the boy had been killed. To Halligan this would mean revenge. Adams had enough guns on his train to handle a fight, but he didn't want to kill Halligan . . .

The ranch house was surrounded by horses; every cowhand was there. They stood on the porch and all their attention was focused on the grim, white-faced man in the doorway—Halligan.

When they heard Adams, they all turned and stared at him. The man next to Halligan drew his gun and Adams heard the click as the gun was cocked.

Across the silence he said: "Hullo, Mike— was hopin' to have a word with you in private."

Halligan made a gesture and the man beside him lowered his gun. "So it's you, Major Adams. I'm real sorry it's you." He turned and shouted to the men: "Get some rest, boys—you'll be needin' it." They dispersed silently, unwillingly. There were over twenty of them and Adams reckoned they were more gunmen than cowmen. They had about them an air of anticipation; they looked at Adams as they passed, looked at him like they reckoned they were looking at a dead man.

"There's nothin' for you an' me to talk about," Halligan said. "One of your men killed Rory; you got to pay." He had trouble keeping his voice steady.

"The man paid the penalty, Mike."

"One man," Halligan laughed harshly. "One man for my whole world. No, Major. It's to be your world for my world."

"You can't bring your son back to life, Mike. You rule by the gun. The gun killed Rory but it was you who taught him to shoot first." Adams got off his horse and walked towards the man standing on the porch.

"I taught him to *shoot* first. But not to kill. Rory wouldn't do that—he shot at your man to scare him. There was no call for your man to kill him."

"There's some men who don't take kindly to gettin' shot at for nothin'." Adams had a foot on the porch now.

"Get off my property, Major, or I'll kill you."

"Would killin' me put a stop to the fight you're plannin'?" Adams asked quietly. "If so, Mike, draw your gun and pull the trigger. I got folk out there, good folk who want peace and quiet."

They've gone through every kind of hell to get this far. If you set your men on them, some of them will die but it won't bring Rory back."

"They're all goin' to die." Halligan turned as if to go back into the ranch house.

"Just a minute, Mike." Adams' voice raised into a command. "Let me tell you about Brady—that's the man you had killed today. Brady was a no-good Irishman. He come from some place close to yours, back in the old country. He drank too much, he liked a fight too much, but there was one good thing in Brady: He had a kid brother, and to that boy, Brady was everthing—Brady was his world. You took one world today when you lost yours."

Halligan listened quietly, then he said finally: "Get out of here, Major, afore I get the boys to ride you off. In the mornin', we're comin' out to get you."

He went into the ranch house and slammed the door. The major turned back to his horse and found two men barring his way.

"Get out of my way," he barked at them.

"Easy now, Major, you ain't in the army any more. We figure we might as well take you now." The leading man was the one who had stood by Halligan on the porch, the one who had drawn his gun when Adams rode up. He went on: "Takin' you now is kinda thoughtful of us really, savin' you the trouble of that long ride back to your train."

"Try it," the major snapped.

It was dark now; there were only the lights from the ranch in the pitch blackness. The three men stood watching each other. Adams reckoned the fellow who had done the talking would be the first to draw. He was the one to watch. It had to come some time—the sort of set-up that couldn't be beaten—but he was sorry McCullough wasn't with him. He waited. Somewhere out on the prairie a wolf howled. At that instant the man's hand went to his gun. Before it was out of the holster a shot rang out and the man spun round and crumpled forward.

"Get on that horse and get out of here like I told you." It was Halligan's voice from the porch. "And you," he yelled at the other man, "pick Sykes up and get him buried."

"Thanks, Mike," Adams said, as he got on his horse.

"You got nothin' to thank me for." The door slammed shut as Adams rode back to the wagon.

McCullough showed none of the worrying he'd been doing when Adams rode back into camp. "Hi, Major—well, you talked him round?"

"You can't talk a mule round," Adams said shortly. "How far to that pass?"

"An hour's ride, maybe two."

"We got to make it before sun-up."

"So?"

"So we get the wagons through. We'll hold Halligan and his men at the mouth of the pass. Shouldn't take more'n five to hold them there."

Adams sat silent for a minute. Then, as though it was all clear in his mind, he said: "Pick five men and ride ahead. I'll get the wagons rollin'."

"There's another pass coupla miles further down the range," McCullough said. "I found it this morning. Too narrow for wagons, but it'll take horses easy enough. Now suppose Halligan reckons we'll make for the large pass with the wagons—like as not he'll use the small pass to head us off. They could ambush us the other end of Halligan's Pass."

"You thinkin' of trapping them at the small pass?"

Flint scratched his head. "If I took three or four guns there and then hid up, I'd be able to hold them off. You'd hear the shootin' and know what was happenin'—but you'd best scout Halligan's pass too."

Together they called the men out of their wagons and asked for volunteers. They told them what had happened and what they thought was going to happen.

It was young Tim Brady who said: "I sure wish I could do somethin' to stop this, Major."

Adams told him: "You can't. If I'd thought sendin' you over to Halligan would help any, I'd have sent you. But now, nothin' will help. He wants a fight: it's up to me to see he don't get near the train."

"Then, sir, I want to go with Mr. McCullough."

The boy might pass for seventeen, Adams thought, but he reckoned he was nearer fifteen. But there were times when a boy was a man long before his years. "O.K., Tim, you ride with McCullough."

It took time getting the wagons rolling. Adams knew they were being watched—they'd been circled in open country—but he couldn't help that. Halligan's men had the ammunition to keep them bottled in the pass for ever. Any long delay now, with water short, would be death to their horses and slow burning death to the whole train. He felt he was leading the train into a trap, but he had no choice.

He spent two hours in the saddle, bullying and helping the drivers get their thirst-tormented horses into the pass. He rode

back and forth feeling the hills stretching up into the night on either side of the pass. It was maybe a mile long, maybe a little more; long enough to get the whole train into it. Slowly the dawn light began to show. In the greyness the whole place seemed unreal. He reined his horse and held his hand high.

The grinding of the wheels stopped and the silence was brooding and heavy with fear. Then the remaining men took to the hills covering the mouth of the pass, the women and children hiding in the wagons.

Adams strained to hear the gunfire from the other pass, hoping Flint's reckoning had been right. But there was nothing.

The silence remained while the light grew brighter and the sun showed across the top of the hills. Then he heard a shot. Just one shot and nothing more. It had come from ahead where the pass opened up into the prairies beyond.

He heard the beat of a horse's hoofs and he spurred his horse forward. He rode hard, legs kicking into his animal, passing the bewildered women by their wagons. The oncoming rider was McCullough.

The scout was breathing heavily. As they met and halted Adams thought he'd never seen McCullough look scared before.

"He's driving the herd at us." McCullough drew his breath in shallow gulps. "He must have ridden through this pass early, soon after you left him. When they hadn't come through the narrow pass by first light, I rode out to see if anything was stirring. He must have spread his range to the far side of the hills since we was last this way—he's got a whole herd over there. We got to get the wagons back out of this pass before we're all flattened by the stampede."

Adams didn't wait to reply—he started for the further mouth of the pass.

McCullough spurred his weary horse after him. "You hear me, Major?"

As he galloped forward, Adams said: "We'd never make it. We got to turn the herd."

McCullough nodded and rode beside him. "They're ridin' 'em close. They got about fifteen men. Halligan's leadin' the cattle with a couple of gunmen."

Adams kept riding. Now he could hear the beat of hoofs on the hard dried land. He kept going until they passed the mouth of the pass where scared men waited in the hills. He reined his horse to a halt and shouted: "If that herd gets in here, we're done for. Try to turn the beasts."

He dug his spurs into his horse and went out into the open. The herd was maybe a quarter of a mile away. The dust was a

storm behind them. He could see the outriders just ahead of the massed bunch of cattle. And in front he could see a lone horseman. As they watched they saw the horseman suddenly halt and turn to face the onrushing mass.

"What in hell does that fool think he's doin'?' Who is it, anyway?" Adams spurred his horse forward.

"It's Tim Brady."

They heard the shots even as they drew their own guns, riding full tilt at the oncoming herd. Shouting and yelling, they fired their guns. They screamed and the echoes of their screams bounced off the hills. The air was full of noise. Suddenly the leading bull swerved to the right within feet of the lone gunman. As it swerved the herd moved with it. Tim Brady's horse reared in terror and the horse and rider went down in a mass of flurrying arms and legs, and in front of their eyes, horrified, they saw the flank beasts trample over the spot where Tim and horse had gone down.

Now the guns of the outriders were trying to drive the herd back in a direct line for the pass. The curve of beasts almost enveloped Adams and McCullough. Their guns exhausted, they twisted this way and that, expert horsemen welded to their saddles, flicking their terrified mounts to avoid the mad stragglers of the herd.

But the speed had slackened; Tim Brady's shots had slowed the rush. Now a volley of shots from the men in the hills swerved them again and they turned in one final spurt towards Halligan who was still riding beside them urging them on. His horse stumbled and he was flung to the ground.

Adams spurred his horse forward to where Tim Brady lay. Half protected by the body of his horse, his life had been saved. He was injured, his legs were broken, but he was alive. At that moment a bullet spurted into the carcass of the dead horse. Both McCullough and Adams flung themselves on the ground beside the injured boy.

Heads down, they began to load their guns. Would Halligan never give up? Adams closed his loaded Colt and peered above the carcass of the horse. The cattle seemed miles away. He saw the two men who were firing at them, using a dip in the prairie for cover. He fired, and he heard McCullough's gun go off, then he saw one of the men fling up his arms.

Then he heard a voice behind him: "Put up your gun, Major. The fight's over." Another shot rang out and Halligan worded an oath and looked down at his arm in surprise. "Stop that god-damned firing," he yelled to his men. "Go round up the cattle."

Halligan stood over them, swaying slightly, breathing hard. He looked weary, an old man who had suddenly found things too much for him. Slowly Adams stood up. "I thought you'd been trampled to death by your cattle."

"They missed." He knelt down by Brady. "Who's this?"

"Brady's kid brother."

"That was the darndest thing he did back there. Bravest thing I ever saw, too." He brushed a huge work-worn hand over the boy's brow. "He goin' to live?"

"Needs plenty of doctorin'," said Flint. "Legs're busted."

"Best get him back to my place. I'd kinda like to look after him." He got to his feet. His eyes met Adams', then he looked away. "You'll be wantin' to get back to your train now, Major. There's some water about two miles west o' here. You can use that this trip—and any trip you make."

Halligan paused for a while. Then he said: "Fellow's always learnin' somethin'. Learned how to fight in the war. That's mighty useful knowledge. Learned somethin' today though which is much more important. Everyone has someone they think the world of; they'll do just about anythin' for that person." He looked down at Tim Brady. "Like gettin' killed to try and save a whole lot of folk that ain't even kin."

"Tryin' to save life is a mighty fine thing to do, Mike."

"Yeah." Halligan bent down and picked up the boy gently. "Next trip you come out and see how the boy is, will you?"

"I'll be glad to, Mike."

Halligan, still holding the boy, watched Major Adams get back on his horse. As Adams rode to the pass, he saw McCullough leading the first wagon through. He wondered at the way God worked His miracles. Two men had had to die to bring Halligan out of his hatred. It was harsh justice, but this was a harsh country which had to be conquered before it would yield. Only the fittest survived.

He jogged back gently to where McCullough was. The water from that stream was going to taste mighty sweet.

Indian-infested territory is no place for a woman—even a woman as desperate as Lucy Owens, one of the strangest characters Seth Adams encounters on the long haul West. You'll be reading her story in Suspense next month.

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

Now there was a ripe subject for murder!

KILL AND CURE

By GUY CULLINGFORD

“AS I see it, we shall have plenty of time to kill,” said a prim female voice.

A pair of masculine hands twitched convulsively upon the papery edges of *The Daily Telegraph* outspread for cover.

“Then I suggest,” said the second female voice, “a brisk walk to the end of the esplanade and back. After that perhaps we might buy a few souvenirs before taking our letter of introduction to the vicar.”

The hands relaxed.

Just what the doctor ordered, thought Rex Burnham with a wry grin.

Although an acknowledged master of the cliché, even he sometimes thought literally. Two days ago he had been huddling on his clothes in the doctor's consulting room with that sheepish yet relieved feeling which accompanies a thorough medical examination.

Nervously he had asked: “Well?”

The doctor, who was also a personal friend, was scribbling away merrily at a small pad. He tore off a sheet and replied with an absent air:

“Eh? Oh! There's nothing wrong organically. As sound as a bell, my dear fellow! As to these other symptoms . . . these nightmares and—um—hallucinations, hah! In my opinion”—he looked extremely grave—“you are being slowly and systematically poisoned.”

To say that the patient was thoroughly alarmed is putting it mildly. He wouldn't have looked out of place on one of his own book-jackets.

“Yes,” said the doctor with a wicked gleam, “you're suffering

from an overdose of sensationalism, self-administered. How many of these shockers have you written during the last six months?"

"I prefer to call them crime novels," remarked Rex, cut to the quick.

"I don't care what you call the darned things. I want to know how many."

"Five or six, I suppose."

"Ye gods, man! You're turning yourself into a murder factory."

"I have to live," Rex reminded him sulkily.

"I see no signs of malnutrition. In my considered opinion your's is a fairly advanced case of an enlarged imagination—not necessarily fatal. Mind you, it won't do to neglect it. Could develop into a nervous breakdown. We don't want to rob the public of one of its favourite authors, even in the interests of mental health. Well, I've written you out a prescription. Here you are, but for heaven's sake don't take it to a chemist!"

He passed the prescription form, folded in half, across the top of the desk. Rex opened it. He read the name of a private hotel at Bunmouth. "*Dose : One fortnight.*"

Rex glared at him.

"I thought you'd give me a course of tablets—some sort of sedative."

