

ONE SHILLING

Mackill's

MYSTERY



SEPTEMBER 1952

MAGAZINE

*MYSTERY * CRIME * DETECTION*

THE SIGN IN THE SKY BY

AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SEVEN BLACK CATS BY

ELLERY QUEEN

THE CASE OF THE RESPECTFUL MURDERED BY

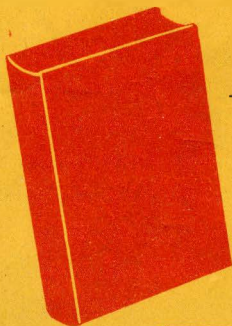
ROY VICKERS

OTHER STORIES BY

MICHAEL INNES • EDMUND CRISPIN

E. C. R. LORAC • ANTHONY GILBERT

J. JEFFERSON FARJEON



BERMUDA GRAPEVINE

BY

MIGNON G. EBERHART

MACKILL'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A monthly selection of mystery, crime and detective stories

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ANY EDITOR, whether an old hand or not, is always filled with pleasurable excitement at the prospect of producing 'Volume 1, Number 1', and the present occasion is no exception to that rule. Each month we hope to bring you for your enjoyment a wide selection of stories by the foremost mystery story writers of today.

In this first number, as in future monthly issues, there are several short stories ranging in length from a brief thousand words or so to the more fully developed plot possible in stories of some ten thousand words. In addition there is a short book-length story. This story is, of course, complete and unabridged.

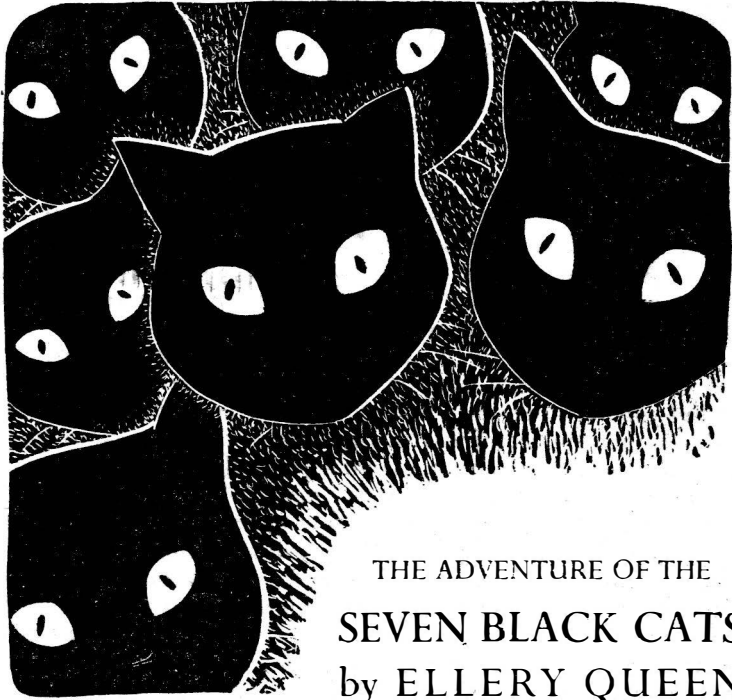
Our first short book is *Bermuda Grapevine* by Mignon G. Eberhart, who will need no introduction to detective story readers.

Among the writers who have contributed shorter stories are that great American writer, Ellery Queen, and our own world-known author of best-selling detective stories, Agatha Christie. Each month we shall publish one of Roy Vicker's famous 'Department of Dead Ends' stories. The story published this month is a new one and we can do no better, if you are a newcomer to these stories, than to say with Ellery Queen, "If you have never read any of the 'Department of Dead Ends' stories, we envy you your first reading."

To complete the selection there are stories by Michael Innes, Edmund Crispin, Anthony Gilbert, E. C. R. Lorac and J. Jefferson Farjeon.

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE
SEVEN BLACK CATS
by ELLERY QUEEN

THE tinkly bell quavered over the street door of Miss Curleigh's Pet Shoppe on Amsterdam Avenue, and Mr. Ellery Queen wrinkled his nose and went in. The instant he crossed the threshold he was thankful it was not a large nose, and that he had taken the elementary precaution of wrinkling it. The extent and variety of the little shop's odours would not have shamed the New York Zoological Park itself. And yet it housed only creatures, he was amazed to find, of the puniest

proportions; who, upon the micrometrically split second of his entrance, set up such a chorus of howls, yelps, snarls, yawps, grunts, squeaks, caterwauls, croaks, screeches, chirrups, hisses, and growls that it was a miracle the roof did not come down.

'Good afternoon,' said a crisp voice. 'I'm Miss Curleigh. What can I do for you, please?'

In the midst of raging bedlam Mr. Ellery Queen found himself gazing into a pair of mercurial eyes. There were other

details—she was a trim young piece, for example, with masses of titian hair and curves and at least one dimple—but for the moment her eyes engaged his earnest attention. Miss Curleigh, blushing, repeated herself.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Ellery hastily, returning to the matter at hand. ‘Apparently in the animal kingdom there is no decent ratio between lung-power and—ah—aroma on the one hand and size on the other. We live and learn! Miss Curleigh, would it be possible to purchase a comparatively noiseless and sweet-smelling canine with frizzy brown hair, inquisitive ears at the half-cock, and crooked hind-legs?’

Miss Curleigh frowned. Unfortunately, she was out of Irish terriers. The last litter had been gobbled up. Perhaps a Scottie—?

Mr. Queen frowned. No, he had been specifically enjoined by Djuna, the martinet, to procure an Irish terrier; no doleful-looking, sawed-off substitute, he was sure, would do.

‘I expect,’ said Miss Curleigh professionally, ‘to hear from our Long Island kennels to-morrow. If you’ll leave your name and address?’

Mr. Queen, gazing into the young woman’s eyes, would be delighted to. Mr. Queen, provided with pencil and pad, hastened to indulge his delight.

As Miss Curleigh read what he

had written the mask of business fell away. ‘You’re not Mr. Ellery Queen!’ she exclaimed with animation. ‘Well, I declare. I’ve heard so much about you, Mr. Queen. And you live practically around the corner, on Eighty-seventh Street! This is really thrilling. I never expected to meet—’

‘Nor I,’ murmured Mr. Queen. ‘Nor I.’

Miss Curleigh blushed again and automatically prodded her hair. ‘One of my best customers lives right across the street from you, Mr. Queen. I should say one of my most frequent customers. Perhaps you know her? A Miss Tarkle—Euphemia Tarkle? She’s in that large apartment house, you know.’

‘I’ve never had the pleasure,’ said Mr. Queen absently. ‘What extraordinary eyes you have! I mean—Euphemia Tarkle? Dear, dear, this is a world of sudden wonders. Is she as improbable as her name?’

‘That’s unkind,’ said Miss Curleigh severely, ‘although she is something of a character, the poor creature. A squirrely-faced old lady, and an invalid. Paralytic, you know. The queerest, frailest, tiniest little thing. Really, she’s quite mad.’

‘Somebody’s grandmother, no doubt,’ said Mr. Queen whimsically, picking up his stick from the counter. ‘Cats?’

‘Why, Mr. Queen, however did you guess?’

'It always is,' he said in a gloomy voice, 'cats.'

'You'd find her interesting, I'm sure,' said Miss Curleigh with eagerness.

'And why I, Diana?'

'The name,' said Miss Curleigh shyly, 'is Marie. Well, she's so strange, Mr. Queen. And I've always understood that strange people interest you.'

'At present,' said Mr. Queen hurriedly, taking a firmer grip on his stick, 'I am enjoying the fruits of idleness.'

'But do you know what Miss Tarkle's been doing, the mad thing?'

'I haven't the ghost of a notion,' said Mr. Queen with truth.

'She's been buying cats from me at the rate of about one a week for weeks now!'

Mr. Queen sighed. 'I see no special cause for suspicion. An ancient and invalid lady, a passion for cats—oh, they go together, I assure you. I once had an aunt like that.'

'That's what's so strange about it,' said Miss Curleigh triumphantly. 'She doesn't like cats!'

Mr. Queen blinked twice. He looked at Miss Curleigh's pleasant little nose. Then he rather absently set his stick on the counter again. 'And how do you know that, pray?'

Miss Curleigh beamed. 'Her sister told me. Hush, Ginger! You see, Miss Tarkle is absolutely helpless with her paralysis and all, and her sister

Sarah-Ann keeps house for her; they're both of an age, I should say, and they look so much alike. Dried-up little apples of old ladies, with the same tiny features and faces like squirrels. Well, Mr. Queen, about a year ago Miss Sarah-Ann came into my shop and bought a black male cat—she hadn't much money, she said, couldn't buy a really expensive one; so I got just a—well, just a cat for her, you see.'

'Did she ask for a black tom-cat?' asked Mr. Queen intently.

'No. Any kind at all, she said; she liked them all. Then only a few days later she came back. She wanted to know if she could return him and get her money back. Because, she said, her sister Euphemia couldn't stand having a cat about her; Euphemia just *detested* cats, she said with a sigh, and since she was more or less living off Euphemia's bounty she couldn't very well cross her, you see. I felt a little sorry for her and told her I'd take the cat back; but I suppose she changed her mind, or else her sister changed her mind, because Sarah-Ann Tarkle never came back. Anyway, that's how I know Miss Euphemia doesn't like cats.'

Mr. Queen gnawed a fingernail. 'Odd,' he muttered. 'A veritable saga of oddness. You say this Euphemia creature has been buying 'em at the rate of one a week? What kind of cats, Miss Curleigh?'

Miss Curleigh sighed. 'Not very good ones. Of course, since she has pots of money, that's what her sister Sarah-Ann said, anyway, I tried to sell her an Angora, I had a beauty, and a Maltese that took a ribbon at one of the shows. But she wanted just cats, she said, like the one I sold her sister. Black ones.'

'Black . . . It's possible that—' 'Oh, she's not at all superstitious, Mr. Queen. In some ways she's a very weird old lady. Black tomcats with green eyes, all the same size. I thought it very queer.'

Mr. Ellery Queen's nostrils quivered a little, and not from the racy odour in Miss Curleigh's Pet Shoppe, either. An old invalid lady named Tarkle who bought a black tomcat with green eyes every week!

'Very queer indeed' he murmured; and his grey eyes narrowed. 'And how long has this remarkable business been going on?'

'You *are* interested! Five weeks now, Mr. Queen. I delivered the sixth one myself only the other day.'

'Yourself? Is she totally paralysed?'

'Oh, yes. She never leaves her bed; can't walk a step. It's been that way, she told me, for ten years now. She and Sarah-Ann hadn't lived together up to the time she had her stroke. Now she's absolutely dependent on her sister for everything, meals,

baths, bedp . . . all sorts of attention.'

'Then why,' demanded Ellery, 'Hasn't she sent her sister for the cats?'

'Miss Curleigh's mercurial eyes wavered. 'I don't know,' she said slowly. 'Sometimes I get the shivers. You see, she's always telephoned me, she has a 'phone by her bed and can use her arms sufficiently to reach for it, the day she wanted the cat. It would always be the same order, black, male, green eyes, the same size as before, and as cheap as possible.' Miss Curleigh's pleasant features haggled. 'She's something of a haggler, Miss Euphemia Tarkle is.'

'Fantastic,' said Ellery thoughtfully. 'Utterly fantastic. There's something in the basic situation that smacks of lavenderish tragedy. Tell me: how has her sister acted on the occasions when you've delivered the cats?'

'*Hush*, Ginger! I can't tell you, Mr. Queen, because she hasn't been there.'

Ellery started. 'Hasn't been there! What do you mean? I thought you said the Euphemia woman is helpless—'

'She is, but Sarah-Ann goes out every afternoon for some air, I suppose, or to a movie, and her sister is left alone for a few hours. It's been at such times, I think, that she's called me. Then, too, she always warned me to come at a certain time, and since I've never seen Sarah-

Ann when I made the delivery, I imagine she's planned to keep her purchases a secret from her sister. I've been able to get in because Sarah-Ann leaves the door unlocked when she goes out. Euphemia has told me time and time again not to breathe a word about the cats to anyone.'

Ellery took his *pince-nez* off his nose and began to polish the shining lenses, an unflinching sign of emotion. 'More and more muddled,' he muttered. 'Miss Curleigh, you've stumbled on something—well, morbid.'

Miss Curleigh blanched. 'You don't think—'

'Insults already? I *do* think; and that's why I'm disturbed. For instance, how on earth could she have hoped to keep knowledge of the cats she's bought from her sister? Sarah-Ann isn't blind, is she?'

'Blind? Why, of course not. And Euphemia's sight is all right, too.'

'I was only joking. It doesn't make sense, Miss Curleigh.'

'Well,' said Miss Curleigh brightly, 'at least I've given the great Mr. Queen something to think about . . . I'll call you the moment an Ir—'

Mr. Ellery Queen replaced the glasses on his nose, threw back his square shoulders, and picked up the stick again. 'Miss Curleigh, I'm an incurable meddler in the affairs of others. How would you like to help me med-

dle in the affairs of the mysterious Tarkle sisters?'

Scarlet spots appeared in Miss Curleigh's checks. 'You're not serious?' she cried.

'Quite.'

'I'd love to! What am I to do?'

'Suppose you take me up to the Tarkle apartment and introduce me as a customer. Let's say that the cat you sold Miss Tarkle the other day had really been promised to me, that as a stubborn fancier of felines I won't take any other, and that you'll have to have hers back and give her another. Anything to permit me to see and talk to her. It's mid-afternoon, so Sarah-Ann is probably in a movie theatre somewhere, languishing after Clark Gable. What do you say?'

Miss Curleigh flung him a ravishing smile. 'I say it's—it's too magnificent for words. One minute while I powder my nose and get someone to tend the shop, Mr. Queen. I wouldn't miss this for *anything!*'

Ten minutes later they stood before the front door to Apartment 5-C of the 'Amsterdam Arms,' a rather faded building, gazing in silence at two full quart-bottles of milk on the corridor floor. Miss Curleigh looked troubled, and Mr. Queen stooped. When he straightened he looked troubled, too.

'Yesterday's and to-day's,' he muttered, and he put his hand

on the door-knob and turned. The door was locked. 'I thought you said her sister leaves the door unlocked when she goes out?'