"Maybe I'm old-fashioned. I'm not so keen on experiment, not on my friends, anyway."

"I've never stayed in a dump like that for years."

"That's half the trouble."

"How on earth did you come by the address?"

"I stayed there myself. I ran down to Bunmouth in the car for a breath of sea air and couldn't get into the Royal Bun. There was a golf tournament on, and I had to take what I could get. I made a mental note of it. I've just been waiting for the right patient to send there."

"There may not be a tournament on now," said Rex, brightening up. "I wouldn't mind the Royal Bun so much."

"I dare say you wouldn't! That's not the cure. You want somewhere unlicensed, with a well-balanced diet. Just teetering on the edge of starvation."

"It will be most inconvenient for me to get away."

"It will be most inconvenient for you to spend three months in a nursing-home. But you needn't take my advice. I'm used to people who don't."

"I always take advice—when I have to pay for it," admitted Rex.

So here he was in the private hotel, his first morning, after a breakfast more smell than substance, sitting in a room called the lounge on a chair which had the appearance of comfort, but felt like something out of a geometry book.

He sat listening unashamedly to the conversation around him, a natural defect in those who strive after realistic dialogue. Although Rex couldn't exactly imagine Larry the Eye saying to Slasher Green: "Another lovely morning! We must make the most of it while it lasts!" doubtless even Larry the Eye had a maiden aunt who could, at a pinch, be used as padding.

It is a marvellous thing to come out of one world and discover the co-existence of others as round, as compact and as exclusive as one's own. This obviously was the maiden ladies' world. Apart from the casual coming and going of middle-aged couples, pottering over the countryside in their tiny cars before the seasonal high prices drove them back to their own gardens, anyone else who booked at Baxter's had got in by mistake.

These two must be Miss Meadows and Miss Faraday; he could detect London suburban in their voices, and he had tracked them down in the register. He risked a glance over the top of his newspaper. Caught in the act by Miss Meadows, the lean and stringy one, he gave her a smile of disarming simplicity, which she returned with caution.

Rex was feeling a lot better already and even in a strange bed had slept tolerably well with only one bad dream, which he put down to the curry at dinner rather than to the state of his nerves. From his bedroom window he had an unlimited view of the ocean; the sound of it sucking upon the stones had lulled him to sleep.

He put down the *Telegraph* and stared frankly about him. Now, that was an interesting old dame—sorry, lady—sitting there in the corner. Stiff with character; he must find out all about her. He could see that it wouldn't do to approach her direct and invite a snub. She had the unmistakable aura of breeding and he christened her Lady Rag-Bag. Her dress deserved it. She was also, he decided, deaf; her voice at table, when complaining of stewed figs, was authoritative and harsh. You might have thought from what she said to her companion that the pips had been put in personally to spite her.

Presently, the companion came bustling into the room and hurried over to close the window.

"Oh, Miss Ives, you shouldn't be sitting there in a draught. You know how susceptible you are to colds."

Miss Ives lifted her patrician but repulsive head and said harshly, "Open the window again, Bates. At once. Can't you see that I'm enjoying the fresh air?"

Bates cast a despairing glance around the assembled company and said weakly, "Oh, but—Miss Ives—"

"Open the window, Bates!"

The unfortunate Bates did as she was told, then said in as firm a tone as she could muster, "I shall fetch your shawl. Yes, whatever you say, I shall fetch your shawl!"

She hurried out again, face taut and anxious. Rex felt an instinctive sympathy. He thought he recognised the end of a tether when he saw it.

"The old Tartar," he thought. "Now there's a ripe subject for murder. I daresay there's a little legacy attached to it as well. It's not much in my line but perhaps if I jerked it up a bit—holy smoke, there I go again! I'm not fit for polite society. No wonder I was told to get right away!"

Conscience-smitten, he marched out of the lounge, past the dining-room door, the letter-rack and the consistently unattended reception counter and found himself on the esplanade.

He helped himself to a lungful of the health-giving ozone and set off at a brisk pace in the direction of the cliffs. The pace soon slackened to a stroll and when he reached the bottom of the cliffs he decided to put off the ascent until tomorrow. He sank down on a slatted seat in the sun.

Maybe I am a little out of condition, he admitted with reluctance. Glancing down, he was aware of a switchback contour starting from his waistline which he hurriedly corrected. Perhaps a few exercises?

He was still sitting there when the redoubtable Miss Ives passed him, shepherded by her companion. Miss Ives had on a straw hat which was obviously brought out every year to confront the summer. She also carried what she no doubt called a parasol, whether to protect the garden in her hat or her leathery cheeks was open to question. As the two passed without acknowledgment of his presence, the companion was saying: "But I really don't think you should tax your strength with the climb in this warm weather."

In answer to which the harsh voice was borne gratingly back to him: "Allow me to know best, Bates. There is always a good breeze at the top."

Two days later, Rex had ingratiated himself sufficiently with Miss Meadows and Miss Faraday to learn all he wanted to know about Miss Ives. These ladies knew all about everybody and he, too, had not been absent from their innocent speculations.

"I should put him down as something scholastic," hazarded Miss Meadows. "Did you notice how quickly he did the

Telegraph crossword? The big one, you know, not the little one."

"Schoolteachers are not on holiday now," pointed out Miss Faraday. "He is not quite—*quite*"—she hesitated—"I think he might be someone rather important in a big store. He has the figure for it."

Neither of these guesses would have pleased Mr. Burnham, although he had long passed the stage where he wanted to tell everyone he met that he was an author.

"She comes from an extremely old family," explained Miss Meadows in a carefully lowered voice. "Miss Bates tells me that the Ives' have been established in this part of the country for eight hundred years at least."

"I shouldn't have put her age down as quite as much as that," said Rex solemnly. "But then I suppose she's what you ladies would describe as well-preserved?"

"Oh, Mr. Burnham, you will have your joke! But, of course, it is because of her great age that she is here with Bates—Miss Bates—to look after her. Her own beautiful home is sold up. She couldn't keep it up, you know, partly through lack of staff and partly"—her voice dropped to the pitch suitable for a cathedral—"through lack of money."

"In a way, you disappoint me," commented Rex. "I thought that at least she would have had some sort of a title. At least an 'hon.'"

"Oh dear me no! She wouldn't like that idea at all. To be Miss *Ives*—that is really something."

"And to be Miss Bates is to be a feudal retainer. I wonder how she sticks it!"

"There is not much opening for the post of paid companion in these democratic days, is there, Mr. Burnham? Who else would employ her?"

Who else, thought Mr. Burnham at dinner, searching for the one edible mouthful in his cutlet. Yet he was beginning to feel marvellously fit. A low diet and no work were doing wonders to his constitution. He had promised the doctor not to write a word, but the truth was that, in this atmosphere, he couldn't have done so if he had wished. The place was far too quiet; he simply couldn't concentrate.

But his imagination still roved. He couldn't contemplate the spectacle of Miss Ives and her companion for long without thinking how dead easy it would be for Miss Bates to cut her bonds and come into her inheritance. He barely stopped himself from giving her a hint. Strive as he might to repress his professional enthusiasm, at least a dozen gallows-proof ways of dealing with

female dragons suggested themselves to his fertile mind. Miss Ives' chief sport was to send that wretched woman scampering up to their joint room to fetch small articles. No sooner did Miss Bates show her face in the lounge with the required object than she was despatched again on another errand.

"And their bedroom is right at the top," breathed Miss Meadows into his ear. "For reasons of economy, you understand. Of course, I know why she does it—" But a belated discretion sealed her mouth.

"And I know why she does it, too," said Mr. Burnham grimly. The old devil, he thought, must have someone to boss around.

That night he had a return of his old trouble. Miss Bates was impaling her employer on a long sword and he wanted to help her but couldn't move an inch. Luckily, this was an isolated instance.

He was becoming much more mobile. Twice he had been half way up the cliffs. At last, one day, he made the top. Miss Ives had been right—that was the devil of it, she often was—and on that exposed height there was quite a stiffish breeze. But he found a sheltered nook a good way back from the cliff edge and sat there at peace with himself and this new curious world. It was deserted. The sun shone in a cloudless sky. He was quite alone. But was he?

A hat he knew rose above the steep, a hat he readily recognized.

Miss Ives and her companion breasted the top, rising like two resurrected ghosts from churchyard mould. Miss Ives was on the side nearest to him; but if she hadn't learned to recognize him across the width of the dining-room she was not likely to recognize him at this distance. Besides, he was hidden by two bushes rampant.

Then something totally unexpected happened—at least to him.

The hat, the celebrated hat, was caught by a gust of wind. It sailed off its owner's head and was borne past Miss Bates right over the unprotected edge. Both ladies started after it, Miss Bates in the lead and, as her agitation took her to a point beyond caution, the redoubtable Miss Ives put forth her parasol and, with its long, pointed ferrule in the small of her companion's back, firmly propelled her over the top. It was all over in the twinkling of a second.

The despairing cry dissolved into the original quiet in which nothing obtruded but the song of a lark. Rex Burnham sat pinned to his seat; no nightmare had ever held him more secure.

Miss Ives turned and without further ado, without a glance

either backwards or roundabout, disappeared in the same manner as she had arisen. In the instantaneous glimpse Rex had of her face he could detect no change of expression; she looked neither pleased nor sorry.

As for Rex himself, he was in a state of shock. The sun still shone, but not for him. He was in an arctic region where no sun could penetrate. For a time he sat entirely motionless except for the trembling of his limbs. A drop of eighty feet terminated by rocks did not suggest to him that he wanted to make acquaintance with Miss Bates. But what to do—that was the problem.

Had he seen it? He was sure that he had seen Miss Bates go over the top; there wasn't the shadow of a doubt about that. But had he really seen Miss Ives send her over with the tip of that incredibly ancient sunshade? Was it only one more of his—well—his hallucinations?

How could he prove it, even if he wanted to do so? It would be simply Miss Ives' word against his—and who was he? If the police ever came to inquire into his antecedents, he was a thriller-writer suffering from mental strain. And Miss Ives was—Miss Ives. There was absolutely nothing for him to do but to get back to the town, if his legs would take him there.

He staggered to his feet, and went tottering down the path like an old man. He didn't catch up with Miss Ives, not he! Thank God, there was no sign of her! All Lombard Street to a China orange she had gone to report the matter to the police.

He went straight to the Royal Bun, where he drank three double whiskies and finally returned to something like normal. Nor did he return for his luncheon to the private hotel, anyone was welcome to his share of the cold ham and salad.

But he had to go back, in the end. He crept in to the sound of the dinner gong, smelling furiously of strong drink. He was relieved to find that Miss Ives was taking her evening meal in her room.

He ate with his eyes fixed glumly on his plate. He chewed away morosely and he couldn't have told anyone what he was eating—which was not altogether a dead loss as the chef had been experimenting with corned beef.

He couldn't hope to escape altogether. For the sake of appearances he had to drink his coffee in the lounge, where Miss Meadows and Miss Faraday pounced upon him with the tale of disaster. They didn't mean to be unkind, but they couldn't help enjoying it. The body of poor Miss Bates had been recovered, also the hat, both battered beyond recognition.

“And the funeral is to be held as soon as the inquest is over,”

said Miss Faraday. "Do you think we should all go as a sign of respect, Mr. Burnham? We should so like your advice."

"I shan't be here," said Mr. Burnham gruffly. "I'm leaving tomorrow morning—by the first train."

"Oh now, what a pity! I thought you were staying for the full fortnight. Is it a sudden decision? I do hope that this tragedy hasn't caused you to alter your plans!"

("He had been drinking—he wasn't at all himself," Miss Meadows informed her friend afterwards.)

"Business reasons," mumbled Mr. Burnham.

("What did I tell you?" said Miss Faraday later. "I knew he was something in a shop!")

"Who knows?" she went on. "Perhaps it is all for the best. Miss Ives was nearly desperate. Poor Miss Bates fussed so, you know. Miss Ives told me only the other day that she would have to get rid of her. But she has such a kind heart under that somewhat forbidding exterior. She couldn't bear the idea of giving her notice."

Rex didn't feel safe until he was settled in his first class compartment, rattling away to London. Then and then only was he able to relax.

Oh, what bliss to be going back to the company of Spike O'Harrigan, Larry the Eye, Slasher Green and all those violent characters who sprang to life at the touch of his typewriter.

Never again would any of that fraternity be capable of giving him a nightmare. Now, if he ever saw something which shouldn't be there out of the corner of his eye, he would invite it to join him in a drink. He was cured, all right.

And if he met a fellow-author in a similar plight, over-writing himself in a vain attempt to keep body and soul together, he would willingly hand on the address.

Miss Ives would still be there for the next hundred years.

SOLUTION to SUSPENSE CROSSWORD on Page 145

Across. 1, *Condescending*. 10, *Ophelia*. 11, *Marconi*. 12, *Oxon*. 13, *Fiend*. 14, *Blah*. 17, *Hashish*. 18, *Schisms*. 19, *Spanner*. 22, *Helicon*. 24, *Year*. 25, *Edits*. 26, *True*. 29, *Replica*. 30, *Arsenic*. 31, *Behind the bars*.

Down. 2, *On hoofs*. 3, *Dale*. 4, *Spanish*. 5, *Edmunds*. 6, *Dark*. 7, *Noodles*. 8, *Dorothy Sayers*. 9, *Light sentence*. 15, *Liana*. 16, *Shell*. 20, *An apple*. 21, *Red hand*. 22, *Hot mash*. 23, *Coroner*. 27, *Nisi*. 28, *A sob*.

★ *Thomas Walsh says he is fascinated by crime and police detection. He has published four books to date, The Dark Window, The Night Watch, Nightmare in Manhattan, and Dangerous Passenger, and as may be gathered from the titles, none of these books is cosy reading. Walsh was born in New York, thought of being an engineer but gave it up to write instead.*

FRONT PAGE STORY

By THOMAS WALSH



IT was no more than a few minutes past ten, on a slow and rainy November night, when Kilbane happened to meet her in the street corridor at headquarters. Just as she came out of the press room and tip-tapped down the marble steps towards the lower hall Kilbane himself, pushing through the frosted glass doors, paused by a convenient window to light a cigarette and glance out at the melancholy drizzle slanting past the street lamps. That was what allowed Miss Todd to catch up with him.

She came on fast, in her accustomed great hurry; at the front entrance, which they reached almost together, Kilbane looked sideways at her and then flicked a negligent finger at his hatbrim.

She glanced up, too. "Kilbane," she said, with an off-handedly casual, man-to-man greeting that matched his own perhaps overdone lack of interest. At the moment, a slim girl with black hair and dark eyes, dressed in a grey tailored suit and a plain little round hat like a boy's, she was nothing important to Kilbane regardless of how he chose to look at it.

He knew that she had covered the police news for the *Morning Tribune* ever since Jack Garrity left, and he had heard somewhere that up in the press room, with exceptionally little friendliness, the boys had begun to refer to her as Miss Todd, Scoop or By-line.

That, of course, was no concern of Kilbane's.

He opened the right-hand door for her by levering his arm against it, let her through and went out after her. "It's raining," he said unnecessarily, as they stood on the top step.

Miss Todd nodded. Countless tiny drops sprayed up at them on a moody billow of wind; when she narrowed her eyes against them, peering down at a deserted taxi stand near the corner, he turned up his coat collar and mentioned his car and the possibility of a lift simply because there seemed nothing else for him to do.

Miss Todd did not jump at it; but after a moment, with an air of not asking for any favours, she admitted that she wanted to drop in at the *Tribune* office. If that was on his way?

Kilbane brought her down to the car and helped her in. He said, "I'll make a stop first, in Eagle Street. A couple of minutes. O.K.?"

"O.K. with me," Miss Todd told him, dropping the hat into her lap and fluffing out the black hair carelessly. "Business, Kilbane?"

"Yes," Kilbane said. On that November night S. Pasquariella, who was being guarded against certain unpleasant possibilities by Kilbane on the night shift and Charley Harris on the day, was no topic for conversation with anyone from the press room. Kilbane sheered away at once. How was the reporting? he wanted to know. Quiet, eh?

"Deadly," Miss Todd said. She gave him a level glance, as if she didn't want him to think anything he shouldn't think. "I'm not thrilled to death, you know. I've done it before."

Kilbane started the car. On the far side of the plaza, where they turned into Eagle Street, he offered the opinion that there was a good bunch of fellows in the press room. Personally he liked them.

"Oh, fine," Miss Todd said. But she had her head back against the seat and was smiling up scornfully at nothing. "Perhaps I'm not quite—meck enough, Kilbane. I don't ask advice and when it's given I don't follow it. That's bad. And then, of course, I don't intend to be a police reporter all my life. There you have the really unforgivable thing."

Kilbane, puzzled by what seemed to be slight lack of continuity, stopped for a traffic light. "Like it here?"

"It's all right," Miss Todd said. She blew an impatient stream of smoke against the windscreen and then pursed her lips carefully. "I'll stick here six months," she said. "I might possibly need that. It—well, gives you prestige or something to say you've worked on the *Tribune*. I don't know why it should, but it does. Then—"

Kilbane cocked his nearer eyebrow at her. "Big stuff," he said. "New York?"

"Why not?" Miss Todd said. She was very cool about it. "That's why I'm not liked, you know. I'm conceited, you understand. I know what I want and I mean to get it. And that's one of the things you mustn't let people see, of course. Never. You've found that out. You know that's true, don't you, Kilbane?"

"Once in a while I've had a hint of it," Kilbane said, deciding thoughtfully that here was a funny kind of a girl. At the next corner he slowed long enough to see that the barber's shop of S. Pasquariella had been closed for the night; then, a little further down, he pulled into the kerb before a two-storey house with a scrubbed white flagstone in front.

Miss Todd sat in the car while he got out and rang the doorbell. He was admitted presently by a little girl with long black hair and enormous black eyes, who told him that Poppa had gone out but that Momma was upstairs. Momma was ill.

"That's too bad," Kilbane said, patting her head. "You're Angelica Theresa. Your poppa told me all about you. Know who I am?"

"No," Angelica Theresa said, incuriously. She was about eight years old. Behind her in the kitchen doorway a smaller-scale model began to emit wailing sobs without taking her eyes from Kilbane. Angelica Theresa looked around her unemotionally.

"She always cries," Angelica Theresa said. "She's Christina Marie. She's only six. I think she's crazy. I can tell you what my mamma's got—'pendecitis. Poppa said so before he went for the doctor. It hurts her. She—" Noise came from the upper floor, and Angelica Theresa looked up there with some interest. "You hear her?"

"Yes," Kilbane said. It seemed to him that he'd have heard her over at headquarters. "Your poppa put an ice compress on her before he left?"

"A what?" Angelica Theresa said.

Kilbane dropped his hat on the hall table. Would she get some ice cubes out of the refrigerator and bring them upstairs as fast as she could? And she mustn't cry. That would only make Momma feel a lot worse.

"All right," Angelica Theresa said. "I won't cry."

She didn't. She was perfectly willing to be helpful. But when she got upstairs with the bowl of ice cubes, Kilbane erupted violently before her in the bedroom doorway. Did she know what was happening up here? Kilbane demanded in a shrill voice.

Had she any idea—he stopped, glared helplessly at her and slammed the door.

Three or four minutes later S. Pasquariella and the doctor broke in from the street and ran upstairs. It was all over then. The baby, S. Pasquariella's first boy, weighed eight pounds and seven ounces, and Kilbane hadn't done a bad job for a detective lacking any kind of previous experience.

The doctor complimented him highly; S. Pasquariella, liquid-eyed, crushed his hand in a grip of steel. But Kilbane got out of there as fast as he could, his coat slung over his arm, his face glistening with sweat. Miss Todd, who had a nose for news, was in the hall by that time talking to Angelica Theresa. Kilbane looked at her; after a moment he remembered who she was.

"Come on," he said, going by her blindly into the rain. He did not pick up his hat; he did not put on his coat. And on the way to the *Tribune* office, unobservant of everything, he did not notice that Miss Todd kept on staring at him with bright and interested eyes.

Next morning he read all about it in the *Tribune*. It was a two-column spread, signed by one Janet S. Harrington, and the heading was cute and explicit: "Doctor late, Baby early; Detective Waylays Stork."

Kilbane chanced upon those words after a late breakfast of bacon and eggs, while he was sitting with his feet propped up on the table and a morning cigarette in the corner of his mouth. For a moment he did not move. Then he sat up slowly, spilling half a cup of coffee into his lap, and reading over the story itself as if it were—as if it had to be—some kind of horrible mistake.

It wasn't, of course. In the first paragraph Miss Todd had excelled herself. There it was narrated that Detective Joseph J. Kilbane, at present attached to the headquarters squad, owned modestly that he was always prepared for anything. Pay roll bandits, bank robbers, mad dogs, homicide or arson—Detective Kilbane took all those things in his stride. Babies, too. What—and here Detective Kilbane was quoted directly—what was so exceptional about babies? A good police officer could turn his hand to a lot of things. Twins or triplets might have been considered extraordinary; but a single baby, even one of eight pounds and seven ounces—

"Nothing to it," Detective Kilbane was reported to have said.

There was more, much more. Further down he was described as the "rugged-looking, tough guy type," and after that it was asserted that he had borne himself throughout the ordeal with the most incomparable sang-froid. Some people might have

thought it a fairly amusing story on a night when nothing very much had happened; but Kilbane, who did not agree for several grimly personal reasons, walked into headquarters at four that afternoon prepared for the worst.

In that he was wise. When he passed the desk, Sergeant Mulligan referred to him in a deferential way as young Dr. Kilbane; when he entered the locker room he found a statement pasted up on the bulletin board outlining the duties of the newly formed maternity squad, Joseph J. Kilbane, acting chief; when he went upstairs to the chief inspector's office two or three persons called blithely to him from the crowd gathered outside the police court.

He endured all that; he had to. But at half past five, as he came on Janet S. Harrington—Miss Todd, Scoop, By-line—occupied with a cup of coffee and a sandwich in the basement cafeteria, he licked his lips gently and then touched her on the tip of the left shoulder.

"Wonderful story," Detective Joseph J. Kilbane said; his dark blue eyes glittered down at her. "Nice going. That's the kind of stuff that's going to get you places fast."

Janet S. Harrington thought it was pretty good herself. The *Tribune's* city editor had liked it. He—

"Sure. He knows first-rate stuff," Kilbane told her, with a painful grin she seemed to accept as quite in order. "Suppose I buy you a drink on it tonight? Ten-thirty, say. At the ramp entrance, By-line."

"By-line?" she said. "Oh! You're not angry about it, for heaven's sake?"

"Me?" Kilbane said. He went off, the grin clamped in place. It was later that night, when he had Miss Todd secure from interruptions behind a table in the nearest cocktail lounge, that he drew up the points of arraignment over the one drink he ever intended to buy anyone like her.

"I wasn't anything much," he said, after a first few matters—common decency among them—had been made clear to her. "You had a column to be funny in—that's what mattered. And if you had to crucify somebody in print, why, that part was all right. It was nothing to you that—"

"Crucify?" Miss Todd said. Now she seemed exasperated. "Of course, that's ridiculous. I should think you'd be—"

"What?" Kilbane asked, his voice throbbing. "Pleased, maybe. Tickled to death. Because I got my name in a cheap rag, in a smart-aleck, smirking story—"

"Cheap what?" Miss Todd demanded, with some excitement. "Let me tell you something. The *Tribune*—"

Kilbane thumped his chest. Afterwards that seemed a lot too dramatic, but at the moment distinctions were beyond him. "I'm proud of being a cop. I like it. It's not funny to me and I'm the kind who doesn't want it to be funny to other people. That's another joke, I suppose."

There Miss Todd, losing whatever remained of her self-control, pointed a trembling cigarette at him.

"You shut up," she said. "Shut up right now, do you hear? You don't even know what you're talking about. I never saw—"

Kilbane reached for his hat. "There's a lot you never saw," he told her. His voice shook slightly, to his fury. "There's a lot a girl like you is never going to see."

He stalked off without looking back, without stopping at the cashier's desk either; when he realized afterwards that he must have saddled her with the bill it gave him a moment of sullen satisfaction. From the cocktail lounge, still simmering inside, he visited S. Pasquariella for the regular nightly check up, and there he asked the usual questions without wasting very much time over them: Had anyone, Kilbane wanted to know, been around today to talk to him? Had anyone tried to bother him?

S. Pasquariella, a wiry little man with bushy black hair and glowing black eyes, dismissed the matter with a Latin gesture richly expressive of contempt. Those fellas kept away from him; you betcha, kid. Something else was on his mind. Last night he had not thanked Kilbane. Last night—he gripped Kilbane's forearm, smiling sheepishly and jerking his head towards the bedroom upstairs. The boy—he was a fine boy, eh?

Kilbane put his hand on the door knob. Unmatchable anywhere, Kilbane assured him.

"Bambino," S. Pasquariella murmured in a tender voice to himself. "We call him—" He paused, took a deep breath before the plunge, and then without looking at Kilbane punched him slightly and very self-consciously in the stomach. "We call him Salvatore Kilbane Pasquariella. For me—for you. This thing what I say I no say so good. But what I mean, Joe—"

He nodded, very earnestly and at the same time rather shyly: his eyes searched Kilbane's astounded face. Nice guy, this Joe—S. Pasquariella got that out with some effort. All right. S. Pasquariella liked and admired him. That's why he had thought—he stopped, smiling painfully at Kilbane's chin. He waited.

"Admired who?" Kilbane asked him after a moment, his ears and the back of his neck slightly flushed. "You haven't got much sense, Salvatore."

"No," S. Pasquariella said humbly. "But—you like it, Joe?"

"I don't know," Kilbane said. He was more in command of

himself then. "Nobody ever wanted to name a kid after me before. If you can stand it, I suppose I ought to be tickled to death."

He was, in a way, though he would never have admitted it to anyone. Even when eventually he thought of Miss Todd, and of what Miss Todd could make of something like this, he was not very much disturbed; but by that time, of course, after the third glass of wine in S. Pasquariella's kitchen, Miss Todd was no one to worry about, no one to fret over.

During the next ten days he ran into her occasionally at headquarters. Then the procedure never varied: Miss Todd's cool stare would pierce all through Detective Kilbane: he would gaze absently at a point in space some two or three inches above her head. Miss Todd understood that and so did he.

Two Saturdays later, the afternoon before the christening, he bought a silver cup for Salvatore Kilbane Pasquariella; and that night at ten o'clock, coming back to headquarters after a bit of excitement over by the waterfront, he picked up an early edition of the Sunday morning *Tribune*.

It appeared in there that Miss Todd was doing all right for herself. Jack Garrity's weekly feature—"Over a Police Desk"—I ad her name underneath it now, and Kilbane spared a moment to glance contemptuously through. . . . The last paragraph, in italicized letters, was adorned by the picture of a crystal ball on the side. Inside stuff, Kilbane thought sourly. Right off the—

His throat got very dry then, because in Todd's chattiest style he began to read that odds on the conviction of Samuel J. (Little Sammy) Gordon at his trial for murder next month were now five to one in favour of the prosecution.

There was an eye-witness to the shooting, kept undercover and very hush-hush, who would be the State's big surprise at the proper time. Miss Todd advised her readers to watch for him. "Once over, but not too lightly," would be the D.A.'s watchword.