'Perhaps she's in,' said Miss Curleigh uncertainly. 'Or, if she's out, that she's forgotten to take the latch off.'

Ellery pressed the bell-button. There was no reply. He rang again. Then he called loudly: 'Miss Tarkle, are you there?'

'I can't understand it,' said Miss Curleigh with a nervous laugh. 'She really should hear you. It's only a three-room apartment, and both the bedroom and the living-room are directly off the sides of a little foyer on the other side of the door. The kitchen's straight ahead.'

Ellery called again, shouting. After a while he put his ear to the door. The rather dilapidated hall, the ill-painted door . . .

Miss Curleigh's extraordinary eyes were frightened silver lamps. She said in the queerest voice: 'Oh, Mr. Queen. Something dreadful's happened.'

'Let's hunt up the superintendent,' said Ellery quietly.

They found 'Potter, Sup't' in a metal frame before a door on the ground floor, Miss Curleigh was breathing in little gusts. Ellery rang the bell.

A short fat woman with enormous forearms flecked with suds opened the door. She wiped her red hands on a dirty apron and brushed a strand of bedraggled

grey hair from her sagging face. 'Well?' she demanded stolidly.

'Mrs. Potter?'

'That's right. We ain't got no empty apartments. The door-man could 'a' told you—'

Miss Curleigh reddened. Ellery said hastily: 'Oh, we're not apartment-hunting, Mrs. Potter. Is the superintendent in?'

'No, he's not,' she said suspiciously. 'He's got a part-time job at the chemical works in Long Island City, and he never gets home till ha' past three. What you want?'

'I'm sure you'll do nicely, Mrs. Potter. This young lady and I can't seem to get an answer from Apartment 5-C. We're calling on Miss Tarkle, you see.'

The fat woman scowled. 'Ain't the door open? Generally is this time o'day. The spy one's out, but the paralysed one—'

'It's locked, Mrs. Potter, and there's no answer to the bell or to our cries.'

'Now ain't that funny,' shrilled the fat woman, staring at Miss Curleigh. 'I can't see— Miss Euphemia's a cripple; she *never* goes out. Maybe the poor thing's threw a fit!'

'I trust not. When did you see Miss Sarah-Ann last?'

'The spy one? Let's see, now. Why, two days ago. And, come to think of it, I ain't seen the cripple for two days, neither.'

'Heavens,' whispered Miss Curleigh, thinking of the two milk-bottles. 'Two days!'

'Oh, you do see Miss Euphemia occasionally?' asked Ellery grimly.

'Yes, sir.' Mrs. Potter began to wring her red hands as if she were still over the tub. 'Every once in a while she calls me up by 'phone in the afternoon if her sister's out to take somethin' out to the incinerator, or do somethin' for her. The other day it was to mail a letter for her. She—she gives me somethin' once in a while. But it's been two days now . . .'

Ellery pulled something out of his pocket and cupped it in his palm before the fat woman's tired eyes. 'Mrs. Potter,' he said sternly, 'I want to get into that apartment. There's something wrong. Give me your master-key.'

'P-p-police!' she stammered, staring at the shield. Then suddenly she fluttered off and returned to thrust a key into Ellery's hand. 'Oh, I wish Mr. Potter was home!' she wailed. 'You won't--'

'Not a word about this to anyone, Mrs. Potter.'

They left the woman gaping loose-tongued and frightened after them, and took the self-service elevator back to the fifth floor. Miss Curleigh was white to the lips; she looked a little sick.

'Perhaps,' said Ellery kindly, inserting the key into the lock, 'you had better not come in with me, Miss Curleigh. It

might be unpleasant. I--' He stopped abruptly, his figure crouching.

Somebody was on the other side of the door.

There was the unmistakable sound of running feet, accompanied by an uneven scraping, as if something were being dragged. Ellery twisted the key and turned the knob in a flash, Miss Curleigh panting at his shoulder. The door moved a half-inch and stuck. The feet retreated.

'Barricaded the door,' growled Ellery. 'Stand back, Miss Curleigh.' He flung himself sidewise at the door. There was a splintering crash and the door shot inward, a broken chair toppling over backward. 'Too late--'

'The fire-escape!' screamed Miss Curleigh. 'In the bedroom. To the left!'

He darted into a large narrow room with twin beds and an air of disorder and made for an open window. But there was no one to be seen on the fire-escape. He looked up: an iron ladder curved and vanished a few feet overhead.

'Whoever it is got away by the roof, I'm afraid,' he muttered, pulling his head back and lighting a cigarette. 'Smoke? Now then, let's have a look about. No bloodshed, apparently. This may be a pig-in-the-poke after all. See anything interesting?'

Miss Curleigh pointed a shaking finger. 'That's her bed.

The messy one. But where is she?

The other bed was neatly made up, its lace spread undisturbed. But Miss Euphemia Tarkle's was in a state of turmoil. The sheets had been ripped away and its mattress slashed open; some of the ticking was on the floor. The pillows had been torn to pieces. A depression in the centre of the mattress indicated where the missing invalid had lain.

Ellery stood still, studying the bed. Then he made the rounds of the closets, opening doors, poking about, and closing them again. Followed closely by Miss Curleigh, who had developed an alarming habit of looking over her right shoulder, he glanced briefly into the living-room, the kitchen and the bathroom. But there was no one in the apartment. And, except for Miss Tarkle's bed, nothing apparently had been disturbed. The place was ghastly, somehow. It was as if violence had visited it in the midst of a cloistered silence; a tray full of dishes, cutlery, and half-finished food lay on the floor, almost under the bed.

Miss Curleigh shivered and edged closer to Ellery. 'It's so-so deserted here,' she said, moistening her lips. 'Where's Miss Euphemia? And her sister? And who was that—that creature who barred the door?'

'What's more to the point,' murmured Ellery, gazing at the

tray of food, 'where are the seven black cats?'

'Sev--'

'Sarah-Ann's lone beauty, and Euphemia's six. Where are they?'

'Perhaps,' said Miss Curleigh hopefully, 'they jumped out the window when that man—'

'Perhaps. And don't say 'man'. We just don't know.' He looked irritably about. 'If they did, it was a moment ago, because the catch on the window has been forced, indicating that the window has been closed and consequently that the cats might have—' He stopped short. 'Who's there?' he called sharply, whirling.

'It's me,' said a timid voice, and Mrs. Potter appeared hesitantly in the foyer. Her tired eyes were luminous with fear and curiosity. 'Where's—'

'Gone.' He stared at the slovenly woman. 'You're sure you didn't see Miss Euphemia or her sister to-day?'

'Nor yesterday. I—'

'There was no ambulance in this neighbourhood within the past two days?'

Mrs. Potter went chalky. 'Oh, no, sir! I can't understand how she got *out*. She couldn't walk a step. If she'd been carried, *someone* would have noticed. The doorman, sure. I just asked him. But nobody did. I know everythin' goes on—'

'Is it possible your husband may have seen one or both of

them within the past two days?"

'Not Potter. He saw 'em night before last. Harry's been makin' a little side-money, sort of, see, sir. Miss Euphemia wanted the landlord to do some decoratin' and paperin', and a little carpentry, and they wouldn't do it. So, more'n a month ago, she asked Harry if he wouldn't do it on the sly, and she said she'd pay him, although less than if a reg'lar decorator did it. So he's been doin' it spare time, mostly late afternoons and nights, he's handy, Potter is. He's most done with the job. It's pretty paper, ain't it? So he saw Miss Euphemia night before last.' A calamitous thought struck her, apparently, for her eyes rolled and she uttered a faint shriek. 'I just thought if—if anythin's happened to the cripple, we won't get paid! All that work . . . And the landlord—'

'Yes, yes, said Ellery impatiently. 'Mrs. Potter, are there mice or rats in this house?'

Both women looked blank. 'Why, not a one of 'em,' began Mrs. Potter slowly. 'The exterminator comes—' when they all spun about at a sound from the foyer. Someone was opening the door.

'Come in,' snapped Ellery, and strode forward; only to halt in his tracks as an anxious face poked timidly into the bedroom.

'Excuse me,' said the newcomer nervously, starting at

sight of Ellery and the two women. 'I guess I must be in the wrong apartment. Does Miss Euphemia Tarkle live here?' He was a tall needle-thin young man with a scared, horsy face and stiff tan hair. He wore a rather rusty suit of old-fashioned cut and carried a small handbag.

'Yes, indeed,' said Ellery with a friendly smile. 'Come in, come in. May I ask who you are?'

The young man blinked. 'But where's Aunt Euphemia? I'm Elias Morton, Junior. Isn't she here?' His reddish little eyes blinked from Ellery to Miss Curleigh in a puzzled, worried way.

'Did you say 'Aunt' Euphemia, Mr. Morton?'

'I'm her nephew. I come from out of town—Albany. Where—'

Ellery murmured: 'An unexpected visit, Mr. Morton?'

The young man blinked again; he was still holding his bag. Then he dumped it on the floor and eagerly fumbled in his pockets until he produced a much-soiled and wrinkled letter. 'I—I got this only a few days ago,' he faltered. 'I'd have come sooner, only my father went off somewhere on a— I don't understand this.'

Ellery snatched the letter from his lax fingers. It was scrawled painfully on a piece of ordinary brown wrapping paper; the envelope was a cheap one. The pencilled scribble, in the crabbed hand of age, said:

Dear Elias, You have not heard from your Auntie for so many years, but now I need you, Elias, for you are my only blood kin to whom I can turn in my Dire Distress! I am in great danger, my dear boy. You must help your poor Invalid Aunt who is so helpless. *Come at once.* Do not tell your Father or anyone, Elias! When you get here make believe you have come just for a Visit. Remember. Please, please do not fail me. Help me, please! Your Loving Aunt-Euphemia.

'Remarkable missive,' frowned Ellery. 'Written under stress, Miss Curleigh. Genuine enough. Don't tell anyone, eh? Well, Mr. Morton, I'm afraid you're too late.'

'Too-- But--' The young man's horse-face whitened. 'I tried to come right off, b-but my father had gone off somewhere on --on one of his drunken spells, and I couldn't find him. I didn't know what to do. Then I came. T-t-to think--' His buck teeth were chattering.

'This is your aunt's handwriting?'

'Oh, yes. Oh, yes.'

'Your father, I gather, is not a brother of the Tarkle sisters?'

'No, sir. My dear mother w-was their sister, God rest her.' Morton groped for a chair-back. 'Is Aunt Euphemia- d-dead? And where's Aunt Sarah?'

'They're both gone.' Ellery related tersely what he had

found. The young visitor from Albany looked as if he might faint. 'I'm--er--unofficially investigating this business, Mr. Morton. Tell me all you know about your two aunts.'

'I don't know m-much,' mumbled Morton. 'Haven't seen them for about fifteen years, since I was a kid. I heard from my Aunt Sarah-Ann once in a while, and only twice from Aunt Euphemia. They never-- I never expected-- I do know that Aunt Euphemia since her stroke became . . . funny. Aunt Sarah wrote me that. She had some money, I don't know how much, left her by my grandfather, and Aunt Sarah said she was a real miser about it. Aunt Sarah didn't have anything; she had to live with Aunt Euphemia and take care of her. She wouldn't trust banks, Aunt Sarah said, and had hidden the money somewhere about her, Aunt Sarah didn't know where. She wouldn't even have doctors after her stroke, she was--is so stingy. They didn't get along; they were always fighting, Aunt Sarah wrote me, and Aunt Euphemia was always accusing her of trying to steal her money, and she didn't know how she stood it. That--that's about all I know, sir.'

'The poor things,' murmured Miss Curleigh with moist eyes. 'What a wretched existence! Miss Tarkle can't be responsible for--'

'Tell me, Mr. Morton,' drawled Ellery. 'It's true that your Aunt Euphemia detested cats?'

The lantern-jaw dropped. 'Why, how'd you know? She hates them. Aunt Sarah wrote me that many times. It hurt her a lot, because *she's* so crazy about them she treats her own like a child, you see, and that makes Aunt Euphemia jealous, or angry, or something. I guess they just didn't—don't get along.

'We seem to be having a pardonable difficulty with our tenses,' said Ellery. 'After all, Mr. Morton, there's no evidence to show that your aunts aren't merely somewhere on a vacation, or a visit, perhaps.' But the glint in his eyes remained. 'Why don't you stop at a hotel somewhere near by? I'll keep you informed.' He scribbled the name and address of a hotel in the Seventies on the page of a notebook, and thrust it into Morton's damp palm. 'Don't worry. You'll hear from me.' And he hustled the bewildered young man out of the apartment. They heard the click of the elevator door a moment later.

Ellery said slowly: 'The country cousin in full panoply. Miss Curleigh, let me look at your refreshing loveliness. People with faces like that should be legislated against.' He patted her cheek with a frown, hesitated, and then made for the bathroom. Miss Curleigh blushed

once more and followed him quickly, casting another apprehensive glance over her shoulder.

'What's this?' she heard Ellery say sharply. 'Mrs. Potter, come out of that—By George!'

'What's the matter now?' cried Miss Curleigh, dashing into the bathroom behind him.

Mrs. Potter, the flesh of her powerful forearms crawling with goose-pimples, her tired eyes stricken, was glaring with open mouth into the tub. The woman made a few inarticulate sounds, rolled her eyes alarmingly, and then fled from the apartment.

Miss Curleigh said: 'Oh, my God!' and put her hand to her breast. 'Isn't that—isn't that *horrible!*'

'Horrible,' said Ellery grimly and slowly, 'and illuminating. I overlooked it when I glanced in here before, I think . . .' He stopped and bent over the tub. There was no humour in his eyes or voice now; only a sick watchfulness. They were both very quiet. Death lay over them.

A black tomcat, limp and stiff and boneless, lay in a welter and smear of blood in the tub. He was large, glossy black, green-eyed, and indubitably dead. His head was smashed in and his body seemed broken in several places. His blood had clotted in splashes on the porcelain sides of the tub. The weapon, hurled by a callous hand,

lay beside him: a blood-splattered bath-brush with a heavy handle.

'That solves the mystery of the disappearance of at least one of the seven,' murmured Ellery, straightening. 'Battered to death with the brush. He hasn't been dead more than a day or so, either, from the looks of him. Miss Curleigh, we're engaged in a tragic business.'