Kilbane read that part twice. No, he thought then, not even Miss Todd would be dumb enough—he raced off to the chief inspector's office, clutching the paper, and about a minute and a half later, bursting out through the ramp entrance with Beatty and Wilshaw, he rammed head-on into Miss Todd.

"So you did it," he said thickly. "You went and—who told you about Salvatore?"

She blazed up at once. "Who told me?" She mimicked him. "Salvatore told me when I met him coming in here yesterday afternoon. Did you observe that I failed to mention his name?"

I'm not a fool, you know. And if you've got the faintest idea that you can bully me into ignoring legitimate news—"

"Legitimate news," Kilbane said. He could not seem to get enough breath into him. "He told you because he'd seen you with me. Because he never thought you'd be fool enough to plaster it all over the city."

His right fist pounded the air. Did she know where Charlton Street was? Right by Salvatore's barber's shop. That's where Little Sammy knocked off his friend; that's where Salvatore practically watched him do it. He was closing up that night—had the lights off—when it happened. The police hadn't let that get out because there were some others mixed up in it who'd do their best to take care of an eye-witness. They were still at large. Now they knew what they had to do to protect themselves.

"But that's absurd," Miss Todd faltered. She was just a little breathless. "From what I wrote they could never—"

Kilbane put his face close to hers. Maybe she forgot the phrase she used—once over, but not too lightly. They'd get it. Anyone with the brains of a fly would get it. A barber, of course. They'd look for a barber and they wouldn't have to look past the corner of Charlton Street, where the shooting had been. Salvatore was the only barber in the neighbourhood. Did Miss Janet S. Harrington understand everything now?

Tom Wilshaw honked at him from the car. "Wait," Miss Todd said. "Kilbane—" He did not wait. He swung on to the car as it circled around the guard rail, and three minutes later he swung off it before S. Pasquariella's barber's shop. It was locked and dark now, and after a hurried consultation they split up in front of it. Tom Wilshaw and Beatty sought information in a couple of nearby shops; Kilbane went on down to the house in the next square.

He had pushed the door open, not waiting tonight to ring the bell, when Miss Todd got out of a cab behind him. She followed him into the hall without a word; she did not look or behave like Miss Todd at all. In the parlour Angelica Theresa put down an accordion and Christina Marie slid off the piano stool. A stout woman, coming out of the kitchen, blushed rosily and hid her mouth with her hand when she saw Kilbane.

She told him that Salvatore was not in yet; on Saturday after work he did the shopping. But soon, any minute now—

"We'll wait a while," Kilbane said. His heart was pounding. They sat down and the two children, preparing a repertoire for the celebration tomorrow, played something or other when Mrs. Pasquariella nodded vigorously at them. Kilbane was given some wine and managed to touch his lips to it; later, with Miss Todd,

he went upstairs and admired Salvatore Kilbane Pasquariella, an infinitesimal peanut snoring placidly in an old-fashioned rocking cradle.

Downstairs again they listened to *Santa Lucia* as interpreted on the accordion by Angelica Theresa and on the piano by Christina Marie. In the middle of it Kilbane answered the door-bell and held a low-voiced conversation with Beatty and Tom Wilshaw on the white flagstone. He learned that at a quarter past nine, not long after the *Tribune* appeared on the streets, Salvatore had walked out of the barber's shop with two strangers. No one had seen him since.

For a moment after closing the door Kilbane leaned his shoulders against it. Then, his face much the same as ever, he went back to the parlour. "We'll get in touch with Salvatore later," he announced loudly, surprised that the words came out as well as they did. "Now we'd better be getting along."

He drove Miss Todd home. "They've got men out," he told her quietly. "Better men than me. You don't have to worry about Salvatore. You aren't, are you?"

She did not answer him; she did not cry either; whatever was inside her—and Kilbane realized soberly that there must be pretty much—she was managing to keep inside her. But at Appleton Road, when he pulled up behind a green saloon parked in front of her apartment house, she failed to get out after he walked round the car and opened the door for her.

He glanced down at her, at the side of her face and at the hands all knotted up in her lap; then, because it seemed best to leave her alone there for a minute or two, he went on up to the front door and into the hall. A redheaded man, very broad through the shoulders, looked up at him without friendliness and then shifted position on a bench near the stairs.

Kilbane did not pay any attention to him. He walked past him to the row of bells and fussed around there momentarily; then, as if he had pressed one without receiving an answer, he went out mumbling to himself. He had seen the redheaded man before, standing sullenly beside Sammy Gordon in a morning line-up. But at that time the redheaded man had been on an illuminated stage, while Detective Kilbane sat half a dozen rows back in a darkened auditorium. That was why he knew the redheaded man did not know him.

Before he reached the steps a good many details had dropped miraculously into place. They had Salvatore—they'd had him since nine-fifteen—but what Kilbane had forgotten was that Salvatore was nobody's fool. If he denied everything they'd be

careful with him because Miss Todd, as she said, had mentioned no names. They had a lead, but if they had not broken Salvatore they could not be positive that it was the right lead. So they'd got a phone book and looked up the Janet S. Harrington who had signed the column and after that they sent the redheaded man over here to talk to her.

It was not very complicated. By the time he reached the car, Kilbane understood the main points well enough to shape them into eight or nine sentences directed at the top of Miss Todd's round hat.

She looked up at him blindly. What was he trying to tell her? That—

"Keep it low," Kilbane warned her. He wanted to be very calm himself, but a couple of hundred pinpoints that were each as small and hard as the tip of an ice pick had drawn themselves up into a complete circle around his chest. "He won't want to take you to where Salvatore is; you've got to make him. You've got to tell him that you don't know Salvatore's name, that you only saw him once when someone pointed him out to you at headquarters. You can't describe him very well, either, but you'd know him if you saw him again. Got that straight?"

He had pulled ahead of the green saloon to the next corner. He parked there.

"Yes," Miss Todd answered him very quietly and without a tremor. "I understand perfectly. I'll go with him and you'll follow us—"

Kilbane nodded. She'd sit here for five minutes so that he'd have a chance to line things up. After that—he looked narrowly at her. She understood that this wasn't a picnic, didn't she? She understood that she didn't have to do it? It was a good way, but it wasn't the only way.

Miss Todd turned to him, her eyes blazing with cold excitement. If he tried to stop her now—

"All right," Kilbane said. He patted her hand reassuringly, understanding that a girl like this was all right in fundamentals: she was a lot cooler now, for instance, than Joseph J. Kilbane. Before she left the car he contacted headquarters by means of the two-way radio, and not long after that several black sedans with no police insignia on them were cutting over to Appleton Road from City Hall Square.

They were all in place when Miss Todd came down the steps with the redheaded man and got into the green saloon with him.

It was a long ride, and all the way Kilbane kept telling himself senselessly that he should never have let her go off alone. But

in the end nothing went wrong; when the green saloon stopped outside an apartment house he was only two minutes away on a parallel road.

O'Hare and Conlon were close behind him; Patterson, who had taken over for the last part of the trip, met them at the corner; Beatty and Tom Wilshaw also appeared from somewhere, but despite the crowd Kilbane was first in the lobby. Arrangements were made there after they found out that the apartment was 4E, and that in addition to someone who almost certainly was S. Pasquariella it held a girl and three men. They started upstairs in a creaking elevator, Kilbane breathing slowly and deeply. They got off at the fourth floor and O'Hare stopped them all before a brass 4E glittering sleekly against dark wood.

"All right," O'Hare said. "Wait till we hear Beatty and Patterson at the back. Then!"

Kilbane looked at him. "To hell with that," Kilbane said, through his teeth. It was not a time for waiting—not for Kilbane. He set his revolver almost flush with the lock, fired twice into it, rammed one heel viciously into what the bullets left and plunged far off balance into a long and empty living-room.

The redheaded man appeared in a doorway. He was shouting back at someone and trying frantically to get a gun out from under the left flap of his vest. After Kilbane shot him precisely through the shoulder without breaking stride, event seemed to move on into event without any intervening time lapse at all.

Looking back on it later, he appeared to reach the inner doorway immediately after he burst through the outer one, and at that moment he sprawled forward over a little sallow-faced man crouched down in front of him. He landed on a dining-room table that was eight feet long and as smooth as ice; he sped down it on his left arm and the side of his left leg.

It must have been an impressive entrance. The tablecloth wrapped itself around him and a bowl of flowers in the centre got tangled up in his left armpit. On the far end he sailed off into a chair and carried that majestically with him against the wall. He had one swirling glimpse of the sallow-faced man running out of the dining-room and into O'Hare. Then he landed.

A dapper young man with crisp blond hair raced out of the kitchen and fired down quickly at him with his left hand. Kilbane shot back from an impossible angle, wondering for a moment—he must have been dazed by the fall—why left-handed people always handled themselves so deftly. O'Hare, Conlon, Beatty, Tom Wilshaw poured into the room; S. Pasquariella stood over

the blond young man and waved the remains of a kitchen chair venomously in the air. Everyone was there—everyone but Miss Todd. Kilbane himself, moving only a pair of wild blue eyes, lay with his right shoulder piled into the wall, his knees drawn up under him and his nose dug deep into the carpet.

He breathed something when he could—he'd known it, he'd known it. Wobbling, the gun still in his hand, he got up and staggered out to the kitchen. Dark. Empty. And incredibly enough it was only he who was worried about her. Back in the dining-room O'Hare was lighting a cigarette and stirring the left-handed man with a contemplative toe.

"Eh?" O'Hare said, when Kilbane croaked something. "What's the matter with you?"

Kilbane staggered by him into the bedroom. She was there, trying to light a cigarette and handle the phone at the same time—the same old Miss Todd. He looked at her for a moment and then he tried to help her. One sleeve was ripped away from his coat and his buttonless waistcoat bore a fragment of tablecloth and a few crushed flower petals. His nose was bleeding. When Miss Todd saw him she said, "St-st-st-st," with progressive disapproval.

"I fell," Kilbane said. "Over the table," he added, with a vague gesture towards the dining-room. "Were you beginning to think you'd lost me?"

"Oh no," Miss Todd said, sharp as ever. "I heard you come in." But after that, when her news editor's voice barked out of the carpiece, she took a moment to reach up one hand and brush a couple of the flower petals away from him. And she said, very softly for Miss Todd, "I'm all right, you know. Were you afraid? I wasn't."

Was he? Kilbane didn't know anything. He nodded, though. She spoke something into the mouthpiece and then she opened her handbag and took her handkerchief out of it.

"As if you had to do it all," she said. "Now sit down somewhere where I can't see you and wipe your nose."

She went with him to the christening on Sunday afternoon, and when they got out of his car before S. Pasquariella's house Kilbane showed her the silver cup.

"Very nice," Miss Todd said. "Monogrammed, too."

"Well," Kilbane said, taking the credit only where credit was due, "that was the shop's idea. I think it looks pretty good. S.K.P. You know what the K's for? Kilbane."

"Oh," she said, without adding anything smart. There was no need for her to take his arm, either, but she did that, too, and

Kilbane was not very much upset about it. Perhaps it meant something; perhaps it didn't. Kilbane intended to find out.

Inside, in a busy parlour, the girl children of S. Pasquariella swung into something or other on a one-two-three piano and accordion duet. It sounded wonderful to Kilbane.



"Ah—a metronome, I presume."

DRINK TO DANGER

By VICTOR FRANCIS

THE strip of micro-film was about as wide as the cork tip on John Cross's cigarette—and, in fact, had been concealed under the cork tip of a cigarette which was handed to Cross at his farewell party at the consulate.

"Not a very good idea to leave it there, old chap," the languid young man at the consulate had said. "Our friends have been wise to the cigarette trick since Mata Hari was a Girl Guide. I expect you know a better way to get it over the border. But—" he raised a protesting hand as Cross opened his mouth to speak "—but don't tell me. I'm happier not to know the ways and means of you professionals . . . What were you going to say?"

"Only goodbye—and thank you for nothing," Cross murmured.

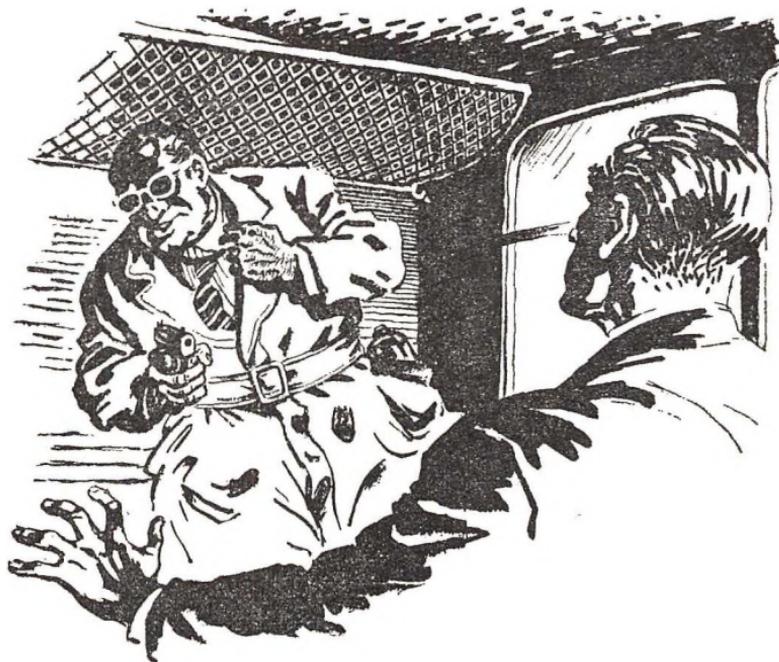
Now, as the trans-continental express rattled through the dark night, he stirred in his corner seat and tried to assume an expression which blamed his restlessness on the proletarian springs.

"I'm afraid our trains lack the comfort to which you must be accustomed in the West." The fat man spoke flawless English. His pink flesh looked as crumpled as his bulky clothes. He was the only other occupant of the compartment.

A hand dived into the cavernous pocket of his overcoat. "But we have a private-enterprise amenity which lessens the rigours of our State railways." And, as he chuckled fatly, the hand emerged clasping a bottle of innocently-colourless liquid. "To comfort," he said; swigged deeply, wiped the palm of his hand on his sleeve, then wiped the palm of his hand round the bottle neck, and handed it to Cross.

"To friendship," said Cross tactfully. He took one burning mouthful, and silently wondered how long it would take to grow a new larynx.

"Potatoes," said the fat man proudly. "Distilled from potatoes. . ."



"To potatoes," said Cross, slightly huskily, as he swigged again.

"May friendship between our two countries grow and grow. . ." said the fat man as he recovered the bottle and drank again.

" . . . Grow like little potatoes," said Cross as the bottle was handed back to him.

The fat man had a motor car with six cylinders, three children and a wife, which he appeared to place in that order in his affections. He had learned his English at Manchester University, and he knew the words of "On Ilkley Moor Baht 'At." He also had a revolver under his left armpit, which Cross discovered when he stood to propose a toast to Agricultural Development and permitted the train to jolt him against his companion.

By this time the bottle was empty, and the toasts were being drunk in amber fire-water from a large gun-metal flask which the fat man had produced from his suitcase. He was visibly pinker, and appeared to be even fatter, and was teaching Cross a song which he had picked up from the interpreter to the last trade mission from Peking.

Cross was becoming aware that the onward-swaying motion of the train was being sickeningly supplemented by a tendency for

the compartment to revolve; and he knew from experience that he had about five minutes left before passing out.

"Tell you what," he said thickly. "I propose to do you a signal honour, my friend. I propose to initiate you into my club. First, we swap ties . . ."

He pulled the blue-striped silk from his neck and gestured impatiently to the fat man to do the same. They exchanged ties, and the fat man insisted that the re-tying should be marked by another drink. Cross pulled a corn-cob pipe from his pocket and thrust it into the mouth of his astonished companion. He took a pair of sunglasses from his pocket and planted them on the other's nose. "Voilà," he said. "You are now a member of the Entwistle Harriers!"

The compartment was now revolving anti-clockwise, and as he sank back, Cross was dimly aware of the fat man impatiently pulling off the glasses and leaning forward, his smile gone, to stare intently at him.

Cross stirred slightly only once, when a shivering draught made him realize that he had been completely stripped, as his clothes and his inert body were searched.

But it had been skilfully done. He was fully dressed again, and even his shoes had been tied in his own idiosyncratic manner, when he struggled through to consciousness in the morning.

The fat man was looking at him steadily. "I regret that we must say goodbye in a few moments, Mr. Cross," he said. "The train is now slowing for the frontier halt. There I must turn back." He smiled with a trace of humour. "I had hoped at one stage last night that our association might perhaps continue—but apparently it is not to be."

Cross groaned. His mouth was like the floor of a bird-cage.

"I expect my cases have been thoroughly searched in the luggage van, but there's nothing of interest in them."

"Quite so," said the fat man.

The train was shuddering to a standstill. Cross rose. "Well, goodbye," he said. "I'll tell the Entwistle Harriers they have a new member. That reminds me . . ." He stretched out his hand to his own tie, which the fat man still wore.

The fat man moved with astonishing speed. He pushed Cross roughly back on to the seat, his right hand produced the gun from his shoulder holster, and his left hand tore the blue-striped tie from his neck.

"You were very clever, Mr. Cross, very clever indeed. But mercifully you reminded me."

The gun was held steady as his left hand fingered the tie. He

cursed unintelligibly. He seized the tie in his teeth, and ripped the seam.

"That's frightfully destructive, you know, and I'm sure the Entwistle Harriers wouldn't approve," said Cross. "Tell you what, you keep the tie. I'm getting out here."

The fat man hurled the shredded tie to the floor. He put his gun away, and took a very deep breath. "I apologise. I was given certain information. Apparently there was an error . . ."

"I shouldn't worry," said Cross, opening the compartment door. "I'll keep your tie as a souvenir. Lord. . ."

He put his hand up to his eyes as the early morning light hit him like a blow. "Talking of souvenirs, you've given me the mother and father of all hangovers."

He fumbled in his breast pocket, blinking against the light. "Sunglasses," he muttered.

The fat man held them out courteously. "You loaned them to me for my initiation into your club—if you remember," he said. "I think perhaps your need is now greater than mine. And the pipe, too." He held out the corn-cob.

"Keep it," said Cross cheerfully. "Your souvenir."

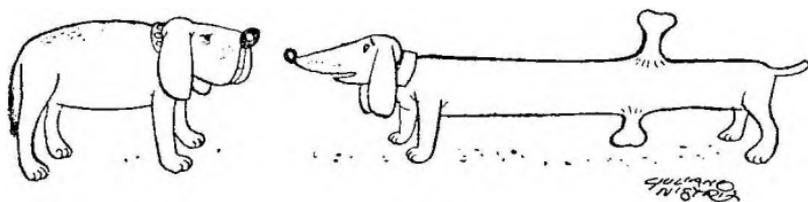
Twenty-four hours later, in a flat off St. James's in London, Cross laid his sunglasses on a large and empty desk. He took a penknife, and prised out one of the lenses. Then he inserted the blade in the edge of the lens, and it parted into two symmetric halves. Between them lay a strip of micro-film, about as wide as the cork tip on a cigarette, and the colour of the lens.

"Thank you, Cross," said the man on the other side of the desk, as he picked up the micro-film with a pair of tweezers. "Did you have any trouble?"

"Not really," said Cross. "Our friends gave me a travelling companion who saw through me. But he didn't realize that micro-film in a matching lens can be seen through, too."

He rose to leave. "By the way," he said. "What are the Entwistle Harriers?"

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"I think it's something I ate."

DARK ILLUSION

By
R. L. WILD



REMEMBER Magio? The Great Magio? Of course I remember him. Knew him when he was less than nothing, peddling his magic from agent to agent when illusionists and magicians were ten a penny. Knew him when he was up and coming, when he'd improved on most of the disappearing stunts and the unravelling gimmicks. In those days he was often referred to as the new Houdini. Matter of fact, there was nothing Houdini did that Magio did not do better, eventually—although that stuff wasn't generally his game.

It was after the war that he really came into his own—after he'd come back from the Far East where he'd done a long tour with ENSA and learned that trick with the snakes and the being buried alive stunt. His one disappointment was in never mastering the Indian rope-trick.

Oh, yes, I knew him all right. Can't say I cared for him a great deal—his off-stage behaviour had nothing of the suave charm he adopted on-stage. In my opinion he was a nasty bit of work, although even I had not realized just how nasty. If I had, then he would never have come down to Semastipur to see me and nothing would have happened.

What nationality was his wife? I never knew. She was very beautiful, yet except for her eyes she seemed cold, emotionless; but those eyes . . . I had never appreciated the phrase "live coals" until I met her. That's just what her eyes were, two dark, lustrous, intensely burning live coals. So were the man's. No—not Magio's. His were cold, grey-green, the sort of eyes one associates with a killer.



Semastipur is a small railway colony in Bihar, some eighty or so miles from Lucknow, not terribly far from the more fetid *jungli* Bengal. It was not a civilized kind of railway community like Muzzafapur, thirty miles up the line towards Lucknow, although it had much of the same deep tropical, illusory beauty.

The flowers gave off masses—*masses* of exotic colour, but no perfume. The grass was a luxuriant green—but damp, lacking the inviting warmth, despite the heat, of an English meadow. There was no swampy ground nearby, but it had that sort of atmosphere, as though one were living on the edge of a huge bog. At night this feeling increased so that one seemed to be in the very centre of the swamp.

At the time I had a company of infantrymen there, purely for internal security reasons. I was billeted, at his own invitation, on the stationmaster, who was quite a character, an Englishman who had married locally and had been there for about forty years. Jovial type, like his rolling fat, Indian wife, and—strange to say—he dabbled amateurishly with magic.

His bungalow was large and lavish, but indescribably untidy. Not dirty, if you know what I mean. Just untidy, and incredibly noisy during the day. A whole tribe of half-naked coffee-tinted kids running wild with a weird assortment of pets. Old Warwick's bungalow was a noisy, delightful English island in a strange sea of mystic orientalism.

The bungalow was set in a long wide garden. Warwick had, on one or two rare occasions, made some half-hearted attempts to cultivate it, but unlike his contemporaries on British Railways, he disliked gardening, and the place was just a large patch of semi-wildland with a fence separating it from the other wildland. It contained a vast number of mango trees, but unlike those a few feet away on the outside of the fence they never bore fruit. "Resent being fenced off," Warwick would grin.

The rest was a wild confusion of flowers, weeds, strangling long wide-leaved grass and dark, sinister squat palms. Except close to the house where, under the administration of Mrs. Warwick, a reasonably neat lawn was maintained. Only a few yards square, but admirable for sitting in the cool of the evening drinking one's chottha peg, or the long glass of that delicious mangofool which Mrs. Warwick made so expertly.

It was while we were sitting there one moonlit evening that old Warwick said, "About this time o' year we usually get a bunch of travelling magicians around. They do one or two performances on the *maidan* in front of the station, and sometimes a few of the locals hire them for a dinner party or something. Would you like me to book 'em up for a show for ourselves?"

"I would indeed," I said enthusiastically. "What do they do?"

"Depends what you give 'em. I usually reckon to give 'em a hundred rupees and think I get my money's worth. Mind, I only get about half of the burying alive stuff, less than half of the snakes, but—"

"When are they due?"

"Oh, I'll get to know when they're at Muzzafapur. Give 'em a week there and we'll see 'em."

About a week later he said, "That bunch of magic-wallahs are at Muzzafapur now, so I'll arrange for 'em to do a show here on Saturday next week. Like to bring your fellow officers up?"

"As a matter of fact," I said, "we've been talking about it. What sort of a do would we get for two hundred?"

He grinned. "The lot, I should think. Anyone who's got his Missus here shouldn't bring her; they'd probably make her disappear—for keeps. What's on your mind?"

"Well, as I say, we've been talking it over. What about my brother officers and I producing the couple of hundred and

saving you the expense? We'd be grateful for the use of your place as the theatre, so to speak."

He sucked away at his pipe then said, "O.K., if you like, but bring 'em all round to dinner first. I'll get the Missus to put on a curry. How many will there be?"

I hesitated. "Rather a lot you know, Warwick. Four officers, two wives—and I would like to invite the sergeant-major and his wife."

"Eight? That's all right."

It was then that I thought of Magio—Robinson, off-stage. This was something he'd hate to miss. He was, I knew, at Calcutta. He had one more show to do somewhere near there and was then flying home. I mentioned this to Warwick.

"Oh, write him, write him at once," he cried. "Ask him for the weekend. Imagine, a real live illusionist! Mind you," he added, "he might learn something too. These people work at close quarters. No long distance, no dark auditorium, no helpful footlights. Yes, he might even learn something."

I wrote off to Magio straight away. His reply, accepting, came almost by return.

Magio's swarthy saturnine face was completely expressionless when he alighted from the train. We shook hands, and as always I felt a slight chill at the touch of his hand. At the bungalow he watched the railway labourers, borrowed for the purpose, digging the long, narrow hole that the native magicians had ordered. It was exactly like a grave. Looking down into that gruesome trench, Magio passed no comment.

We dined well and Mrs. Warwick coped admirably, but as we moved out to the terrace the domestic homeliness seemed to evaporate. In a few short steps we had left behind us the comforting din of children, pets and blaring radio to enter an ominous silent night of tropical mystery. A bright moon gave light strong enough to read by, and the Warwicks' servants were busy fetching chairs from the bungalow and arranging them on the lawn.

To one side of the mound of earth thrown up from that sinister grave, the magicians' orchestra squatted cross-legged, puffing noiselessly at the inevitable hookah, and a few hurrying clouds produced a weird shadow effect on the four nondescript thin bodies and their bulging pipes and narrow drums. The palms and foliage of mango trees threw an eerie pattern of black and white slats across them, and the effect was startling. They had the frightening appearance of painted African witchdoctors.

Old Warwick looked up at the sky critically.

"Thought I heard a faint rumble of thunder a moment ago," he muttered. "You haven't seen one of our freak electrical storms yet. These people'll get more stage lighting than they'll want, if it comes." Even as he spoke there came the distant crack of a lightning whip and the grumbling thunder. Overhead the breeze sighed almost hissing through the trees, and all around the bull frogs set up their hideous nightly cacophony.

Then, from out of the shadows, the man and his woman made their entrance. They were both extraordinarily tall with fine, intellectual faces—scarcely more dark of skin than Magio, and their near-perfect chiselled features were about as expressionless, except for those live burning coals that were their eyes.

They came forward, hand in hand, slowly, silently, with unholy dignity. They wore similar clothes, the loose shirt flapping outside Punjabi-type pantaloons and long curled-up slippers. Strangely enough, they wore no headgear and I noticed the raven blackness of the girl's long straight hair when the moon shone on it.

Reaching the edge of the lawn nearest us they stopped, sank to their haunches and stared at us. Their teeth gleamed white, but they were not smiling. I saw the movement of the instruments as the musicians put them to their mouths; there came a few preliminary beats from the drums and the overture began, a thin plaintive wailing that floated up and over us.

The man and the woman rose sinuously, like snakes uncoiling, to their feet. The man snapped his fingers.

"Ah," I heard Warwick murmur, "the props." He handed the man a small sheet of glass which he had taken from a photo frame. The man, in turn, gave it to the woman. Slowly, as though munching a delicacy, she bit off pieces of it, chewed and swallowed until she had eaten the lot. The man snapped his fingers again and Warwick gave him something else. A packet of thin razor-blades. One by one she inserted them into her mouth, chewed grimly and swallowed them down. A tumbler followed. I felt Magio stir beside me impatiently.