But Miss Curleigh, her first shock of horror swept away by rage, was crying: 'Anyone who would kill a puss so brutally is—is a monster!' Her silvery eyes were blazing. 'That terrible old woman—'

'Don't forget,' sighed Ellery, 'she can't walk.'

'Now this,' said Mr. Ellery Queen some time later, putting away his cunning and compact little pocket kit, 'is growing still more curious, Miss Curleigh. Have you any notion what I've found here?'

They were back in the bedroom again, stooped over the bedtray which he had picked up from the floor and deposited on the night-table between the missing sisters' beds. Miss Curleigh had recalled that on all her previous visits she had found the tray on Miss Tarkle's bed or on the table, the invalid explaining with a tightening of her pale lips that she had taken to eating alone of late, implying that she and the long-suffering

Sarah-Ann had reached a tragic parting of the ways.

'I saw you mess about with powder and things, but—'

'Fingerprint test.' Ellery stared enigmatically down at the knife, fork, and spoon lying awry in the tray. 'My kit's a handy gadget at times. You saw me test this cutlery, Miss Curleigh. You would say that these implements had been used by Euphemia in the process of eating her last meal here?'

'Why, of course,' frowned Miss Curleigh. 'You can still see the dried food clinging to the knife and fork.'

'Exactly. The handles of knife, fork, and spoon are not engraved, as you see—simple silver surfaces. They should bear fingerprints.' He shrugged. 'But they don't.'

'What do you mean, Mr. Queen? How is that possible?'

'I mean that someone has wiped this cutlery free of prints. Odd, eh?' Ellery lit a cigarette absently. 'Examine it, however. This is Euphemia Tarkle's bedtray, her food, her dishes, her cutlery. She is known to eat in bed, and alone. But if only Euphemia handled the cutlery, who wiped off the prints? She? Why should she? Some one else? But surely there would be no sense in someone else's wiping off *Euphemia's* prints. Her fingerprints have a right to be there. Then, while Euphemia's prints were probably on these

implements, someone else's prints were also on them, which accounts for their having been wiped off. Someone else, therefore, handled Euphemia's cutlery. Why? I begin,' said Ellery in the grimmest of voices, 'to see daylight. Miss Curleigh, would you like to serve as hand-maiden to Justice?' Miss Curleigh, overwhelmed, could only nod. Ellery began to wrap the cold food leftovers from the invalid's tray. 'Take this truck down to Dr. Samuel Prouty, here's his address, and ask him to analyse it for me. Wait there, get his report, and meet me back here. Try to get in here without being observed.'

'The food?'

'The food.'

'Then you think it's been—'

'The time for thinking,' said Mr. Ellery Queen evenly, 'is almost over.'

When Miss Curleigh had gone, he took a final look around, even to the extent of examining some empty cupboards which had a look of newness about them, set his lips firmly, locked the front door behind him, pocketing the master-key which Mrs. Potter had given him, took the elevator to the ground floor, and rang the bell of the Potter apartment.

A short thickset man with coarse features opened the door; his hat was pushed back on his head. Ellery saw the agitated

figure of Mrs. Potter hovering in the background.

'That's the policeman!' shrieked Mrs. Potter. 'Harry, don't get mixed up in—'

'Oh, so you're the dick,' growled the thickset man, ignoring the fat woman. 'I'm the super here, Harry Potter. I just get home from the plant and my wife tells me there's somethin' wrong up in the Tarkle flat. What's up, for God's sake?'

'Now, now, there's no cause for panic, Potter,' murmured Ellery. 'Glad you're home, though; I'm in dire need of information which you can probably provide. Has either of you found anywhere on the premises recently—*any dead cats?*'

Potter's jaw dropped, and his wife gurgled with surprise. 'Now that's damn' funny. We sure have. Mrs. Potter says one of 'em's dead up in 5-C now—I never thought *those* two old dames might be the ones—'

'Where did you find them, and how many?' snapped Ellery.

'Why, down in the incinerator. Basement.'

Ellery smacked his thigh. 'Of course! What a stupid idiot I am. I see it all now. The incinerator, eh? There were six, Potter, weren't there?'

Mrs. Potter gasped: 'How'd you know that, for mercy's sake?'

'Incinerator,' muttered Ellery, sucking his lower lip. 'The bones, I suppose—the skulls?'

'That's right,' exclaimed Potter; he seemed distressed. 'I found 'em myself. Empty out the incinerator every morning for ash-removal. Six cats' skulls and a mess o' little bones. I raised hell around here with the tenants lookin' for the damn' fool who threw 'em down the chute, but they all played dumb. Didn't all come down the same time. It's been goin' on now maybe four-five weeks. One a week, almost. The damn' fools. I'd like to get my paws on—'

'You're certain you found six?'

'Sure.'

'And nothing else of a suspicious nature?'

'No, *sir*.'

'Thanks. I don't believe there will be any more trouble. Just forget the whole business.' And Ellery pressed a bill into the man's hand and strolled out of the lobby.

He did not stroll far. He strolled, in fact, only to the sidewalk steps leading down into the basement and cellar. Five minutes later he quietly let himself into Apartment 5-C again.

When Miss Curleigh stopped before the door to Apartment 5-C in late afternoon, she found it locked. She could hear Ellery's voice murmuring inside and a moment later the click of a telephone receiver. Reassured, she pressed the bell-button; he appeared instantly, pulled her inside, noiselessly shut the door

again, and led her to the bedroom, where she slumped into a rosewood chair, an expression of bitter disappointment on her pleasant little face.

'Back from the wars, I see,' he grinned. 'Well, sister, what luck?'

'You'll be dreadfully put out,' said Miss Curleigh with a scowl. 'I'm sorry I haven't been more helpful—'

'What did good Dr. Prouty say?'

'Nothing encouraging. I like your Dr. Prouty, even if he is the Medical Examiner or something and wears a horrible little peaked hat in the presence of a lady; but I can't say I'm keen about his reports. He says there's not a thing wrong with that food you sent by me! It's a little putrefied from standing, but otherwise it's pure enough.'

'Now isn't that too bad?' said Ellery cheerfully. 'Come, come, Diana, perk up. It's the best news you could have brought me.'

'Best n—' began Miss Curleigh with a gasp.

'It substitutes fact for theory very nicely. Everything fits, lassie, like a glove. We have,' and he pulled over a chair and sat down facing her, 'arrived. By the way, did anyone see you enter this apartment?'

'I slipped in by the basement and took the elevator from there. No one saw me, I'm sure. But I don't underst—'

'Commendable efficiency: I believe we have some time for expatiation. I've had an hour or so here alone for thought, and it's been a satisfactory if morbid business.' Ellery lit a cigarette and crossed his legs lazily. 'Miss Curleigh, you have sense, plus the advantage of an innate feminine shrewdness, I'm sure. Tell me: Why should a wealthy old lady who is almost completely paralysed stealthily purchase six cats within a period of five weeks?'

Miss Curleigh shrugged. 'I told you I couldn't make it out. It's a deep, dark mystery to me.' Her eyes were fixed on his lips.

'Pshaw, it can't be as completely baffling as all that. Very well, I'll give you a rough idea. For example, so many cats purchased by an eccentric in so short a period suggests—vivisection. But neither of the Tarkle ladies is anything like a scientist. So that's out. You see?'

'Oh, yes,' said Miss Curleigh breathlessly. 'I see now what you mean. Euphemia couldn't have wanted them for companionship, either, because she hates cats!'

'Precisely. Let's wander. For extermination of mice? No, this is from Mrs. Potter's report a pest-free building. For mating? Scarcely; Sarah-Ann's cat was a male, and Euphemia also bought only males. Besides, they were nondescript tabbies, and people don't play Cupid to nameless animals.'

'She might have bought them for gifts,' said Miss Curleigh with a frown. 'That's possible.'

'Possible, but I think not,' said Ellery dryly. 'Not when you know the facts. The superintendent found the skeletal remains of six cats in the ashes of the incinerator downstairs, and the other one lies, a very dead pussy, in the bathtub yonder.' Miss Curleigh stared at him, speechless. 'We seem to have covered the more plausible theories. Can you think of some wilder, less plausible ones?'

Miss Curleigh paled. 'Not—not for their *fur*?'

'*Brava!*' said Ellery with a laugh. 'There's a wild one among wild ones. No, not for their fur; I haven't found any fur in the apartment. And besides, no matter who killed Master Tom in the tub, he remains bloody but unskinned. I think, too, that we can discard the even wilder food theory; to civilized people killing cats for food, smacks of cannibalism. To frighten Sister Sarah-Ann? Hardly; Sarah is used to cats and loves them. To scratch Sister Ann to death? That suggests poisoned claws. But in that case there would be as much danger to Euphemia as to Sarah-Ann; and why *six* cats? As—er—guides in eternal dark? But Euphemia is not blind, and besides she never leaves her bed. Can you think of any others?' 'But those things are *ridiculous!*'

'Don't call my logical meanings names. Ridiculous, perhaps, but you can't ignore even apparent nonsense in an elimination.'

'Well, I've got one that isn't nonsense,' said Miss Curleigh suddenly. 'Pure hatred. Euphemia loathed cats. So, since she's cracked, I suppose, she's bought them just for the pleasure of exterminating them.'

'All black tomcats with green eyes and identical dimensions?' Ellery shook his head. 'Her mania could scarcely have been so exclusive. Besides, she loathed cats even before Sarah-Ann bought her distinctive tom from you. No, there's only one left that I can think of, Miss Curleigh.' He sprang from the chair and began to pace the floor. 'It's not only the sole remaining possibility, but it's confirmed by several things . . . *Protection.*'

'Protection!' Miss Curleigh's devastating eyes widened. 'Why Mr. Queen. How could that be? People buy dogs for protection, not cats.'

'I don't mean that kind of protection,' said Ellery impatiently. 'I'm referring to a compound of desire to remain alive and an incidental hatred for felines that makes them the ideal instrument toward that end. This is a truly horrifying business, Marie. From every angle. Euphemia Tarkle was afraid. Of what? Of being murdered for her money. That's borne out

amply by the letter she wrote to Morton, her nephew; and it's bolstered by her reputed miserliness, her distrust of banks, and her dislike for her own sister. How would a cat be protection against intended murder?'

'Poison!' cried Miss Curleigh.

'Exactly. *As a food-taster.* There's a reversion to mediævalism for you! Are there confirming data? A-plenty. Euphemia had taken to eating alone of late; that suggests some secret activity. Then she re-ordered cats five times within a short period. Why? Obviously, because each time her cat, purchased from you, had acted in his official capacity, tasted her food, and gone the way of all enslaved flesh. The cats were poisoned, poisoned by food intended for Euphemia. So she had to re-order. Final confirmation: the six feline skeletons in the incinerator.'

'But she can't walk,' protested Miss Curleigh. 'So how could she dispose of the bodies?'

'I fancy Mrs. Potter innocently disposed of them for her. You'll recall that Mrs. Potter said she was often called here to take garbage to the incinerator for Euphemia when Sarah-Ann was out. The 'garbage,' wrapped up, I suppose, was a cat's dead body.'

'But why all the black, green-eyed tomcats of the same size?'
'Self-evident. Why? Obviously, again, *to fool Sarah-Ann.* Because

Sarah-Ann had a black tomcat of a certain size with green eyes, Euphemia purchased from you identical animals. Her only reason for this could have been, then, to fool Sarah-Ann into believing that the black tom she saw about the apartment at any given time was her own, the original one. That suggests, of course, that Euphemia used Sarah-Ann's cat to foil the first attempt, and Sarah-Ann's cat was the first poison-victim. When he died, Euphemia bought another from you, without her sister's knowledge.

'How Euphemia suspected she was slated to be poisoned, of course, at the very time in which the poisoner got busy, we'll never know. It was probably the merest coincidence, something psychic, you never know about slightly mad old ladies.'

'But if she was trying to fool Sarah-Ann about the cats,' whispered Miss Curleigh, aghast, 'then she suspected—'

'Precisely. She suspected her sister of trying to poison her.'

Miss Curleigh bit her lip. 'Would you mind giving me a cigarette? I'm—' Ellery silently complied. 'It's the most terrible thing I've ever heard of. Two old women, sisters, practically alone in the world, one dependent on the other for attention, the other for subsistence, living at cross-purposes, the invalid helpless to defend herself against attacks . . .' She shuddered.

'What's *happened* to those poor creatures, Mr. Queen?'

'Well, let's see. Euphemia is missing. We know that there were at least six attempts to poison her, all unsuccessful. It's logical to assume that there was a seventh attempt, then, and that, since Euphemia is gone under mysterious circumstances—the *seventh attempt was successful*.'

'But how can you *know* she's—she's dead?'

'Where is she?' asked Ellery dryly. 'The only other possibility is that she fled. But she's helpless, can't walk, can't stir from bed without assistance. Who can assist her? Only Sarah-Ann, the very one she suspects of trying to poison her. The letter to her nephew shows that she wouldn't turn to Sarah-Ann. So flight is out, and, since she's missing, she must be dead. Now, follow. Euphemia knew she was the target of poisoning attacks via her food and took precautions against them; then how did the poisoner finally penetrate her defences—the seventh cat? Well, we may assume that Euphemia made the seventh cat taste the food we found on the tray. We know that food was not poisoned, from Dr. Prouty's report. The cat, then, didn't die of poisoning from the food itself, confirmed by the fact that he was **beaten** to death. But if the cat **didn't** die of poisoned *food*, neither did

Euphemia. Yet all the indications are that she must have died of poisoning. Then there's only one answer: she died of poisoning not in eating but *in the process of eating.*'

'I don't understand,' said Miss Curleigh intently.

'The cutlery!' cried Ellery. 'I showed you earlier this afternoon that someone other than Euphemia had handled her knife, spoon, and fork. Doesn't this suggest that the poisoner had *poisoned the cutlery* on his seventh attempt? If, for example, the fork had been coated with a colourless odourless poison which dried, Euphemia would have been fooled. The cat, flung bits of food by hand, for no one feeds an animal with cutlery, would live; Euphemia, eating the food with the poisoned cutlery, would die. Psychologically, too, it rings true. It stood to reason that the poisoner, after six unsuccessful attempts one way, should in desperation try a seventh with a variation. The variation worked and Euphemia, my dear, is dead.'