"Childish stuff. You can see that sort of rubbish any day at an English fair," he scoffed.

They did many more such tricks, most of them ordinary. Then the music took on a new rhythm. The girl dragged two wicker baskets from the shadows, one about two feet high. The other was much larger.

"Snakes," hissed Warwick. She lifted the lid from the smaller one, darted her hand inside and brought out a black, writhing hooded cobra. She gripped it with one hand at its neck, pressing on it and forcing open its mouth to show us its poison fangs. She held it stretched taut with the other hand farther down the

body. Slowly she walked towards us and allowed us to examine it at close quarters. Mrs. Wilkes, the wife of my number two, reached out and stroked the reptile's head, but most of the others shrank back.

The girl returned to the middle of the lawn, the music again changed tempo and she threw the snake viciously to the ground. Almost immediately it rose on its tail and swayed to the reedy wailing of that queer orchestra. The man sank to his haunches and began swaying with it. His hand, I noticed, was shaped very like the cobra's head and, as they both swayed from side to side, the snake's eyes never left the hand.

Slowly, slowly they swung, the man and the snake. Then, with startling unexpectedness, the hand shot out and clipped the snake's head. Again and again the man hit it—like gently smacking a naughty child, and yet somehow very sinister. I drew my eyes away from the snake to glance at the man. I saw the dull gleam of those smouldering eyes and I felt an overwhelming, unexplainable pity for the snake.

The music stopped. The man rose to his full height and the snake actually seemed to sag. It collapsed to the ground and I had the strange feeling that it was exhausted. The girl whipped out her arm, grabbed it by the neck and returned it to its basket. A great sigh came from the audience. Cigarettes were lit and I heard the intake of breath as we all inhaled deeply.

She then produced a square, off-white sheet.

"The shroud," whispered Warwick with awesome glee.

The man moved forward to the edge of the grave and she wrapped the dirty sheet around him. Carefully she wound until he was completely enveloped, then two of the musicians lifted him down into the trench and shovelled the earth in on top of him. The girl stood upon the mound, feet firmly apart, looked at her wrist watch and announced, "*Bice minut.*" Those twenty minutes were the longest of my life.

After about five minutes dark cloud completely obscured the moon and the woman became only a blurred shadow. Then long, forked streaks of lightning threw her shape at us in brilliant flashes, each followed by absolute darkness and rolling thunder. The rain itself must have by-passed us but I found myself dreading the illuminating split second of lightning and hating the ominous dark and the ear-shattering thunder.

As suddenly as it had come, it stopped and a pale, watery moon came through. I saw the woman astride the grave of her live husband, hair streaming, black, black eyes smouldering, mouth agape with a fascinating hideousness showing the white teeth. A wild scene.

"*Bice minit . . . finish,*" she screamed into the wind, and the musicians moved forward to unbury the living.

As the last shovel of earth was scraped away, the dirty, ghoul-like shroud rose out of its chasm, fell away, and the man leaped lightly on to the grass, his lips twisted in what I suppose was some sort of a smile.

For a minute or so the woman stood there, impassive, cold, statuesque, then with her near-stately dignity, she walked to the large wicker basket and took away its lid. The reeds once more took up the wailing rhythmic melody and, inch by inch, a huge thick python sinuated itself to a full fifteen feet. The music stopped and the girl embraced the thing, almost lovingly it seemed, and it proceeded to coil itself around her. She did everything with that snake—almost kissed it. It wound and unwound itself about her and she nearly wound herself about it.

Then there came a single crash from a drum. The girl stooped, grabbed the python by its thick tail with both hands, and with enormous effort swung it out around her and into the air like a rope. A roll from the drum, a soft "rat-tat-tat" and everyone held their breath. The snake stood vertically in the air as stiff as an iron rod. Carefully the girl let go of the tail and it swung into position, just as the end of a suspended rope would have done.

Then she left it, the tail some two or three feet from the ground, the head at least fifteen feet above. She walked round slowly, gesticulating towards the snake, then she went over to it, grasped its body with both hands and *climbed up it* until her hands reached its neck. And there before our eyes was this astonishing, incredible spectacle of a snake and woman suspended in mid-air.

More drums, more music, the snake wriggled, the woman slithered to the ground, grabbed its tail and, with a flick, brought it down. It gave her one look and wriggled over to its own basket, and with indescribable fascination I watched it disappear. The woman replaced the lid.

"The Indian rope-trick with a vengeance," I heard Magio whisper, and for the first time in my life I thought I detected a suppressed excitement in him.

The last act was an anti-climax. The man again took out the cobra and teased it as before, then with both hands, one at the neck, the other at the tail he picked it up and took it over to the woman. She opened her mouth wide and inserted that repugnant head up to its neck. With a flourish the man flashed a razor-blade, cut round the snake's head, just nicking the skin, the girl bit, the man pulled, and to our horror the body came away in

his hand. The woman chewed—one would have thought she was chewing a sweetmeat—gulped once or twice and swallowed.

Once again she encircled us, parading with open mouth. I heard a woman retch. The bulging pipes whined, the man and his woman disappeared into the shadows. The show was over. As we trooped back into the bungalow Warwick grinned and said, "There goes the safest woman in Semastipur tonight."

How wrong he was.

"Who's for a drink?" asked Warwick.

"All of us, I should imagine." My number two's wife laughed nervously.

"Whisky for me," I said.

"Large peg too, I bet," Warwick commented dryly as he poured. I nodded.

Then I noticed that Magio was not with us. Puzzled, I went back to the rear verandah. He was deep in animated conversation with the man and his woman.

"Come on," I shouted. "There's a drink in here for you."

"Coming," he called back.

As he sipped his whisky he laughed and said, "Well, folks?"

The woman shuddered. "Bit much—that last thing," said one of them.

"Oh," Magio said, "I'm not concerned with that. In any case it wouldn't go down in England, but that variation of the rope-trick, now . . ." He turned to Warwick. "I hate to impose, old man, but would you mind terribly if I stayed for a week? I want to spend the time with that troupe. Reckon in a week I'll have that rope-trick mastered."

"You're welcome," the genial Warwick said. "Stay as long as you like."

At breakfast on the seventh day Magio said, "I'd like to put the show on again tonight, if you'd let me."

"By all means," said his host. "Love it, myself."

"It won't be the full show—just the burying and the python."

"Who's going to be buried?" I asked.

"I am. Think I've got it. Of course, there's nothing new in that, and the time lapse is too long for the English stage, unless we can think of something to hold the interest while I'm buried. Meanwhile, I just want to ensure that I've got it. The great thing, of course, is that rope-trick. I've certainly got that, but—" his voice took on a strange tone "—not alone. I can't do it without that blasted woman."

None of the womenfolk came that night. Only my officers, Warwick, his wife and myself were present. There were no

preliminaries. The music went straight into its weird melody and the girl took the lid from the large wicker basket. Magio went through exactly the same procedure we'd seen the girl perform the previous week. The snake coiled and wound itself about him, he seemed to coil about the snake. Then, just as the girl had done, he grabbed it by its tail, whirled it into the air, clapped his hands, and the thing hung there stiff, stark stiff. With a grin he climbed it, hung round its neck for a second or two, slid to the ground. The snake unstiffened, sagged and returned to its basket.

We all gasped, and I realized what this would mean to Magio in the international world of magic.

The woman brought out the shroud and Magio whispered to her. I saw her nod and beckon to the man. He too nodded. Magio came over to us. "Hope you won't be bored, but we're going to give it another run. Want to make absolutely sure I've got it. After all, it's easy enough to make a real grave of that blasted hole, isn't it?"

I coughed and Warwick laughed a little self-consciously. Together Magio and the woman wrapped the shroud round the man, lifted him in and filled up the hole.

"We'll only leave him down there ten minutes," Magio called. "It's not the length of time that matters."

Together they dug and scraped away the dirt. In silence we waited—and continued to wait. The shroud did not rise. Magio called out to him and the woman shouted in her unintelligible tongue. No movement. Five, ten minutes after the hole had been cleared the shroud still did not move.

Warwick and I jumped to our feet, rushed over. The three of us lifted it out. With panic tearing at me, we unravelled that dirty, greyish sheet. The lids covered those smouldering eyes. I patted his cheeks. Eventually, scared of confirming what I already knew, I put my ear to his heart. There was no sound. The man was quite dead.

After the inquest—"death by misadventure" was the coroner's verdict—Magio returned to England. The itinerant band of magic-wallahs went on their way minus their male star and—as I discovered afterwards—minus their female star.

Yes, she was a very beautiful woman, Magio's wife. For a couple of years they had the world at their feet, could demand their own price. Then, as you know, she died. But what you didn't know is that Magio could do none of that stuff without her.

I was at Bombay when the letter came from Warwick, who was still plodding along at Semastipur under Independent India.

Magio had written him asking if he could get hold of another band of magicians like the first. Warwick's letter informed me that he had arranged it, that Magio was on his way out by air, and would I care to join them?

I was a civilian now and only in Bombay for a few weeks but I knew that I simply had to find the time to go over to Bihar.

Warwick was not the jovial old man I'd known. He had that strange air, the air of one who has trouble. During lunch he told me that Magio was due in on the evening train, and that the group of "magic-wallahs" were also expected.

"Only coming for us," Warwick explained. "The magistrate managed to get hold of them for me—remember him? He acted as coroner at the inquest on the body of that other fellow."

Yes, I remembered. Remembered the queer look he gave Magio as he passed verdict, too.

Warwick took me out to the terrace after lunch. Same untidy compound, same tidy lawn and the same yawning grave.

"Not really," said Warwick. "It isn't the same hole. We dug another, a few feet further back. And the players—they will be different. Two of them at least."

Magio arrived on time. He seemed unchanged. Slightly older perhaps.

"I'd rather you didn't come tonight," Warwick said to his wife as we rose from the table after dinner.

"Rubbish," Mrs. Warwick said.

There were only Warwick and his wife, Magio, the Indian magistrate and myself. Magio took a great deal of fussy care in sitting down, settled, lit a cigarette. His face, dark, strange in the momentary glow from the match, showed no emotion.

The eerie overture began. We held our breath. The woman came out alone. She was not as tall as Magio's wife, perhaps not so beautiful, but nevertheless, she was extremely lovely in that same cold way and with those same dark, smouldering eyes. I remember thinking, "Perhaps it is a national characteristic, whatever nationality that might be."

And then *he* came out from the shadows. Mrs. Warwick gripped my arm and it hurt. The atmosphere was indescribably tense and my nerves were as taut as over-stretched violin strings.

"I don't think it *can* be," Warwick said in an agonized whisper. Then as he neared us and the slatted shadows from the palm leaves fell away, I was not so sure either. A twin brother, maybe.

I glanced at Magio and I could see that even he was perturbed. As I looked again at the man, I heard Magio's voice on that fateful night: "Only leave him down there ten minutes. It's not the length of time that matters."

No, it could not be physically possible, yet the horrible mental picture prevailed—that this man, who had been dead from one burial, might have come to life from another. He walked with slow deliberate tread right up to Magio's chair and again I felt that it was an amazing likeness—but that was all.

"I believe—" he said, and the voice of the man was sheer shock. The other one had never spoken. "I believe that in England and for many rupees you do this thing." Without turning his head he gestured towards the hole.

Magio nodded.

"Would you care—?"

Magio rose to his feet. I shall never understand what compelled him to accept that challenge. It was so terribly, crudely obvious.

Together they wound the greyish, awful shroud around him and together they took him to that cold narrow slit and gently lowered him. Together, in complete silence, they took shovels and with undue care filled in the grave.

Why none of us attempted to stop them I cannot say. "I told you you shouldn't have come," hissed Warwick to his trembling wife. On the face of the magistrate I saw a faint sardonic smile.

For twenty long, long minutes we sat. For twenty minutes those two, that man and the woman, stood upon that grave, feet apart, faces unsmiling. The musicians blew softly, dolefully and the tune that enveloped us was a dirge.

"*Bice minit*," I heard the man say, and they commenced to dig. Slowly, painstakingly they shovelled and scooped. There seemed no other noise on earth but the thumping of my heart. Then, to our utter amazement, from out of that black hole the shroud began to appear. It came up slowly at first and then faster, and eventually it fell away to reveal Magio, ashen-grey, obviously shaken, but very much alive.

He came over to us and sat down. I lit a cigarette for him. The music crescendoed into a cheerful sort of dance from Hades and with every puff of the cigarette Magio retrieved more and more of his suave self-assurance. At last, with a deep breath, perhaps of relief, he whispered, "Knew they wouldn't dare."

The music was slowing now. The lid was off the large wicker basket and the python was slithering sinuously from it.

"You also do this trick, don't you?" The man's whisper was almost a threatening hiss.

"I'm not sure." Magio hesitated. "Only with the woman can I do it."

"That's right," the man said. "Only with the woman. Only with the woman. Come—the woman will help." He led Magio

by the hand—and now it was the old Magio—"Magio the Great." His eyes never left the woman until he took that strong python by the tail, a near-smile on his thin lips.

He strained. The python reared its head and it slid along to Magio, climbed up his leg and body. Magio was now trying in vain to swing it into the air for the rope-trick.

I do not know which I heard first, Mrs. Warwick's scream, or the awful *crrrunch* of his bones breaking under the constriction. I remember looking to see where its tail was anchored, my mind telling me that a python's tail *must* be anchored to enable it to crush. None of us had noticed, but its tail had entwined itself round what looked like—*could* have been—a short, thick tree stump, a few feet in front of the new grave.

Before we even sent for the police, as we took the much needed whisky from Warwick and as I looked at the magistrate's face, I knew it would be another "death by misadventure."



THE CRIME

Our crime expert's verdict (see page 58) is as follows :

Every person, says the law, "who in the night breaks and enters the dwelling-house of another with intent to commit a felony therein" is guilty of burglary, and liable to imprisonment for life.

So as there was an intention to steal, the fact that they were not given the time to carry out their purpose does not matter. And, it has been held, it is still a "breaking" when you displace any part of the building—by turning a key, drawing a bolt, or even lifting a latch.

But as it was not yet dark, did the breaking and entering take place at night? Alas, for Bill and Mary! Night, for this purpose, is defined by the Larceny Act, 1916, as any time between nine p.m. and six a.m. So they are a pair of burglars.

Had they moved a bit faster and in exactly the same way but half an hour earlier, they would not have been guilty of burglary! They would only have committed housebreaking—and that carries much lighter maximum penalties!

CRIME CLUB CHOICES

APRIL

Elizabeth FerrarsA TALE OF TWO MURDERS
10s. 6d.

MAY

Andrew GarveA HERO FOR LEANDA
10s. 6d.*and the first thriller from***Berkely Mather**THE ACHILLES AFFAIR
10s. 6d.**COLLINS***detection de-luxe***Hide and Kill****JEREMY YORK** How an ordinary girl became enmeshed in a web of terror. Would the nightmare ever end? Ingenious, unusual, credible.**The Third Assassin****HOWARD CHARLES DAVIS** Attempts on the life of a South American dictator are the theme of this punch-packed novel.*each 11s. 6d.***JOHN LONG****Suspense**

presents—

DEEP in the water beneath a landing stage the man stood swaying, arms outspread, head nodding, eyes staring. He was very dead. From the moment Alan Preston—university lecturer on holiday in Italy—makes his sinister find he is involved in a sorcerer's brew of political intrigue, threatened revolution, violence and graft . . . with suspicion pointing to the beautiful and mysterious English girl he is determined to help. Leonard Halliday's *The Devil's Door* is a lively whodunnit with an unusual background and setting. (Hammond, Hammond, 12s. 6d.).

Suspense author Michael Gilbert comes up with another winner—*Blood and Judgement*, featuring, for the first time in novel form, the imperturbable Detective Sergeant Patrick Petrella. When a woman's body is found on the banks of a lonely reservoir the young detective decides to play a lone hand, does some off-duty night work, and finally comes up with all the aces. A very real, very dramatic police novel, with all the author's usual force and liveliness. (Hodder and Stoughton, 12s. 6d.)

When Nigel Strangeways embarked on a cruise of legend-steeped Greek islands he had no foreboding of disaster.

But his fellow-passengers had brought the seeds of trouble with them, and he was soon involved in a maze of intrigue more sinister and more tortuous than the Minotaur's Labyrinth... From the fascinating widow and her neurotic sister to the revoltingly precocious child, **Nicholas Blake's** characterization is rich and subtle: vivid and nostalgic in atmosphere. **The Widow's Cruise** is civilized and satisfying. (Collins, 12s. 6d.)

Two unsuccessful attempts have already been made to kill General Cortez, tyrannical dictator of a South American state, visiting England. Cortez must be protected; Scotland Yard rounds up the dictator's many enemies—including William Gatt, down and out ex-commando. But, for reasons of his own, Gatt is hired—as **The Third Assassin**. In **Howard Charles Davis's** novel the pace is fast, the action plentiful... And, in the end, who *was* the third assassin? (John Long, 11s. 6d.)

"I want another five hundred," ex-gaol bird Jim Walsh told his wife. "If you don't give me the money they'll find me dead..." He *was* found dead, and his murder is the first episode in a complex, fast-moving mystery story involving an advertising agency, a couple of suspect night clubs and no lack of dubious characters. In **Don't Argue With Death** the ingenuity and patience of **Leonard Gribble's** Superintendent Slade are taxed to the hilt. (Herbert Jenkins, 10s. 6d.)

Sign of a good mystery



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THE CASE AGAINST CARELL

By ELLERY QUEEN

EMBEZZLEMENT is a serious offence—and for John Carell, junior law partner, it brings a sinister threat. Meredith Hunt, Carell's ruthless senior partner, has discovered all, and the money Carell misappropriated to help his brother must be repaid immediately and in full. Carell refuses to ask his lovely and wealthy young wife, Helena, who is helplessly crippled by arthritis.

Next morning the voluptuous Mrs. Hunt contacts Carell. Meredith Hunt is no longer a threat to him—the burly lawyer has been found in his car, shot dead with Carell's pistol.

The police learn of Meredith's ultimatum to Carell, and the young lawyer is charged with Hunt's murder. He produces no alibi, telling the police that in his restless anxiety he had tramped the streets most of the night.

Tully West, another law partner, and the young Ellery Queen try to prove Carell's innocence, but all evidence is against him. Unknown to them Carell visits Hunt's widow, telling her he can shield her reputation no longer; he must produce an alibi for the murder period. Felicia Hunt, once infatuated with Carell, reluctantly signs a confession saying that Carell was with her on the night her husband was murdered.

Later, during the trial, knowing nothing else can save him, Carell tells Ellery of the confession. But when Ellery finds the envelope in Carell's safe it is empty—the vital confession is missing.

Meanwhile Felicia Hunt has disappeared. Ellery, Inspector Queen, and Tully West track her down to a country cottage. But when they arrive, they find that Hunt's widow is dead, murdered . . .

The story continues:



FELICIA HUNT was lying on the bedroom floor face down. The back of her head had been crushed, and the bloody shards of the heavy stoneware vase that had crushed it strewed the floor around her. In the debris were some stiff chrysanthemums, looking like big dead insects. One of them had fallen on her open right palm.

West swallowed and rapidly retreated to the hall.

She had been dressed in a rainbow-striped frock of some iridescent material when death caught her. Jewels glittered on her hands and arms and neck. There were pompomed slippers on her feet, her legs were bare, and the dead lips and cheeks and eyes showed no trace of make-up.

"She's been dead at least four days, maybe five," Inspector Queen said. "What do you make it, Velie?"

"Nearer four," the big sergeant said. "Last Sunday some time, Inspector." He glanced with longing at the tightly-closed windows.

"Better not, Velie."

The two men rose. They had touched nothing.

Ellery stood watching them morosely.

"Find anything, son?"

"No. That rain the other night wiped out any tyre tracks or

footprints that might have been left. Some food in the refrigerator, and her car is in the garage behind the house. No sign of robbery." Ellery added suddenly, "Doesn't something about her strike you as queer?"

"Yeah," Sergeant Velie said. "That posy in her hand ought to be a lily."

"Spare us, Velie! What, Ellery?"

"The way she's dressed."

They stared down at her. Tully West came back to the doorway, still swallowing.

The sergeant said, "Looks like she was expecting somebody, the way she's all dolled up."

"That's just what it doesn't look like," Inspector Queen snapped. "A woman as formally brought up as this one, who's expecting somebody, puts on shoes and stockings, Velie—doesn't go around bare-legged and wearing bedroom slippers. She hadn't even made up her face. She was expecting nobody. What about the way she's dressed, Ellery?"

"Why isn't she still in mourning?"

"Huh?"

"She drives up here alone on Saturday after wearing nothing but unrelieved black in town, and within twenty-four hours or less she's in a colour-happy dress and wearing all her favourite jewellery. It tells a great deal about Felicia de los Santos Hunt."

"It doesn't tell me a thing," his father retorted. "What I want to know is why she was knocked off. It certainly wasn't robbery."

"Isn't it obvious that this is part and parcel of Hunt's murder and the frame-up of John Carell?" West broke in with bitterness. "Felicia was murdered to keep her from giving John the alibi that would get him off the hook."

The Inspector nibbled his moustache.

"What does it take to convince you people that somebody is after Carell's hide?"

"That sounds like sense, dad."

"Maybe."

"In any case the Hunt woman's murder is bound to give the case against Carell a different look. Dad, before Velie phones the state police—"

"Well?"

"Let's really give this place a going over."

"What for, Ellery?"

"For that alibi statement Felicia signed and then took back when Carell wasn't looking. It's a long shot, but—who knows . . .?"

Their session with the state police took the rest of the night. It was sunrise before they got back to the city.

West asked to be dropped off at Sam Rayfield's, the top-flight criminal lawyer defending Carell.

"Rayfield won't thank me for waking him up, but then I haven't had any sleep at all. Who's going to tell John?"

"I will," Ellery said.

West turned away with a grateful wave.

"So far so bad," the Inspector said as they sped downtown. "Now all I have to do is talk the D.A.'s office into joining Rayfield in a plea to Judge Holloway, and why *I* should have to do it is beyond me!"

They parted with Sergeant Velie at the Headquarters' garage and Ellery walked over to the Criminal Courts Building. His head was muddy, and he wanted to clear it. He tried not to think of John Carell.

Carell woke up instantly at the sound of the cell door.

"Queen! How did you make out with Felicia?"

Ellery said: "We didn't."

"She won't testify?"

"She can't testify. John, she's dead."

It was brutal, but he knew no kinder formula. Carell was half sitting up, leaning on an elbow, and he remained that way. His eyes kept blinking in a monotonous rhythm. "Dead . . ."

"Murdered. We found her on the bedroom floor of her cottage with her head smashed in. She'd been dead for days."

"Murdered." Carell blinked and blinked. "But who—?"

"There's not a clue. So far, anyway." Ellery lit a cigarette and held it out. Carell took it. But then he dropped it and covered his face with both hands. "I'm sorry, John."

Carell's hands came down. "I'm no coward, Queen. I faced death a hundred times in the Pacific. But a man likes to die for some purpose . . . I'm scared."

Ellery looked away.

"There's got to be some way out of this!" Carell dropped off the bunk and seized Ellery by the arms. "That statement, that's my way out, Queen! Maybe she didn't destroy it. Maybe she took it up there with her. If you could find it for me—"

"I looked," Ellery said. "And my father looked, and Sergeant Velie looked, too. We covered the cottage inside and out. It took us over two hours. We didn't call the local police until we were satisfied it wasn't there."

"But it's got to be there! My life depends on it! Don't you see?" He shook Ellery. "Maybe she put it in an obvious place—like in that story of Poe's. Did you look in her bag?"

Her luggage?"

"Yes. We even went over the linings of her suits and coats."

"Her car—"

"Her car, too."

"Maybe it was on her. On her person. Did you . . . no, I suppose you wouldn't."

"We would and we did." He wished Carell would stop.

"How about that big ruby-and-emerald pendant she was so set on? The statement was only a single sheet of paper. She might have folded it up small and hidden it in the locket. Did you look there while you were searching the body?"

"Yes, John. All we found in the locket were two photos, Spanish-looking elderly people. Her parents, I suppose."

Carell released him. Ellery rubbed his arms.

"How about books?" Carell mumbled. "Felicia was always reading. She might have slipped it between two pages—"

"There were eleven books in the house and seven magazines. I went through them myself."

In the cold cell Carell wiped the perspiration from his cheeks.

"Desk with a false compartment? . . . Cellar? . . . Is there an attic? . . . Did you search the garage?"

He went on and on. Ellery waited for him to run down.

When Carell was finally quiet, Ellery called the guard. His last glimpse of the young lawyer was of a spreadeagled figure, motionless on the bunk, eyes shut. All Ellery could think of was a corpse.

Judge Joseph N. Holloway shook his head. He was a grey-skinned, frozen-eyed veteran of the criminal courts, known to practising members of the New York bar as Old Steelguts.

"I didn't come down to my chambers an hour early on a Monday morning, Counsellor Rayfield, for the pleasure of listening to your mellifluous voice. That pleasure palled on me a long time ago. I granted an adjournment on Friday morning because of the Hunt woman's murder, but do you have any evidence to warrant a further postponement? So far I've heard nothing but a lot of booshwah."

Smallhauser, the Assistant D.A., nodded admiringly. Judge Holloway's fondness for the slang of his youth—indulged in only *in camera*, of course—was trifled with at the peril of the trifler. "Booshwah is *le mot juste* for it, Your Honour. I apologize for being a party to this frivolous waste of your time."

Samuel Rayfield favoured the murderous little Assistant D.A. with a head-shrinking glance and clamped his teeth more firmly about his cold cigar. "Come off it, Joe," he said to Judge

Take a hand of tobacco leaf . . .



bind the leaves tight with
sail cord . . . store in a
cool cellar for weeks . . .
unbind and cut into
thin slices . . . rub a slice
between your hands
and smell . . . ah, that rich,
full-flavoured aroma
tells you it is matured . . .
ready for your pipe and
the most truly satisfying
smoke you've ever had.

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[NCT 108M]

Holloway. "This is a man's life we're playing with. We're not privileged to kick him to death simply because he acted like a damn fool in holding back his alibi. All I want this adjournment for is time to look for that alibi statement the Hunt woman signed when she was alive enough to write."

Judge Holloway's dentures gleamed towards Smallhauser.

"The alibi statement your client *says* the Hunt woman signed," the little D.A. said with his prim smile.

The Judge's dentures promptly turned to Rayfield.

"I've got the notary, Rudin, to attest to the fact that she signed it," the portly lawyer snapped.

"That she signed some paper, yes. But you people admit yourselves that Carell concealed the text of the paper from Rudin. For all Rudin knows he might have been witnessing the woman's signature to the lease of a new dog house."

The little D.A. turned his smile on the Judge. "I'm bound to say, Your Honour, this whole thing smells more and more to me like a stall."

"Joe," the famous lawyer said, "I'm not stalling. There's a chance she didn't destroy the statement. Not much of one, I admit, but I wouldn't sleep if I thought I hadn't exhausted every avenue of investigation on Carell's behalf."