'But her body—Where—'

Ellery's face changed as he whirled noiselessly toward the door. He stood in an attitude of tense attention for an instant and then, without a word, laid violent hands upon the petrified figure of Miss Curleigh and thrust her rudely into one of the bedroom closets, shutting the door behind her. Miss Curleigh,

half-smothered by a soft sea of musty-smelling feminine garments, held her breath. She had heard that faint scratching of metal upon metal at the front door. It must be—if Mr. Queen acted so quickly—the poisoner. Why had he come back? she thought wildly. The key he was using—easy—a duplicate. Earlier when they had surprised him and he had barricaded the door, he must have entered the apartment by the roof and fire-escape window because he couldn't use the key . . . someone may have been standing in the hall . . .

She choked back a scream, her thoughts snapping off as if a switch had been turned. A hoarse, harsh voice—the sounds of a struggle—a crash . . . they were fighting!

Miss Curleigh saw red. She flung open the door of the closet and plunged out. Ellery was on the floor in a tangle of threshing arms and legs. A hand came up with a knife . . . Miss Curleigh sprang and kicked in an instantaneous reflex action. Something snapped sharply, and she fell back, sickened, as the knife dropped from a broken hand.

'Miss Curleigh—the door!' panted Ellery, pressing his knee viciously downward. Through a dim roaring in her ears Miss Curleigh heard pounding on the door, and tottered toward it. The last thing she remembered before she fainted was a weird boiling of blue-clad bodies as

police poured past her to fall upon the struggling figures.

'It's all right now,' said a far-away voice, and Miss Curleigh opened her eyes to find Mr. Ellery Queen, cool and immaculate, stooping over her. She moved her head dazedly. The fireplace, the crossed swords on the wall . . . 'Don't be alarmed, Marie,' grinned Ellery; 'this isn't an abduction. You have achieved Valhalla. It's all over, and you're reclining on the divan in my apartment.'

'Oh,' said Miss Curleigh, and she swung her feet unsteadily to the floor. 'I—I must look a sight. What happened?'

'We caught the bogey very satisfactorily. Now you rest, young lady, while I rustle a dish of tea—'

'Nonsense!' said Miss Curleigh with asperity. 'I want to know how you performed that miracle. Come on, now, don't be irritating!'

'Yours to command. Just what do you want to know?'

'Did you *know* that awful creature was coming back?'

Ellery shrugged. 'It was a likely possibility. Euphemia had been poisoned, patently, for her hidden money. She must have been murdered at the very latest yesterday, you recall yesterday's milk-bottle, perhaps the night before last. Had the murderer found the money after killing her? Then who was the prowler whom we surprised this

afternoon and who made his escape out the window after barricading the door? It must have been the murderer. But if he came back *after* the crime, then he had not found the money when he committed the crime. Perhaps he had so much to do immediately after the commission of the crime that he had no time to search. At any rate, on his return we surprised him, probably just after he had made a mess of the bed. It was quite possible that he had still not found the money. If he had not, I knew he would come back, after all, he had committed the crime for it. So I took the chance that he would return when he thought the coast was clear, and he did. I 'phoned for police assistance while you were out seeing Dr. Prouty.'

'Did you *know* who it was?'

'Oh, yes. It was demonstrable. The first qualification of the poisoner was availability; that is, in order to make those repeated poisoning attempts, the poisoner had to be near Euphemia or near her food at least since the attempts began, which was presumably five weeks ago. The obvious suspect was her sister. Sarah-Ann had motive—haired and possibly cupidity; and certainly opportunity, since she prepared the food herself. But Sarah-Ann I eliminated on the soundest basis in the world.

'For who had brutally beaten to death the seventh black

tomcat? Palpably, either the victim or the murderer in a general sense. But it couldn't have been Euphemia, since the cat was killed in the bathroom and Euphemia lay paralysed in the bedroom, unable to walk. Then it must have been the murderer who killed the cat. But if Sarah-Ann were the murderer, would she have clubbed to death a cat—she, who loved cats? Utterly inconceivable. Therefore Sarah-Ann was not the murderer.'

'Then what—'

'I know. What happened to Sarah-Ann?' Ellery grimaced. 'Sarah-Ann, it is to be feared, went the way of the cat and her sister. It must have been the poisoner's plan to kill Euphemia and have it appear that Sarah-Ann had killed her, the obvious suspect. Sarah-Ann, then, should be on the scene. But she isn't. Well, her disappearance tends to show, I think the confession will bear me out, that she was accidentally a witness to the murder and was killed by the poisoner on the spot to eliminate a witness to the crime. He wouldn't have killed her under any other circumstances.'

'Did you find the money?'

'Yes. Lying quite loosely,' shrugged Ellery, 'between the pages of a Bible Euphemia always kept in her bed. The Poe touch, no doubt.'

'And,' quavered Miss Curleigh, 'the bodies . . .'

'Surely,' drawled Ellery, 'the incinerator? It would have been the most logical means of disposal. Fire is virtually all-consuming. What bones there were could have been disposed of more easily than . . . Well, there's no point in being literal. You know what I mean.'

'But that means— Who was that fiend you were struggling with on the floor? I never saw him before. It couldn't have been Mr. Morton's f-father . . .?'

'No, indeed. Fiend, Miss Curleigh?' Ellery raised his eyebrows. 'There's only a thin wall between sanity and—'

'You called me,' said Miss Curleigh, 'Marie before.'

Ellery said hastily: 'No one but Sarah-Ann and Euphemia lived in the apartment, yet the poisoner had access to the invalid's food for over a month—apparently without suspicion. Who could have had such access? Only one person: the man who had been decorating the apartment in late afternoons and evenings, around dinner-time, for over a month; the man who worked in a chemical plant and therefore, better than anyone, had knowledge of and access to poisons; the man who tended the incinerator and therefore could dispose of the bones of his human victims without danger to himself. In a word,' said Ellery. 'The superintendent of the building, Harry Potter.'

THE MAN WHO SHOT AT CATS

By J. Jefferson Farjeon

WELL, what have we got on Wilfred Ablett?" asked the superintendent.

The detective looked surprised; almost hurt.

"What have we got on Ablett?" he repeated. "Pretty well all but the handcuffs." He added, with a touch of innocent sarcasm, "Haven't you heard?"

"I've heard a lot, Ellington," snapped the superintendent, "but there's one thing we haven't got that I'm still waiting to hear about, and that's *motive!* Our minds may work differently, but I don't care what the evidence is, if I don't see the motive I'm not happy."

"And I don't care what the motive is," retorted the detective, "if I see the evidence, I'm content. This is what we've got on him, and it's enough for me. Now listen, and tell me the flaw."

He took out his cigarette case, held it out to the superintendent, and they lit up.

"Round about seven o'clock yesterday evening, July 6, Robert Smith is returning home from his office, his home being the top flat of three small flats at Keswick Place, N.W.3. His

road passes the back of the flats, and he raises his eyes above the wall of the back garden to see whether his wife is at the window.

"Mrs. Smith didn't happen to be at the window that evening, but Smith saw someone sitting at the open window just below—namely, Wilfred Ablett, the neurotic occupant of the middle flat.

"He saw something else, too, although at the time it did not make much impression on him. Just the momentary gleam of something in Ablett's hand. We know now that it was a revolver."

"The one he'd brought back from Burma," nodded the superintendent. "From where he also brought back his chronic neuroticism."

"Quite. Well, Smith goes round to the front entrance, and just inside he passes George Baines, the occupant of the bottom flat.

Baines, as we know, had only taken the flat a week previously, taken it furnished from the usual resident, Henry Hartwell, who had gone off for a month in the Lake District. "Good evening," says Smith to Baines, and

receives no reply. Baines, apparently, was not a sociable fellow.'

'That's right. Spent most of his time indoors, and Smith had only bumped into him once before. Nobody knew much about Baines, and I wish we knew a bit more. You might talk a bit about him, Ellington.'

'The agent he got the address of the flat from had never seen him before. 'All I can tell you,' the agent said to me, 'is that he had a small bag, a cough, and an American accent, that he gave his name as George Baines, and that he paid a month's rent in advance.'

Let's get back to Smith and follow him up to his flat. He gets there. Has a wash. And he and Mrs. S. are just starting their meal when they are startled by a report. 'What was that?' exclaims Mrs. S. 'Probably a motor-bike back-firing', says Smith.

But then comes another report. They run to the window. See nothing. Then they run to the kitchen window at the back—the window above that at which Ablett had been seen by Smith.

'And there, in the garden below, lies George Baines.' Quoting from the rest of Smith's statement—

He took out his note-book. 'We were aghast. I rushed down to the garden. It was Baines all right, the chap I'd seen alive

only half an hour before. He was dead as a doornail. Shot through the heart.'

The detective closed his note-book. 'And then we came into it. And what did we find?'

'Not Ablett,' remarked the superintendent, grimly.

'No. The bird had flown. And when he came back next morning he said he spent the night at an hotel, which he had, but he had arrived there at eight, not six, as he tried to make out.

When asked why he had gone to the hotel, he just stared. In his panic, he hadn't thought of that.

When asked whether a revolver found in an alley a couple of blocks away was his, he denied all knowledge of it. But we found his fingerprints on the weapon.

And then, when he had been told this, and that Smith had seen him with the revolver at his window just after 7 p.m., about half an hour before Baines was shot, he broke down, and blubbed that he had aimed at a car that had started yowling at night had kept him awake.

He'd missed the cat, and when he saw Baines fall he panicked and fled. So there you are! What more do you want?'

'How many more times am I to tell you?' demanded the superintendent. 'If this is going to be a murder charge, I want the motive.'

Ellington laughed. 'Well, haven't you got that, too? He aimed at a cat, and killed a man instead. *What* a story!'

The superintendent did not join in the detective's mirth.

'You're ignoring something,' he rasped. 'That wasn't his story. He still denies that he hit the man!'

'Then why did he run?'

Come come! You can answer that one. He ran because he's a nervous wreck, and because he knew that even detectives sometimes jump to wrong conclusions!

'I'm not defending Ablett's brain, any more than I'm defending his veracity, but before I make up my mind about him and see clearly what the charge should be, I want—yes, sergeant?'

He broke off as a police sergeant entered the room. The newcomer advanced importantly and held out a small book.

'Wonderful how a search warrant helps, sir,' he said. 'We found this, and thought it might interest you. It's Ablett's diary. You only want to read from a week back.'

The superintendent took the book.

Then he read out:

'*June 30.* Now someone has started coughing below me. You lie and wait for the next cough, and it doesn't come, and you say 'Good!' and then it comes. Who

is it? It can't be Hartwell. He went off yesterday to the lakes.

'*July 1.* This is getting unbearable. Cough, cough, cough. I don't know if I can stand it.

'*July 2.* Why doesn't he go to a doctor? I mean, there's no let-up! Does he enjoy it? One can't get any sleep at all.

'*July 3.* I've just banged on the floor. I'm writing this in bed. Has it stopped him? Yes! No! Here it comes! Cough, cough, cough! Thump, thump, thump! Cough, cough, cough! I believe he's doing it on purpose!'

'*July 4.* To-day I did rather an extraordinary thing. I took a train into the country, and when I got out I walked till I came to some quiet woods, and then I lay down and went to sleep amid the most wonderful silence. I slept for hours. I had one nasty moment when I woke up, because, I thought I was back in Burma, but when I'd got over that shock I lay down again for a few minutes, and then came home. Now I needn't go to bed, need I? He can cough himself to death! Who cares?'

'*July 5.* I can't stand it, I can't stand it, I can't stand it! Now he's begun to whistle as well as wheeze. Cough, cough, cough—cough, cough, cough—wheeze—whistle. I can't stand it! I can't stand it! My God, one day I'll shoot that chap!'

The inspector closed the book,

and then suddenly took out a large pocket-handkerchief.

'That's the poor devils last entry,' he growled, mopping his brow, 'and he won't be making any more. Next day George Baines was shot bang through the heart. Happy, Ellington? Nice, juicy headlines, eh, and a cinch for the jury. You've won.'

He turned rather wearily to the telephone at his elbow as it rang.

'Don't worry,' smiled the detective. 'I won't crow.'

The superintendent answered the 'phone call, confining his side of the conversation to monosyllables, then replaced the receiver and got up.

'You're not going to have the chance,' he said. 'That was a hospital. George Baines is there, dying, and he wants to make a statement.'

'What!' shouted the detective, leaping to his feet.

But the superintendent pushed him down into his chair again.

'You sit tight till I come back', he said. 'The doctor only wants one of us. I'm taking that statement myself.'

An hour later the superintendent returned, and found Ellington seething with indignant impatience. Unconsciously repeating the superintendent's own earlier inquiry, the detective asked: 'Well, what have you got?'

'Not Wilfred Ablett,' answered the superintendent. 'Have one of mine this time.'

He held out his case. The detective took a cigarette with a grunt.

'As a matter of fact, it wasn't George Baines,' began the superintendent.

'Will you repeat that?' begged Ellington, politely.

'It wasn't George Baines,' repeated the superintendent, 'but perhaps I'm not quite fair in putting it that way. It was the man we knew as George Baines, but his real name was Konrad Clark, a crook, and when he took the bottom flat at Keswick Place, he was going into hiding after being chased across the Atlantic by somebody who owed him something for double crossing them.'

He was at the end of his tether, and that cough of his was finishing him.'

'Who was chasing him?'

'His twin brother, Alfred. They were as alike as two peas, and owing to a mistake in an identity parade after Konrad had cracked a crib in Canada, Alfred was nabbed and jugged for it, while Konrad got away. When Alfred got out, he began looking for his brother, and the hunt ended last night.'

Detective Ellington looked up sharply.

'Then it wasn't George Baines—or, rather Konrad Clark—Smith said good evening to in the entrance to the flats?'

'It wasn't. When we question Smith again we can be sure he

never heard that fellow cough, and the reason the man didn't reply was because the business he was on didn't put him in a communicative mood.

It was Konrad's brother, Alfred—trying to get into the flat that had been bolted against him. Failing his efforts at the front, Alfred went round to the garden to try the back. The back windows were open.'

The superintendent paused. 'And now, Ellington, suppose you finish it for me?'

The detective put himself into the position of the pursued brother, while recalling the full details of Robert Smith's statement.