"You wouldn't lose half of a strangled snore," the Judge said with enjoyment. "Look, Sam, it's all conjecture, and you know it. You can't even show that Mrs. Hunt stole that alleged statement of hers from Carell in the first place."

"Ellery Queen showed—"

"I know what Ellery Queen showed. He showed his usual talent for making something out of nothing. Queen's idea of proof!" The old jurist snorted. "And even if the Hunt woman did steal an alibi statement from Carell, what did she steal it for if not to flush it down a toilet? And even if she held on to it, where is it? Be reasonable, Sam. That alibi statement either never existed or, if it did, it doesn't exist any more."

"Of course, if you'd like to put Carell on the stand," Smallhauser said with a grin, "so that I can cross-examine him—"

Rayfield ignored him. "All right, Joe. But you can't deny that Hunt's wife has also been murdered. That's a fact in evidence of which we can produce a corpse. And I don't believe in coincidences. When a man's murder is followed by his wife's murder, I say the two are connected. The connection in this case is obvious. The murder of Felicia Hunt was committed in order to blow up Carell's alibi for the murder of Meredith Hunt and cement Carell's conviction. How can his trial proceed with this area unexplored? I tell you, Joe, this man

is being framed by somebody who's committed two murders in order to pull the frame off! Give us time to explore."

"I remember once sitting here listening to Queen," Judge Holloway said. "You're beginning to sound like his echo. Sam, evidence is what trials are ruled by, and evidence is what you ain't got. Motion denied. My courtroom, gentlemen, ten o'clock on the dot."

After three and a half agonizing days of watching Carell, head half-bowed, standing in the dock, Ellery got the answer that Thursday afternoon in the half-empty courtroom while the jury was out deliberating John Carell's fate.

It came to him after searching reappraisal of the facts as he knew them. He had gone over them countless times before. This time, in the lightning flash he had begun to think would never strike again, he saw it.

By good luck, at the time it came, he was alone. Carell had been taken back to the Tombs, and his wife and the two lawyers had gone with him.

He was being held in a detention room under guard. Ellery was surprised at his calm, even gentle look. It was Helena Carell's eyes that were wild. He was holding her hands, trying to console her. "Honey, honey, it's going to come out all right. They won't convict an innocent man."

"Why are they taking so *long*? They've been out five hours!"

She saw Ellery then, and she struggled to her feet and was at him so swiftly that he almost stepped back.

"I thought you were supposed to be so marvellous at these things! You haven't done anything for John—anything."

Carell tried to draw her back, but she shook him off. Her pain-etched face was livid.

"I don't care, John! You should have hired a real detective while there was still time. I wanted you to—I begged you and Tully not to rely on somebody so close to the police."

"Helena, really." West was embarrassed.

Ellery said stonily, "No, Mrs. Carell is quite right. I was the wrong man for this, although not for the reason you give, Mrs. Carell. I wish I had never got mixed up in it."

She was staring at him intently. "That almost sounds as if . . . as if he knows. *Tully, he does*. Look at his face!" She clawed at Ellery. "You know, and you won't say anything! You talk, do you hear? Tell me! Who's behind this?"

West was flabbergasted. With surprise John Carell studied Ellery's face for a moment, then he went to the barred window and stood there rigidly.

"Who?" His wife was weeping now. "Who?"

But Ellery was as rigid as Carell. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Carell. I can't save your husband. It's too late."

"Too late," she said hysterically. "How can you say it's too late when—"

"Helena." West took the little woman by the arms and forcibly sat her down. Then he turned to Ellery, his lean face dark. "What's this all about, Queen? You sound as if you're covering up for someone. Are you?"

Ellery glanced past the angry lawyer to the motionless man at the window.

"I'll leave it to John," he said. "Shall I answer him, John?"

For a moment it seemed as if Carell had not heard. But then he turned, and there was something about him—a dignity, a finality—that quieted Tully West and Helena Carell.

Carell replied clearly, "No."

Looking out over the prison yard from the Warden's office, Ellery thought he had never seen a lovelier spring night sky, or a sadder one. A man should die on a stormy night, with all nature protesting. This, he thought, this is cruel and unusual punishment. He glanced at the Warden's clock.

Carell had fourteen minutes of life left.

The Warden's door opened and closed behind him. Ellery did not turn round. He thought he knew who it was. He had been half expecting his father for an hour.

"Ellery—I looked for you at the Death House."

"I was down there before, dad. Had a long talk with Carell. I thought you'd be here long ago."

"I wasn't intending to come at all. It isn't my business. I did my part of it. Or maybe that's why I'm here. After a lifetime of this sort of thing, I'm still not hardened to it . . . Ellery—"

"Yes, dad?"

"It's Helena Carell. She's hounded and haunted me. Mrs. Carell thinks I have some pull with you. Have I?"

"In practically everything, dad. But not in this."

"I don't understand you," the Inspector said heavily. "If you have information that would save Carell, how can you keep quiet now?—at this time? All right, you saw something we didn't. Is it my job you're worried about, because I helped put Carell in this spot? If you know something that proves his innocence, Ellery, the hell with me."

"I'm not thinking of you."

"Then you can only be thinking of Carell. He's protecting somebody, he's willing to go to the chair for it, and you're helping



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him do it. Ellery, you can't do that." The old man clutched his arm. "There's still a few minutes. The Warden's got an open line to the Governor's office."

But Ellery shook his head.

Inspector Queen stared at his son's set profile for a moment. Then he sat down, and father and son waited.

At four minutes past eleven the lights suddenly dimmed. Both men stiffened, then the office brightened. At seven minutes past, it happened again, and again five minutes later.

After that, there was no change. Ellery turned away from the window, fumbling for his cigarettes. "Do you have a light, dad?"

The old man struck a match, and Ellery nodded and sat down.

"Who's going to tell her?" his father said suddenly.

"You are," Ellery said. "I can't."

Inspector Queen rose. "Live and learn," he said.

"Dad—"

The door interrupted them. Ellery got to his feet. The Warden's face was as haggard as theirs. He was wiping it with a damp handkerchief.

"I never get used to it," he said, "never . . . He went very peacefully. No trouble at all."

Ellery said, "Yes, he would."

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"He gave me a message for you, by the way."

"Thanking him, I suppose," Inspector Queen said bitterly.

"Why, yes, Inspector," the Warden said. "He said to tell your son how grateful he was. What on earth did he mean?"

"Don't ask *him*," the Inspector said. "My son's constituted himself a one-man sub-committee of the Almighty."

Ellery walked to the door, then turned. "I'll see you at home, later," he said stiffly.

"Well?" the old man said. He had got into his frayed dressing gown and slippers, and he was nursing a cup of coffee with his puffy hands. He looked exhausted. "And it had better be good."

"Oh, it's good," Ellery said. "If good is the word." He had not undressed, and had not even removed his overcoat. When he had come in he had just sat there, waiting for his father. He stared at the blank wall. "It was a slip of the tongue. I remembered it—after a long time of not remembering. It wouldn't have made any difference if the slip had never been made, or if I'd forgotten it altogether. Any difference to Carell, I mean. He was sunk from the start. I couldn't save him, dad. There was nothing to save him with or for. He'd had it."

"What slip?" the old man demanded. "Of whose tongue? Or was I deaf as well as blind?"

"I was the only one who heard it. It had to do with Felicia Hunt. Her husband dies and she goes into Spanish mourning, total and unadorned. But when she gets off by herself in that hillside cottage, back on go the gay clothes, all her favourite jewellery. By herself, mind you—alone. Safe from all eyes, even her maid's."

Ellery stared harder at the wall. "When we got back to town after finding her body, I went directly to the Tombs to tell Carell about the murder in Westchester of the only human being who could support his alibi. Carell was frantic. All he could think of, naturally, was the alibi statement. If that piece of paper existed, if she had hidden it instead of destroying it, he might still be saved. He kept pounding at me. Maybe she'd hidden it in her luggage, her car, a secret drawer. He went on and on. And one of the places he mentioned as a possible hiding place of the statement was the locket of the ruby-and-emerald pendant Felicia Hunt was so fond of. 'Did you look there?' he asked me, '*while you were searching the body?*'"

Ellery flung aside a cigarette he had never lit. "That question of his was what I finally remembered."

"He knew she was wearing the pendant . . ."

"Exactly, when no one could have known except ourselves, when we found her, and the one who had murdered her there five days earlier."

He sank deeper into his coat. "It was a blow, but there it was—John Carell had murdered Felicia Hunt. He'd had the opportunity, of course. You and Velie agreed that the latest she could have been murdered was the preceding Sunday. That Sunday Carell was still free on bail. It wasn't until the next morning, Monday, that he was brought back into custody for the trial."

"But it doesn't add up," Inspector Queen sputtered. "The Hunt woman's testimony could get him an acquittal. Why should Carell have knocked off the only witness who could give him his alibi?"

"Just what I asked myself. And the only answer that made sense was: Carell must have had reason to believe that when Felicia took the stand in court, she was going to tell the truth."

"Truth? About what?"

"About Carell's alibi being false."

"False?"

"Yes. And of course, he had to shut her mouth, to protect the alibi."

"But without her he had no alibi, true *or* false!"

"Correct," Ellery said softly, "but when Carell drove up to Westchester he didn't know that. At that time he thought he had her signed statement locked in his office safe. He didn't learn until days after he had killed her—when West and I opened the safe and found the envelope empty—that he no longer had possession of the alibi statement—hadn't had possession of it for months, in fact. As I pointed out to him, Felicia Hunt must have lifted it from his briefcase while he was downstairs showing the notary out. No wonder he almost collapsed."

Ellery shrugged. "If Carell's alibi for Meredith Hunt's murder was a phony, then the whole case against him stood as charged. He filled in the details for me earlier tonight in the Death House." Ellery's glance went back to the wall. "He said that when he left his house that rainy night after Hunt's ultimatum, to walk off his anger, the fog gave him a slight lease of hope. He thought Hunt's plane might be grounded, so he phoned La Guardia and found that all flights had been delayed for a few hours. On the chance that Hunt was hanging around the airport, Carell stopped at his office and got his pistol. He had some vague idea, he said, of threatening Hunt into a change of heart."

"He took a cab to La Guardia, found Hunt waiting for the

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fog to clear, and persuaded him to get his car so that they could talk in privacy. The talk became a violent quarrel. Carell's hair-trigger temper went off, and he shot Hunt, left him in the car and stumbled back home in the rain.

"The next morning, when we called on Mrs. Hunt to announce her husband's killing and found Carell and West there, you mentioned that the killer had left his gun in Hunt's car, and Carell was sick. Remember he ran into the bathroom? He wasn't acting that time. For the first time he realized that, in his fury and panic, he'd completely forgotten about the gun.

"As a lawyer," Ellery droned on, "he knew that the only thing that could save him was a powerful alibi. He saw only one possible way to get it. He had never destroyed the love letters Felicia Hunt had written him during her infatuation. And he knew her dread of scandal. So he fabricated a statement and took it to her. He didn't have to spell out his threat. Felicia understood clearly enough the implication of his proposal—that if she didn't give him an alibi he would publish her hot letters, and ruin her with her strait-laced Latin-American family and compatriots. She signed."

"But why didn't Carell produce the alibi right away, Ellery? What was his point in holding it back?"

"The legal mind again. If he produced it during the investigation, even if it served to clear him, the case would still be open—and he might find himself back in it up to his ears at any time. But if he stood trial for Hunt's murder and *then* produced the fake alibi and was acquitted—he was safe from the law for ever by the rule of double jeopardy. He couldn't be tried again for Hunt's killing after that, even if the alibi should at some future date be exposed as a fake.

"He knew from the beginning," Ellery went on, "that Felicia Hunt was the weak spot in his plan. She was neurotic and female and he was afraid she might wilt under pressure when he needed her most. As the trial approached, Carell got more and more nervous. So the day before it was scheduled to start, he decided to talk to her again. Learning that she'd gone into retreat up in Westchester, he found an excuse to get away from his family and drove up to the cottage.

"His worst fears were realized. She told him that she had changed her mind. Scandal or no scandal, she wasn't going to testify falsely under oath and lay herself open to perjury. What she didn't tell him—it might possibly have saved her life if she had—was that she'd stolen and destroyed the alibi statement . . .

"Carell grabbed the nearest heavy object and hit her over the head with it. Now at least, he consoled himself, she wouldn't be

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able to repudiate her signed statement, which he thought was in his office safe."

"And you've kept all this to yourself," his father muttered. "Why, Ellery? You certainly didn't owe Carell anything."

Ellery turned from the wall. He looked desperately tired.

"No, I didn't owe Carell anything . . . a man with a completely cock-eyed moral sense—too proud to live on his wife's money, yet capable of stealing twenty thousand dollars—a faithful husband who nevertheless kept the love letters of a woman he despised for their possible future value to him—a loving father who permitted himself to murder two people . . .

"No, I didn't owe him anything," Ellery said, "but he wasn't the only one involved. And no one knew that better than Carell. While we were waiting for the jury to come in, I told Mrs. Carell I couldn't save her husband, that it was too late. Carell was the only one present who knew what I meant.

"He knew I meant it was too late for *him*, that I couldn't save him because I knew he was guilty. And when I put it up to him, he gave me to understand that I wasn't to give him away. It wasn't for his own sake—he knew the verdict the jury was going to bring in. He knew he was already a dead man.

"And so I respected his last request. I couldn't save him, but

I could save his family's memories of him. This way Helena Carell and little Breckie and Louanne will always think John Carell died the victim of a miscarriage of justice." Ellery shrugged off his overcoat and headed for his bedroom. "How could I deny them that comfort?"

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★ *In next month's Suspense—first part of "Down Among the Dead Men," a tense, fast-paced new novel by James Lake. On sale May 29.*



"I wish I could explain to them I'm a burglar and work nights. It's humiliating to be considered a loafer."

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