'I think I can do it', he said. 'Smith heard two shots.'

'Yes, we might have developed that point before,' remarked the superintendent. 'That was one of the frills you left out.'

'Thanks for rubbing it in. The first shot was Ablett's. The fool really *did* fire at a cat! He wasn't going to have yowling added to coughing.'

The second shot was Konrad Clark's—alias George Baines. He was at the window, watching for Alfred, and in his panic he thought the first shot came from Alfred—though, of course, nothing actually went his way.

So he shot back. And down went Alfred. And away ran Konrad in a brain storm—'

'As Ablett did a minute or two later,' interposed the super-

intendent. 'Queer if they'd taken the same direction—two men bunking together from the same corpse! But you've still got to tell me how Konrad died?'

'That's easy. Didn't you say he was at the end of his tether—and that his cough was finishing him?'

The superintendent nodded. 'He didn't spend his night at an hotel, like Ablett. He was picked up in the early morning outside the hospital to which he'd managed to drag himself, was taken in, and when he came to made his statement. A doctor, two nurses, and myself heard him make his statement, and I took it down.'

So now, Ellington, we've got our evidence and motive complete and we can both be satisfied.'

'Sure, sure,' admitted the detective, with a smile, 'but since you're so keen on motives, there's one that seems to be missing.'

'Oh, what's that?'

'Why did Konrad make his statement?'

The superintendent wagged his head.

'It's too late now to ask him,' he replied, 'but I'm not worrying about that. Even crooks, you know, sometimes like to die clean. But suppose we leave the dead and get back to the living? Isn't it time we went to soothe poor old Wilfred Ablett?'



AGATHA CHRISTIE THE SIGN IN THE SKY

THE judge was finishing his charge to the jury.

'Now, gentlemen, I have almost finished what I want to say to you. There is evidence for you to consider as to whether this case is plainly made out against this man so that you may say he is guilty of the murder of Vivien Barnaby. You have had the evidence of the servants as to the time the shot was fired. They

have one and all agreed upon it. You have had the evidence of the letter written to the defendant by Vivien Barnaby on the morning of that same day, Friday, September 13th, a letter which the defence has not attempted to deny. You have had evidence that the prisoner first denied having been at Deering Hill, and later, after evidence had been given by the police,

admitted he had. You will draw your own conclusions from that denial. This is not a case of direct evidence. You will have to come to your own conclusions on the subject of motive—of means—of opportunity. The contention of the defence is that some person unknown entered the music room after the defendant had left it, and shot Vivien Barnaby with the gun which by a strange forgetfulness the defendant had left behind him. You have heard the defendant's story of the reason it took him half an hour to get home. If you disbelieve the defendant's story and are satisfied, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the defendant did, upon Friday, September 13th, discharge his gun at close quarters to Vivien Barnaby's head with intent to kill her, then, gentlemen, your verdict must be guilty. If, on the other hand, you have any reasonable doubt, it is your duty to acquit the prisoner. I will now ask you to retire to your room and consider and let me know when you have arrived at a conclusion.'

The jury were absent a little under half an hour. They returned the verdict that to everyone had seemed a foregone conclusion, the verdict of 'Guilty'.

Mr. Satterthwaite left the court after hearing the verdict, with a thoughtful frown on his face.

A mere murder trial, as such,

did not attract him. He was of too fastidious a temperament to find interest in the sordid details of the average crime. But the Wylde case had been different. Young Martin Wylde was what is termed a gentleman, and the victim, Sir George Barnaby's young wife, had been personally known to the elderly gentleman.

He was thinking of all this as he walked up Holborn, and then plunged into a tangle of mean streets leading in the direction of Soho. In one of these streets there was a small restaurant, known only to the few, of whom Mr. Satterthwaite was one. It was not cheap—it was, on the contrary, exceedingly expensive, since it catered exclusively for the palate of the jaded *gourmet*. It was quiet—no strains of jazz were allowed to disturb the hushed atmosphere—it was rather dark; waiters appeared soft-footed out of the twilight, bearing silver dishes with the air of participating in some holy rite. The name of the restaurant was Arlecchino.

Still thoughtful, Mr. Satterthwaite turned into the Arlecchino and made for his favourite table in a recess in the far corner. Owing to the twilight before mentioned, it was not until he was quite close to it that he saw it was already occupied by a tall, dark man who sat with his face in shadow, and with a play of colour from a stained window turning his sober garb

to a kind of riotous motley.

Mr. Satterthwaite would have turned back, but just at that moment the stranger moved slightly and the other recognized him.

'God bless my soul,' said Mr. Satterthwaite, who was given to old-fashioned expressions. 'Why, it's Mr. Quin!'

Three times before he had met Mr. Quin, and each time the meeting had resulted in something a little out of the ordinary. A strange person, this Mr. Quin, with a knack of showing you the things you had known all along in a totally different light.

At once Mr. Satterthwaite felt excited—pleasurably excited.

His rôle was that of the looker on, and he knew it, but sometimes, when in the company of Mr. Quin, he had the illusion of being an actor—and the principal actor at that.

'This is very pleasant,' he said, beaming all over his dried up little face. 'Very pleasant indeed. You've no objection to my joining you, I hope?'

'I shall be delighted,' said Mr. Quin. 'As you see I have not yet begun my meal.'

A deferential head waiter hovered up out of the shadows. Mr. Satterthwaite, as befitted a man with a seasoned palate, gave his whole mind to the task of selection. In a few minutes, the head waiter, a slight smile of approbation on his lips, retired. A young satellite began his

ministrations. Mr. Satterthwaite turned to Mr. Quin.

'I have just come from the Old Bailey,' he began. 'A sad business, I thought.'

'He was found guilty?' said Mr. Quin.

'Yes, the jury were out only half an hour.'

Mr. Quin bowed his head.

'An inevitable result—on the evidence,' he said.

'And yet,' began Mr. Satterthwaite—and stopped.

Mr. Quin finished the sentence for him.

'And yet your sympathies were with the accused? Is that what you were going to say?'

'I suppose it was. Martin Wylde is a nice-looking young fellow—one can hardly believe it of him. All the same, there have been a good many nice-looking young fellows lately who have turned out to be murderers of a particularly cold-blooded and repellent type.'

'Too many,' said Mr. Quin quietly.

'I beg your pardon?' said Mr. Satterthwaite, slightly startled.

'Too many for Martin Wylde. There has been a tendency from the beginning to regard this as just one more of a series of the same type of crime—a man seeking to free himself from one woman in order to marry another.'

'Well,' said Mr. Satterthwaite, doubtfully. 'On the evidence—'

'Ah!' said Mr. Quin quickly, 'I am afraid I have not followed all the evidence.'

Mr. Satterthwaite's self-confidence came back to him with a rush. He felt a sudden sense of power. He was tempted to be consciously dramatic.

'Let me try and show it to you. I have met the Barnabys, you understand. I know the peculiar circumstances. With me, you will come behind the scenes—you will see the thing from inside.'

Mr. Quin leaned forward with his quick encouraging smile.

'If anyone can show me that, it will be Mr. Satterthwaite,' he murmured.

Mr. Satterthwaite gripped the table with both hands. He was uplifted, carried out of himself. For the moment, he was an artist pure and simple—an artist whose medium was words.

Swiftly, with a dozen broad strokes, he etched in the picture of life at Deering Hill. Sir George Barnaby, elderly, obese, purse-proud. A man perpetually fussing over the little things of life. A man who wound up his clocks every Friday afternoon, and who paid his own housekeeping books every Tuesday morning, and who always saw to the locking of his own front door every night. A careful man.

And from Sir George he went on to Lady Barnaby. Here his touch was gentler, but none the less sure. He had seen her but

once, but his impression of her was definite and lasting. A vivid, defiant creature—pitifully young. A trapped child, that was how he described her.

'She hated him, you understand? She had married him before she knew what she was doing. And now—'

She was desperate—that was how he put it. Turning this way and that. She had no money of her own; she was entirely dependent on this elderly husband. But all the same she was a creature at bay—still unsure of her own powers, with a beauty that was as yet more promise than actuality. And she was greedy. Mr. Satterthwaite affirmed that definitely. Side by side with defiance there ran a greedy streak—a clasping and a clutching at life.

'I never met Martin Wylde,' continued Mr. Satterthwaite. 'But I heard of him. He lived less than a mile away. Farming, that was his line. And she took an interest in farming—or pretended to. If you ask me, it was pretending. I think that she saw in him her only way of escape—and she grabbed at him, greedily, like a child might have done. Well, there could only be one end to that. We know what that end was, because the letters were read out in court. He kept her letters—she didn't keep his, but from the text of hers one can see that he was cooling off. He admits as much. There was the

other girl. She also lived in the village of Deering Vale. Her father was the doctor there. You saw her in court, perhaps? No, I remember, you were not there, you said. I shall have to describe her to you. A fair girl—very fair. Gentle. Perhaps—yes, perhaps a tiny bit stupid. But very restful, you know. And loyal. Above all, loyal.’

He looked at Mr. Quin for encouragement, and Mr. Quin gave it him by a slow appreciative smile. Mr. Satterthwaite went on.

‘You heard that last letter read—you must have seen it, in the papers, I mean. The one written on the morning of Friday, September 13th. It was full of desperate reproaches and vague threats, and it ended by begging Martin Wylde to come to Deering Hill that same evening at six o’clock. *‘I will leave the side door open for you, so that no one need know you have been here. I shall be in the music room.’* It was sent by hand.’

Mr. Satterthwaite paused for a minute or two.

‘When he was first arrested, you will remember, Martin Wylde denied that he had been to the house at all that evening. His statement was that he had taken his gun and gone out shooting in the woods. But when the police brought forward their evidence, that statement broke down. They had found his fingerprints, you remember, both on the

wood of the side door and on one of the two cocktail glasses on the table in the music room. He admitted then that he had come to see Lady Barnaby, that they had had a stormy interview, but that it had ended in his having managed to soothe her down. He swore that he left his gun outside leaning against the wall near the door, and that he left Lady Barnaby alive and well, the time being then a minute or two after a quarter past six. He went straight home, he says, but evidence was called to show that he did not reach his farm until a quarter to seven, and, as I have just mentioned, it is barely a mile away. It would not take half an hour to get there. He forgot all about his gun, he declares. Not a very likely statement—and yet—”

‘And yet?’ queried Mr. Quin.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Satterthwaite slowly, ‘it’s a possible one, isn’t it? Counsel ridiculed the supposition, of course, but I think he was wrong. You see, I’ve known a good many young men, and these emotional scenes upset them very much—especially the dark nervous type like Martin Wylde. Women, now, can go through a scene like that, and feel positively better for it afterward, with all their wits about them. It acts like a safety valve for them, steadies their nerves down and all that. But I can see Martin Wylde going away with his head in a whirl, sick and

miserable, and without a thought of the gun he had left leaning up against the wall.'

He was silent for some minutes before he went on.

'Not that it matters. For the next part is only too clear, unfortunately. It was exactly twenty minutes past six when the shot was heard. All the servants heard it, the cook, the kitchen-maid, the butler, the housemaid and Lady Barnaby's own maid. They came rushing to the music room. She was lying huddled over the arm of her chair. The gun had been discharged close to the back of her head, so that the shot hadn't a chance to scatter. At least two of them penetrated the brain.'

He paused again and Mr. Quin asked casually:

'The servants gave evidence, I suppose?'

Mr. Satterthwaite nodded.

'Yes. The butler got there a second or two before the others, but their evidence was practically a repetition of each other's.'

'So they *all* gave evidence,' said Mr. Quin musingly. 'There were no exceptions?'

'Now I remember it,' said Mr. Satterthwaite, 'the housemaid was only called at the inquest. She's gone to Canada since, I believe.'

'I see,' said Mr. Quin.

There was a silence, and somehow the air of the little restaurant seemed to be charged with an uneasy feeling. Mr. Satterth-

waite felt suddenly as though he were on the defensive.

'Why shouldn't she?' he said abruptly.

'Why should she?' said Mr. Quin with a very slight shrug of the shoulders.

Somehow, the question annoyed Mr. Satterthwaite. He wanted to shy away from it—to get back on familiar ground.

'There couldn't be much doubt who fired the shot. As a matter of fact the servants seemed to have lost their heads a bit. There was no one in the house to take charge. It was some minutes before anyone thought of ringing up the police, and when they did so, they found that the telephone was out of order.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Quin. 'The telephone was out of order.'

'It was,' said Mr. Satterthwaite—and was struck suddenly by the feeling that he had said something tremendously important. 'It might, of course, have been done on purpose,' he said slowly. 'But there seems no point in that. Death was practically instantaneous.'

Mr. Quin said nothing, and Mr. Satterthwaite felt that his explanation was unsatisfactory.

'There was absolutely no one to suspect but young Wylde,' he went on. 'By his own account, even, he was only out of the house three minutes before the shot was fired. And who else could have fired it? Sir George

was at a bridge party a few houses away. He left there at half-past six and was met just outside the gate by a servant bringing him the news. The last rubber finished at half-past six exactly—no doubt about that. Then there was Sir George's secretary, Henry Thompson. He was in London that day, and actually at a business meeting at the moment the shot was fired. Finally there is Sylvia Dale who, after all, had a perfectly good motive, impossible as it seems that she should have had anything to do with such a crime. She was at the station of Deering Vale seeing a friend off by the 6.28 train. That lets her out. Then the servants. What earthly motive could any one of them have? Besides they all arrived on the spot practically simultaneously. No, it must have been Martin Wylde.'

But he said it in a dissatisfied kind of voice.

They went on with their lunch. Mr. Quin was not in a talkative mood, and Mr. Satterthwaite had said all he had to say. But the silence was not a barren one. It was filled with the growing dissatisfaction of Mr. Satterthwaite, heightened and fostered in some strange way by the mere quiescence of the other man.

Mr. Satterthwaite suddenly put down his knife and fork with a clatter.

'Supposing that that young man is really innocent,' he

said. 'He's going to be hanged.'

He looked very startled and upset about it. And still Mr. Quin said nothing.

'It's not as though—' began Mr. Satterthwaite, and stopped. 'Why shouldn't the woman go to Canada?' he ended inconsequently.

Mr. Quin shook his head.

'I don't even know what part of Canada she went to,' continued Mr. Satterthwaite peevishly.

'Could you find out?' suggested the other.

'I suppose I could. The butler, now. He'd know. Or possibly Thompson, the secretary.'

He paused again. When he resumed speech, his voice sounded almost pleading.

'It's not as though it were anything to do with me?'

'That a young man is going to be hanged in a little over three weeks?'

'Well, yes—if you put it that way, I suppose. Yes, I see what you mean. Life and death. And that poor girl, too. It's not that I'm hard-hearted—but, after all—what good will it do? Isn't the whole thing rather fantastic? Even if I found out where the woman's gone to in Canada—why, it would probably mean that I should have to go out there myself.'

Mr. Satterthwaite looked seriously upset.

'And I was thinking of going to the Riviera next week,' he said pathetically.

And his glance toward Mr. Quin said as plainly as it could be said: 'Do let me off, won't you?'

'You have never been to Canada?'

'Never.'

'A very interesting country.'

Mr. Satterthwaite looked at him undecidedly.

'You think I ought to go?'

Mr. Quin leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette. Between puffs of smoke, he spoke deliberately.

'You are, I believe, a rich man, Mr. Satterthwaite. Not a millionaire, but a man able to indulge a hobby without counting the expense. You have looked on at the dramas of other people. Have you never contemplated stepping in and playing a part? Have you never seen yourself for a minute as the arbiter of other people's destinies—standing in the centre of the stage with life and death in your hands?'

Mr. Satterthwaite leaned forward. The old eagerness surged over him.

'You mean—if I go on this wild goose chase to Canada—'

Mr. Quin smiled.

'Oh! it was your suggestion, going to Canada, not mine,' he said lightly.

'You can't put me off like that,' said Mr. Satterthwaite earnestly. 'Whenever I have come across you—' He stopped. 'Well?'

'There is something about you

I do not understand. Perhaps I never shall. The last time I met you—'

'On Midsummer Eve.'

Mr. Satterthwaite was startled, as though the words held a clue that he did not quite understand.

'Was it Midsummer Eve?' he asked confusedly.

'Yes. But let us not dwell on that. It is unimportant, is it not?'

'Since you say so,' said Mr. Satterthwaite courteously. He felt that elusive clue slipping through his fingers.

'When I come back from Canada'—he paused a little awkwardly— 'I—I—should much like to see you again.'

'I am afraid I have no fixed address for the moment,' said Mr. Quin regretfully. 'But I often come to this place. If you also frequent it, we shall no doubt meet before very long.'

They parted pleasantly.

Mr. Satterthwaite was very excited. He hurried round to Cook's and inquired about boat sailings. Then he rang up Deering Hill. The voice of a butler, suave and deferential, answered him.

'My name is Satterthwaite. I am speaking for a—er—firm of solicitors. I wished to make a few inquiries about a young woman who was recently housemaid in your establishment.'

'Would that be Louisa, sir? Louisa Bullard?'

'That is the name,' said Mr.

Satterthwaite, very pleased to be told it.

'I regret she is not in this country, sir. She went to Canada six months ago.'

'Can you give me her present address?'

The butler was afraid he couldn't. It was a place in the mountains she had gone to—a Scotch name—ah! Banff, that was it. Some of the other young women in the house had been expecting to hear from her, but she had never written or given them any address.

Mr. Satterthwaite thanked him and rang off. He was still undaunted. The adventurous spirit was strong in his breast. He would go to Banff. If this Louisa Bullard was there, he would track her down somehow or other.

To his own surprise, he enjoyed the trip greatly. It was many years since he had taken a long sea voyage. The Riviera, Le Touquet and Deauville, and Scotland had been his usual round. The feeling that he was setting off on an impossible mission added a secret zest to his journey. What an utter fool these fellow travellers of his would think him did they but know the object of his quest! But then—they were not acquainted with Mr. Quin.

In Banff he found his objective easily attained. Louisa Bullard was employed in the large hotel there. Twelve hours after his

arrival he was standing face to face with her.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, anaemic looking, but with a strong frame. She had pale brown hair inclined to curl, and a pair of honest brown eyes. She was, he thought, slightly stupid, but very trustworthy.

She accepted quite readily his statement that he had been asked to collect a few further facts from her about the tragedy at Deering Hill.

'I saw in the paper that Mr. Martin Wylde had been convicted, sir. Very sad, it is, too.'

She seemed, however, to have no doubt as to his guilt.

'A nice young gentleman gone wrong. But though I wouldn't speak ill of the dead, it was her ladyship what led him on. Wouldn't leave him alone, she wouldn't. Well, they've both got their punishment. There's a text used to hang on my wall when I was a child 'God is not mocked,' and it's very true. I knew something was going to happen that very evening—and sure enough it did.'

'How was that?' said Mr. Satterthwaite.

'I was in my room, sir, changing my dress, and I happened to glance out of the window. There was a train going along, and the white smoke of it rose up in the air, and if you'll believe me it formed itself into the sign of a gigantic hand. A great white hand against the crimson

of the sky. The fingers were crooked like, as though they were reaching out for something. It fair gave me a turn. 'Did you ever, now?' I said to myself. 'That's a sign of something coming'—and sure enough at that very minute I heard the shot. 'It's come,' I said to myself, and I rushed downstairs and joined Carrie and the others who were in the hall, and we went into the music room and there she was, shot through the head—and the blood and everything. Horrible! I spoke up, I did, and told Sir George how I'd seen the sign beforehand, but he didn't seem to think much of it. An unlucky day, that was; I'd felt it in my bones from early in the morning. Friday, and the 13th—what could you expect?'

She rambled on. Mr. Satterthwaite was patient. Again and again he took her back to the crime, questioning her closely. In the end he was forced to confess defeat. Louisa Bullard had told all she knew, and her story was perfectly simple and straight forward.

Yet he did discover one fact of importance. The post in question had been suggested to her by Mr. Thompson, Sir George's secretary. The wages attached were so large that she was tempted, and accepted the job, although it involved her leaving England very hurriedly. A Mr. Denman had made all the arrangements to this end and had

also warned her not to write to her fellow servants in England, as this might 'get her into trouble with the immigration authorities,' which statement she had accepted in blind faith.

The amount of the wages, casually mentioned by her, was indeed so large that Mr. Satterthwaite was startled. After some hesitation he made up his mind to approach this Mr. Denman.

He found very little difficulty in inducing Mr. Denman to tell all he knew. The latter had come across Thompson in London, and Thompson had done him a good turn. The secretary had written to him in September saying that for personal reasons Sir George was anxious to get this girl out of England. Could he find her a job? A sum of money had been sent to raise the wages to a high figure.

'Usual trouble, I guess,' said Mr. Denman, leaning back nonchalantly in his chair. 'Seems a nice quiet girl, too.'

Mr. Satterthwaite did not agree that this was the usual trouble. Louisa Bullard, he was sure, was not a cast off fancy of Sir George Barnaby's. For some reason it had been vital to get her out of England. But why? and who was at the bottom of it? Sir George himself, working through Thompson? Or was it the latter working on his own initiative, and dragging in his employer's name.

Still pondering over these questions, Mr. Satterthwaite made the return journey. He was cast down and despondent. His journey had done no good.

Smarting under a sense of failure, he made his way to the Arlecchino the day after his return. He hardly expected to be successful the first time, but to his satisfaction the familiar figure was sitting at the table in the recess, and the dark face of Mr. Harley Quin smiled a welcome.

'Well,' said Mr. Satterthwaite as he helped himself to a pat of butter, 'you sent me on a nice wild goose chase.'

Mr. Quin raised his eyebrows.

'I sent you?' he objected. 'It was your own idea entirely.'

'Whose-ever idea it was, it's not succeeded. Louisa Bullard has nothing to tell.'

Thereupon Mr. Satterthwaite related the details of his conversation with the housemaid and then went on to his interview with Mr. Denman. Mr. Quin listened in silence.

'In one sense, I was justified,' continued Mr. Satterthwaite. 'She was deliberately got out of the way. But why? I can't see it.'

'No?' said Mr. Quin, and his voice was, as ever, provocative.

Mr. Satterthwaite flushed.

'I daresay you think I might have questioned her more adroitly. I can assure you that I took her over the story again and again. It was not my fault that I did not get what we want.'

'Are you sure,' said Mr. Quin, 'that you did not get what you want?'

Mr. Satterthwaite looked up at him in astonishment, and met that sad mocking gaze he knew so well.

The little man shook his head, slightly bewildered.

There was a silence, and then Mr. Quin said, with a total change of manner:

'You gave me a wonderful picture the other day of the people in this business. In a few words you made them stand out as clearly as though they were etched. I wish you would do something of that kind for the place—you left that in the shadow.'

Mr. Satterthwaite was flattered.

'The place? Deering Hill? Well, it's a very ordinary sort of house nowadays. Red brick, you know and bay windows. Quite hideous outside, but very comfortable inside. Not a very large house. About two acres of ground. They're all much the same, those round the links. Built for rich men to live in. The inside of the house is reminiscent of a hotel—the bedrooms are like hotel suites. Baths and hot and cold basins in all the bedrooms and a good many gilded electric light fittings. All wonderfully comfortable, but not very country-like. You can tell that Deering Vale is only nineteen miles from London.'

Mr. Quin listened attentively.

'The train service is bad, I have heard,' he remarked.

'Oh! I don't know about that,' said Mr. Satterthwaite, warming to his subject. 'I was down there for a bit last summer. I found it quite convenient for town. Of course the trains only go every hour. Forty-eight minutes past the hour from Waterloo—up to 10.48.'

'And how long does it take to Deering Vale?'

'Just about three quarters of an hour. Twenty-eight minutes past the hour at Deering Vale.'

'Of course,' said Mr. Quin with a gesture of vexation. 'I should have remembered. Miss Dale saw someone off by the 6.28 that evening, didn't she?'

Mr. Satterthwaite did not reply for a minute or two. His mind had gone back with a rush to his unsolved problem. Presently he said:

'I wish you would tell me what you meant just now when you asked me if I was sure I had not got what I wanted?'

It sounded rather complicated, put that way, but Mr. Quin made no pretence of not understanding.

'I just wondered if you weren't being a little too exacting. After all, you found out that Louisa Bullard was deliberately got out of the country. That being so, there must be a reason. And the reason must lie in what she said to you.'

'Well,' said Mr. Satterthwaite argumentatively. 'What did she say? If she'd given evidence at the trial, what could she have said?'

'She might have told what she saw,' said Mr. Quin.

'What did she see?'

'A sign in the sky.'

Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him.

'Are you thinking of *that* nonsense? That superstitious notion of its being the hand of God?'

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Quin. 'For all you and I know it may have been the hand of God, you know.'

The other was clearly puzzled at the gravity of his manner.

'Nonsense,' he said. 'She said herself it was the smoke of the train.'

'An up train or a down train, I wonder,' murmured Mr. Quin.

'Hardly an up train. They go at ten minutes to the hour. It must have been a down train—the 6.28—no, that won't do. She said the shot came immediately afterward, and we know the shot was fired at twenty minutes past six. The train couldn't have been ten minutes early.'

'Hardly, on that line,' agreed Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite was staring ahead of him.

'Perhaps a goods train,' he murmured. 'But surely, if so—'

'There would have been no need to get her out of England. I agree,' said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite gazed at him, fascinated.

'The 6.28,' he said slowly. 'But if so, if the shot was fired then, why did everyone say it was earlier.'

'Obvious,' said Mr. Quin. 'The clocks must have been wrong.'

'All of them?' said Mr. Satterthwaite doubtfully. 'That's a pretty tall coincidence, you know.'

'I wasn't thinking of it as a coincidence,' said the other. 'I was thinking that it was Friday.'

'Friday?' said Mr. Satterthwaite.

'You did tell me, you know, that Sir George always wound the clocks on a Friday afternoon,' said Mr. Quin apologetically.

'He put them back ten minutes,' said Mr. Satterthwaite, almost in a whisper, so awed was he by the discoveries he was making. 'Then he went out to bridge. I think he must have opened the note from his wife to Martin Wylde that morning—yes, decidedly he opened it. He left his bridge party at 6.30, found Martin's gun standing by the side door, and went in and shot her from behind. Then he went out again, threw the gun into the bushes where it was found later, and was apparently just coming out of the neighbour's gate when someone came running to fetch him. But the telephone—what about the telephone? Ah! yes, I see. He dis-

connected it so that a summons could not be sent to the police that way—they might have noted the time it was received. And Wylde's story works out now. The real time he left was five and twenty past six. Walking slowly, he would reach home about a quarter to seven. Yes, I see it all. Louisa was the only danger with her endless talk about her superstitious fancies. Someone might realise the significance of the train and then—goodbye to that excellent *alibi*.'

'Wonderful,' commented Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite turned to him, flushed with success.

'The only thing is—how to proceed now?'

'I should suggest Sylvia Dale,' said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite looked doubtful.

'I mentioned to you,' he said. 'She seemed to me a little—erstupid.'

'She has a father and brothers who will take the necessary steps.'

'That is true,' said Mr. Satterthwaite, relieved.

A very short time afterward he was sitting with the girl, telling her the story. She listened attentively. She put no questions to him but when he had done she rose.

'I must have a taxi—at once.'

'My dear child, what are you going to do?'

'I am going to Sir George Barnaby.'

'Impossible. Absolutely the wrong procedure. Allow me to--'

He twittered on by her side. But he produced no impression. Sylvia Dale was intent on her own plans. She allowed him to go with her in the taxi, but to all his remonstrances she addressed a deaf ear. She left him in the taxi while she went into Sir George's city office.

It was half an hour later when she came out. She looked exhausted, her fair beauty drooping like a waterless flower. Mr. Satterthwaite received her with concern.

'I've won,' she murmured, as she leaned back with half-closed eyes.

'What?' he was startled. 'What did you do? What did you say?' She sat up a little.

'I told him that Louisa Bullard had been to the police with her story. I told him that the police had made inquiries and that he had been seen going into his own grounds and out again, a few minutes after half-past six. I told him that the game was up. He—he went to pieces. I told him that there was still time for him to get away, that the police weren't coming for another hour to arrest him. I told him that if he'd sign a confession that he'd killed Vivien I'd do nothing, but that if he didn't I'd scream and tell the whole

building the truth. He was so panicky that he didn't know what he was doing. He signed the paper without realising what he was doing.'

She thrust it into his hands.

'Take it—take it. You know what to do with it so that they'll set Martin free.'

'He actually signed it,' cried Mr. Satterthwaite, amazed.

'He is a little stupid, you know,' said Sylvia Dale. 'So am I,' she added as an afterthought. 'That is why I know how stupid people behave. We get rattled, you know, and then we do the wrong thing and are sorry afterward.'

She shivered and Mr. Satterthwaite patted her hand.

'You need something to pull you together,' he said. 'Come, we are close to a very favourite resort of mine—the Arlecchino. Have you ever been there?'

She shook her head.

Mr. Satterthwaite stopped the taxi and took the girl into the little restaurant. He made his way to the table in the recess, his heart beating hopefully. But the table was empty.

Sylvia Dale saw the disappointment in his face.

'What is it?' she asked.

'Nothing,' said Mr. Satterthwaite. 'That is, I half expected to see a friend of mine here. It doesn't matter. Some day, I expect, I shall see him again.'



The Department of Dead Ends, wrote Roy Vickers, came into existence in the first decade of this century. It took everything rejected by the other departments — it noted and filed all those clues that had the exasperating effect of proving a palpably guilty man innocent. To this Department, too, were taken all those members of the public who insisted on helping the police with obviously irrelevant information and preposterous theories. Its files were mines of misinformation; it proceeded largely by guess-work and its main function was to connect persons and things that had no logical connection. It played always for the lucky fluke. In short it stood for the antithesis of scientific detection.

THE CASE OF THE RESPECTFUL MURDERER

by Roy Vickers

BEFORE sentencing James Bladlow to death, the judge — following a strange convention of our courts — explained to the prisoner how richly he deserved to be hanged. The crime, he asserted, was a sordid one without a single redeeming feature. From the moment Bladlow set eyes on Miss Henson — the judge did not doubt — he had planned to destroy her. He had enticed this elderly but inexperienced woman to occupy the top floor of his house. For four years, under the guise of friendship, he had systematically obtained control of her fortune. With diabolical cunning he had placed himself beyond

reach of the law. But for a tangential accident, he would never have been brought to trial.

Thus did the judge make it all sound simple and straight-forward. His law, of course, was impeccable, but his moralising was slovenly. If Bladlow had been as insensitive a scoundrel as all that, there would have been no 'tangential accident'. The latter was a foreseeable consequence of his respect for the woman he murdered.

Detective Inspector Rason — without committing himself on the word 'tangential' — certainly regarded his own success as pure luck — in the first instance. The luck drifted on to his table

in the Department of Dead Ends in the form of a portrait in oils of a girl of ten. Attached was a label to the effect that the picture was a forgery of the work of an artist named Merthyr. This certainly led him to Bladlow – but not in connection with the murder.

James Bladlow, born in 1900 – and bred in the stern tradition of middle-class respectability – was a house and estate agent. He had inherited a small business in West Kensington, founded by his grandfather, which was yielding a net income of about eight hundred pounds, with occasional windfalls, – one of which had recently enabled him to open a small branch at Shaldon-on-Thames, some thirty miles out of London, where he lived.

In February 1932 another windfall was impending in the form of instructions from the bank, as executors of Sir Anstruther Henson, recently deceased, to sell the latter's house and contents, together with five other houses in the neighbourhood. To his office a few days later came Miss Henson, daughter of deceased and sole beneficiary.

She was a meagre, pinched little woman of fifty-two, looking rather older than her age. Bladlow's first impression was that her dress, though new and of good material, was ill cut and old fashioned. Under her out-moded muff, her hands were

twitching with shyness. When he addressed her by name and asked her to sit down she bowed like an Edwardian dowager. She sat upright in the visitors' armchair, her breathing laboured with embarrassment.

'I must confess, sir, that I have never before entered a business office, and I beg you to bear with me.' The words sounded like a quotation from a Victorian novel, as indeed they were. The voice was equally startling, coming from the throat of a woman in her fifties. It was not a young voice – it was juvenile: it went on: 'My father would, of course, disapprove. But – you don't mind, do you? It's nothing to you that he would disapprove, is it?'

While Bladlow reassured her and chattered a little, to help her, he noted that her face, now unquestionably plain, might have been attractive in youth. The wide-set, blue eyes were not stupid – they were, he thought, sensitive and vaguely pathetic.

Gradually she lost some of her nervousness and let him draw her out. In something less than twenty minutes he had learnt much about her, including the reason for her visit. He was able to infer that she had lived alone with her father all her life, for the greater part of which he had been a tyrannical invalid.

'Now about this sale, Miss Henson! I understand that you wish to withdraw the furniture

of two of the rooms, including everything that was in the rooms -'

'Everything in the rooms was mine!' She had become bold enough now to interrupt him. 'The rooms were mine. He never once came into them. He promised he would not come in - ever. And he always kept his word.'

Her nervous insistence revealed much of the atmosphere of her home life.

'I daresay that could be arranged. If you'll give me their name, I'll telephone the solicitors who are handling Sir Anstruther's affairs.'

'My father did not approve of lawyers. I suspect that he, too, knew little about business. Before he died he told me the bank would do everything.'

'Hm! Banks are heavily tied by the letter of the law. Never mind. You can 'buy in' at the auction.' He explained that she would ultimately be paying the money to herself. She understood only one point.

'I haven't enough money,' she said. 'There's a portrait by Merthyr - you will be aware that his standing has increased since his death.'

Bladlow had never heard of Merthyr. She explained, and astonished him again by her practical knowledge of art values. He gathered that the portrait might fetch a hundred guineas or more at auction.

'The best thing would be to ask your bank manager -'

'I have never had any dealings with a bank.' The juvenility of the voice was pronounced as she added: 'But I've been saving my pocket money for years. Eighty three pounds! I have it all in my muff, but it won't be enough.' And then: 'Oh, do please help me!'

A shrivelled, middle-aged woman with the air of a child waiting for a grown-up to help her. Bladlow found it unnerving. So far from 'planning to destroy her', he planned to comfort her. He felt that quite deep emotion which some persons feel when a stray dog whines and cringes for food. It is the cringing that is an unbearable indictment of one's humanity. This poor little old scarecrow ought not to have been possible.

It might be six months or more before probate could be granted for her father's will, which, after taxation, would bring her some thirty thousand pounds. Within a week the carpets would be taken from under her feet, by which time some pick-pocket would probably have acquired her savings. She would be temporarily penniless and homeless - would think that everyone was going to be as cruel to her as her father had been.

'I'm glad you came to see me, Miss Henson - it wasn't such

an ordeal after all, was it! I'll see that you get what you want. If you will come back to this office at four this afternoon I think you'll find everything will have been settled.'

When she left him, he allowed himself to be momentarily overcome, even found it necessary to wipe his spectacles.

'That's a damned scandal, if you like!' he told the enlarged photograph of his late father on the opposite wall. 'A selfish swine battenning on his daughter's vitality without even the excuse of poverty! What fun can that poor old thing have had in the whole of her life? And now she's too old to enjoy the money!'

He rang his wife. He presented the case, not from the angle of the stray dog, but from that of the substantial client in difficulties while awaiting probate.

'If you can't stand her, we'll push her along after a few days. But if you can, it'll probably mean a good deal of juicy business for us, one way and another.'

That speech was as sincere as the speech he made to his father's photograph. He expected to act as general agent for her and intended to charge full fees for his services, but on a scale sanctioned by trade custom.

Before she returned, he fixed a loan for her for five hundred pounds, and opened a banking account in her name at Shaldon-on-Thames - which helped him to overcome her scruples about

accepting hospitality from a stranger. He conceded that she should pay the out-of-pocket cost of her board.

Aileen Bladlow without prompting, picked up something of the stray-dog point of view. In a few days, she coaxed her protegee into a shopping expedition and helped her to choose clothes of the right kind - thereby awakening Miss Henson's dormant femininity. The couple treated her with indulgent kindness - though Cedric, their five year old, reserved judgment. In a month the spontaneity of Aileen Bladlow's welcome wore thin, but loyalty to her husband's business interests evoked a synthetic geniality, so that Miss Henson noticed no difference.

On the other hand, Bladlow's benevolent interest became the stronger as the personality of Miss Henson opened, flower-like, in the sunshine of normal friendliness. In three months she no longer looked skinny. Bladlow began to take a pride in her improving health. The shadow of her father was lifting from her - lifted, one might say, by James Bladlow. Her growing confidence of speech and manner he regarded as his own handiwork.

And so did Miss Henson.

In short, the rather unctuous little fairy story of the strong man stooping to help the drab old maid whom everyone de-

spises was coming true. Even to the point where the strong man earns the undying gratitude of the beneficiary, to say nothing of her boundless admiration.

He had yet to discover that the catch in that particular fairy story is that the drab old maid, who ought to turn into a delect-

able princess, more often reveals herself as an Old Man Of The Sea who cannot be shaken from the shoulders of her rescuer.

He received his first warning when probate was granted and Miss Henson became a comparatively affluent woman in her own right.

2

IT must be emphasized that Miss Henson was of normal intelligence and even of studious tastes. She knew a great deal about the history of art and literature and was something approaching an expert in her judgment of paintings. She could herself draw very competently. She was eccentric only in her ignorance of the rough-and-tumble of everyday life, and even this was unobtrusive. In casual contact she would appear an ordinary middle-aged spinster of the sheltered classes, a little more fluttery than is usual nowadays. Instructed by Aileen in the science of buying clothes, she applied her own knowledge of line and colour and now looked very presentable.

For the rest, she could sustain a drawing room conversation, and she could buy food and domestic necessaries as competently as any housewife. But the mental habit of years made her attention panic away from anything to do with business.

Bladlow tried hard to explain the nature of investment.

'Let me put it another way, Miss Henson. The bank, through myself, has sold all your father's property, paid his debts and the taxes, and so has finished the job it undertook. It won't do anything more until you tell it what you want it to do with your money. It has £31,000 and a few hundreds over belonging to you. If you will go and see the manager he will advise you how to invest it.'

'It seems such a lot of money.' Miss Henson was overawed and uneasy. 'How do you think I ought to spend it?'

That started it all over again. Miss Henson became worried and unhappy until she struck a bright idea.

'But it's 'business', isn't it, Mr. Bladlow? Couldn't you do it for me? I know it's a lot to ask after all the great kindness of Mrs. Bladlow and yourself. But I am painfully aware that I am uninstructed and very stupid

at this sort of thing." And then, once again: 'Oh, do *please* help me!'

He said he would gladly do his utmost to help her and she thanked him effusively, glowing with gratitude and admiration.

She signed a power of attorney without asking what it was. He would have told her, at this stage, if there had been the remotest chance of securing her attention and understanding.

He had done well out of his commissions on the sale of the properties. Further, he paid himself a consultation fee and decided that £300 a year would be a fair retainer for managing her investments. Also, he would persuade a stockbroker to treat him as a half commission man. Legitimate pickings.

A few nights later he gave his wife a present of £100. Aileen was the kind of wife commonly described as 'most suitable', by both women and men, including her husband - a goodlooking blonde of amiable temperament, cool, self-disciplined and domestically efficient. Her affection lacked the spice of romantic adoration. She approved of him for his unadventurous ordinariness. She thanked him prettily for the cheque.

'You've earned it, darling!'

'I've tried to!' she admitted. 'What's the next step, Jim? I mean, when is she going?'

Bladlow found himself shirking the question, unworthily won-

dering whether he ought to have made the cheque £150.

'We must give her a week or two to find her feet,' he said. 'Let the suggestion to move come from her. I know she's very anxious to get her furniture out of the warehouse.'

'I hope it won't be longer than a week or two!' Aileen was being wintry about it. 'She isn't good for Cedric. He doesn't like her, but I'm sorry to say he lets her buy his good will with little presents. It'll make him greedy and calculating.'

Before the week or two had passed, Miss Henson burst in on them at tea time on Saturday, from one of her solitary walks.

'There's a lovely house - The Cedars - at the corner of Malvern Avenue. The agent happened to be there and he showed me over it. And Mr. Bladlow, please, I want you to buy it for me, I mean - buying a house is good business, isn't it?'

'In certain circumstances, but hardly if you mean to live in it. It's a twelve roomed house -'

'Yes, and the top floor is self contained!' panted Miss Henson. 'And the agent said I could have a door put on the top staircase so that the top floor would be a flat. And I thought you could live in the rest of the house and we could all be together, only I shouldn't be always in your pocket, as I am now. And it has a lovely garden - Cedric would love it.'

It was the suggestion of a woman wholly without social experience - of a child who cannot conceive that its company might not be desired. Aileen shrank from snubbing her, encouraged her to chatter about the house while she administered tea.

'It isn't the sort of thing one can decide quickly, Miss Henson. I would advise you to talk it over with James before you take any definite step.'

James, thought Aileen, would be easier to manage than Miss Henson.

'The kindest way,' she said that night, 'would be for you to tell her that the house is a hopeless dud as an investment - invent rotten drains or bad settlement or something.'

Bladlow hedged, pleading professional probity.

'But you don't mean to say you *want* to fall in with her absurd plans!' exclaimed Aileen. 'Why, we should never get rid of her!'

'I don't say I want to! But the proposition is not without some solid advantages for us. It is a very good house. At least, we might think twice before we turn it down.'

Aileen said nothing, thereby alarming him. He felt guilty, without understanding the nature of his crime. At last she spoke.

'Jim! Don't you know that the poor, pathetic old golliwog is in love with you?'

'Rot, darling! She's too old.'

'That's a very silly remark!'

'You started the silliness. For one thing, to her the idea of love is inseparable from marriage. Marriage, in her case, would involve divorce - and she's a strict churchwoman. For another - why, dammit, if a man were to kiss her, she'd scream and call the police!'

'I didn't suggest there was any danger of your kissing her. At present she only idealises you. She was bullied all her life by that horrible old father. You've been kind to her and made a fuss of her and, on top of it all, you're hopelessly good-looking. She'll soon start being a serious nuisance to you.'

Bladlow was ready to believe that at least half of it was true.

'Aileen, suppose you're right-'

'You needn't look so grim about it, old boy! We're not having an official row,' urged Aileen. 'The truth is that - though you didn't mean to - you have woken her up. Don't worry! When you've got rid of her, she'll soon transfer it all to some other man.'

'Exactly! That's where we stick!' he exclaimed. 'I brush her off. She takes her money with her. That childish, ignorant old dear in unrestrained possession of thirty thousand quid! A sitting certainty for the first crook who spots her. He won't even need to marry her - just tell her he understands all about 'business', and wants to

help her, and she'll hand him the lot - as she's handed it to me!

Aileen was convinced, but remained of the same opinion regarding the proposal that they should all live in The Cedars.

'Jim, dear - I know it's a heartless thing to say - but does it matter to us if she throws her money away?'

It mattered very much to James Bladlow. A man must live up to his own moral pretensions or despise himself. The stray dog, once taken in, can never be turned out.

'I can prevent the love nonsense becoming a nuisance,' he hedged. 'And she means a good deal of business to us in commissions, don't forget.'

'You aren't thinking of the commissions.'

He let that go, but Aileen followed it up.

'What exactly *are* you thinking about, Jim?'

What indeed! Of a cruel old beast of a father, who made James Bladlow feel so happily superior. Of thirty thousand pounds. Of a stray dog, be-friended, deemed to adore him for the rest of its life. Of the moral stature gained by chivalrously protecting an utterly unattractive woman. And again of thirty thousand pounds.

'She's had a raw deal, Aileen. The money is no compensation because there's not enough of her left to use it.'

3

IN the late autumn of 1932, they moved into The Cedars. When Miss Henson had distributed her furniture in her quarters on the top floor, known as the flat, she invited the Bladlows to dinner. There was only one picture on the wall of the sitting room - an oil painting of a girl of about ten, vivacious, interesting, though the style of the artist was a bit beyond the experience of the Bladlows.

'That's the Merthyr - obviously,' remarked Bladlow. Aileen gave him a warning glance, and he played for safety. 'Charming!'

Miss Henson simpered. She was standing by the painting.

'I recognised you as soon as I saw it, Miss Henson,' said Aileen quickly. Bladlow took his cue.

'You're more like yourself as a child than most people are, Miss Henson.'

She was delighted. She told them the story of the sitting and a great deal about Merthyr's subsequent work, to which they listened with polite boredom. Towards the end of the evening, Miss Henson made them a little speech, extolling their kindness to her.

‘And so I want you to accept the Merthyr – *please* – as a little token –’

Miss Henson was overcome and Bladlow himself was not unaffected because he knew that this decent little old thing was giving something which she prized very highly. Art, of course, was art – but in this case the picture was worth at least £100 – possibly a good deal more.

The Merthyr was hung in a prominent position in the Bladlow’s drawing room, to Aileen’s secret disgruntlement. When Miss Henson visited them – midday dinner on Sundays and tea on Wednesdays – she would sit where her glance fell easily on the picture. In three months they had settled into a regime. From the start, it worked better than might have been expected, helped by Aileen’s forbearance. There were small daily contacts which she found irksome. Bladlow noticed a loss of sweetness in her temper but assured himself that she would soon get over it.

The thirty one thousand pounds had been transferred to an account in his own name. He bought gilt-edged securities while he deliberated over Miss Henson’s financial future. She was obviously unfit to have control of her capital. For some months, he contemplated creating a trust. Then he thought he would rid her and himself of all

further anxiety by using the whole sum for purchase of a life annuity.

Miss Henson smiled and nodded, but was not very receptive, while he tried to explain the nature of an insurance company and a life annuity. Some weeks later, he was on the point of deciding to sell the gilt-edged securities and buy her the annuity, when Miss Henson herself torpedoed the whole idea.

She had read, it appeared, a ‘piece in the paper’ anent the folly of not making a will. For sixpence she had bought a will form, with printed instructions on the back, which she had imperfectly assimilated.

‘There are only two persons in the world who are dear to me, in any personal sense,’ she told him, ‘Mrs. Bladlow and yourself! So of course I shall leave to you all I don’t spend.’ (He could never make her understand that she was not ‘spending her capital’) ‘I would not have told you, only it says a will has to have two witnesses.’

Bladlow kept his head, though his philosophy had been turned inside out, for he had never contemplated profiting from her otherwise than through legitimate fees and perquisites, and even these had begun to seem illegitimate. He explained the law concerning witnesses and called in the cook and the gardener to sign.

When he told Aileen, she was

not as impressed as he had expected.

'Don't kid yourself, Jim, that it's any more than a ticket in a sweepstake. You might win a big prize. But you might forget to pass the salt one day, and then she'd make another will.'

A pity Aileen was getting like that, he thought. Miss Henson would *not* make another will. Outside art, she was a simple, childlike creature who trusted him absolutely. In the normal course of nature the thirty one thousand pounds - increased by his careful management - would be his before many years had passed. He shivered with horror as he remembered how nearly he had defeated Miss Henson's generous intention by buying her an annuity.

That she would, in the future, hit on that very idea herself was beyond his imagination.

In fact, in Aileen's words, he kidded himself that the fortune was as good as his. While he was waiting for nature to co-operate, he had unrestricted control. Feeling what we may call the shadow of ownership of the capital, he invested ten thousand in the purchase of a house agency in central London, putting a manager into the Chelsea office. Further, he bought and sold several properties in Shalton, developing his local agency. With every movement of capital he wrote a letter to himself, approving the transaction, which

Miss Henson signed. She became well accustomed to signing as many as half a dozen letters at a sitting, without giving more than nominal attention to their purport.

None of his investments were wild-cat. But in a couple of years, about a third of the capital was tied up in securities, sound enough in themselves, which were not immediately negotiable.

In the meantime, life at The Cedars achieved a smooth routine, Aileen, though she had many grievances, remained 'satisfactory'. Miss Henson would go to London regularly for the art exhibitions and often to the auction sales at Christie's. She would take her sketch-book and make line notes of any object of special interest to her, adding details of history, price and purchaser as methodically as an art agent.

On one of these expeditions - in February 1934 - she made an impetuous decision. She had her hair cut short and waved.

The girl who attended her had a boy friend who was an insurance agent.

'Do you remember, Mr. Bladlow -' an attempt had been made to introduce first names, but Miss Henson forgot so often that it was tacitly abandoned - 'do you remember explaining to me all about insurance companies and annuities? I was very stupid at the time. I didn't see

that it would save you all that bother of looking after my money.'

She meant, he realized, that it would save her the bother of signing letters and pretending to understand them. He had blundered.

The hairdresser girl, on the other hand, had not blundered. The idea of an annuity was firmly implanted. It was doubtful whether he could achieve anything by explaining that an annuity would make waste paper of her will. The fortune was flying out of the window. Aileen would say she had told him so. Moreover, the life-long gratitude and the unbounded admiration, which had nourished his personality, would perish in the inevitable misunderstanding about those unnegotiable securities.

There was, he decided, only one possible answer.

'I think it is a very good idea, Miss Henson. If you remember, I was in favour of it from the first. The agent can see me, and we'll fix it up.'

In that moment, Bladlow stepped over the line. No good doing things by halves. He turned to her, with a marked change of expression - so marked, indeed, that a sophisticated woman would have laughed.

'If I am not being impertinent, Miss Henson - your hair! - that new way of doing it suits you wonderfully.'

'For my part, Mr. Bladlow,' said Miss Henson, sedately daring, 'I hoped you would make that remark.'

When the hairdresser girl's boy friend called, Bladlow told him that Miss Henson, who did not understand her own affairs, possessed a life interest, only, in her income and had no capital with which to buy an annuity.

Bladlow's firm, like most of its kind, were agents for the leading insurance companies. Under the letterhead of the Metropolitan & Colonial Assurance Society, he wrote to Miss Henson, enclosing a form of application, and later sent a letter of acceptance and a receipt for £31,000. It was easy enough to reclaim both letters and the receipt and burn them.

The routine of life at The Cedars remained unbroken, except that he no longer took business letters to Miss Henson to be signed. Instead, he paid £1,150, in equal half-yearly payments, into Miss Henson's account at the local branch, deemed to equal her annuity after deduction of income tax.

After the second of these half-yearly payments, the feeling that he had stepped over the line passed away. He had deceived her, but only in the sense in which one deceives a child, because a full explanation would not be understood - notably the explanation of the good but unnegotiable securi-

ties. He had not robbed her, for she was receiving the same income as she would have received had an annuity been purchased. As to the practical position, the little deception about the insurance company could not be proved, so there was no possibility of a criminal charge.

True that in personal relations

it had been difficult to retreat from the moment in which he had affected to admire her hair, but the situation was still manageable, if a little irksome.

Miss Henson continued to attend the art exhibitions and the sales at Christie's until August 1936, when she was murdered.

4

AILEEN had insisted that the family should have its summer holiday unaccompanied by Miss Henson. She had been firm about this from the beginning. For this year, they had made reservations at an hotel in Bournemouth and intended to travel down on the Saturday.

On Friday evening, Bladlow went up to the flat for a good-bye chat with Miss Henson.

'It's a shame to talk to you about business when you're in holiday mood,' she apologised, 'but I've had such a *funny* letter from the Metropolitan and Colonial Assurance Society - the people who pay my annuity, if you remember.'

Bladlow gave no outward sign. In his subconsciousness he had known that he must always be prepared for the million-to-one chance. She was chattering about her late doctor's widow with whom she had travelled up to Town last week. He held out his hand for the letter.

Dear Madam. In reply to your letter of yesterday we suggest that you are under some misapprehension of fact. This Society has made no payments to you under an annuity scheme, nor is your name on our books.

'- and when I told her how well it was working in my case she said it would not suit her, because she wanted to leave some money to her married son, who is in the Navy and gets very little. And I didn't want to bother you - in the circumstances - I mean, as you knew I had made a will in your favour -'

In short, Miss Henson had written to the Society to ask if it were true that, when she herself died, the Society would 'keep all her money', so that her will would be meaningless.

Again, Bladlow kept his head. By a simple lie he would gain a little time, but only a little. For any one of a dozen benevolent reasons she might renew contact with the Society.

'I see what's happened,' he smiled. 'They've got their files crossed. We've had this trouble before. Now, on Monday, if you can spare the time, you and I will go together to the head office -'

'But you'll be at Bourne-
mouth -'

'Not until Wednesday. I have a very important auction on Tuesday.'

'But is it true, Mr. Bladlow, that the money - that my will -?'

He could turn this question to advantage - strengthen her faith in him by merely stating what had once been true.

'Yes. I know what you will say next. Why did I encourage you to take the annuity when I knew that it made your will valueless? I can only say that in my mind your interests came first and that I - I had never associated our coming together with the idea of monetary gain to myself.'

Fear drove out self-contempt. He saw with relief that his little speech was taken at its face value.

'On Monday, then. We'll do our business in the morning, and leave time for a leisurely lunch in the West End.' He contrived a certain awkwardness of manner. 'I wonder, Miss Henson, whether - whether you will be wearing that dress you wore last Wednesday! Forgive me - I oughtn't to have said that!'

On the way downstairs his thoughts formed the words 'Winterbourne Manor - in the garage'. Through his local branch he had recently bought the manor, which had been empty for nearly a year. Round it, he had built his whole plan before he reached the hall.

With a short pantomime at the telephone he prepared the ground for telling Aileen that he would be unable to join herself and Cedric at Bourne-mouth until Wednesday.

In a short period of clarity during a sleepless night he realized that his ethical being had been poisoned by that will, which had turned his imagination to the idea of possessing Miss Henson's fortune. But the clarity passed and he whipped his resolution with the argument that he had to consider the greatest good for the greatest number. There was Aileen and Cedric, to say nothing of himself. As for Miss Henson, she had had four years of great happiness. She would never understand the nature of his investments on her behalf, and would believe he had cheated her. That would make her intensely miserable. She would demand the return of her property - and would fall into the hands of a crook. Her remaining years could hold nothing but stark misery.

On Saturday morning Aileen departed for Bournemouth with

Cedric, after last minute instructions to the cook and housemaid concerning her husband's comfort. Bladlow went upstairs and knocked at the door of the flat.

'My grass widowhood has just begun,' he said. 'This morning I am going to inspect Winterbourne Manor. It's an 18th. century manor and, apart from that, it has some paneling on which I would very much like to have your opinion - if you have nothing better to do.'

Miss Henson seemed to be behaving oddly, almost as if she were alarmed.

'The Nefeld panels!' she murmured. 'They're quite well known.' She hesitated and he feared a lengthy disquisition. To his relief she added: 'Thank you very much, Mr. Bladlow, I would be delighted.'

The manor - actually, of course, Miss Henson's manor - stood in five acres of its own on the fringe of the suburb. When they arrived, Bladlow decided that he must waste a few minutes on the paneling. But Miss Henson hardly bestowed a glance.

'I did not know you had bought this house, Mr. Bladlow, or I would have mentioned the panels before. The fact is, I have a confession to make.' She was a little breathless about it and inclined to be arch. 'To begin at the beginning, my father tried to buy the panels. That was in 1913, when the Nefeld

family fell on evil days...'

In his state of tension he could not endure one of her interminable art stories. He put his hand on her arm, which surprised her, not unpleasurably, into silence.

'If you don't want to look at the panels, I don't either. I have something in the garage that will interest you.'

As she did not protest, he kept hold of her arm and led her out of the house.

'The garage,' said Bladlow, 'was, of course, the stables. It was converted about 1900.' He unlocked the padlock on the sliding door and entered with her. 'In those early days, the car required expert attention after every run. So every private garage had to have its own observation pit.' As if absent minded, he closed the sliding door behind them. 'As the car improved and became more reliable, the pits were filled in. But not in this case. Look!'

He stooped and removed a sufficiency of boards covering the pit. 'I want to show you -, if you'll come to the edge you'll see what I mean -'

He shot her twice in the back, replaced the boards and relocked the garage. Late that evening he returned, bringing in his car a wheelbarrow and spade. Throughout the hours of darkness, he loaded earth on to the body, filling the pit.

He spent Sunday inside the

garage. He was planing the boards, getting them down to an inch below floor level. A fortnight later he procured cement and covered the boards. When this had hardened, leaving a very noticeable patch, he gradually recemented the whole of the floor of the garage.

This work was not completed for more than six weeks. In the interval his arrangements had been thorough. On the Monday morning he had called at a local Repository and instructed them to move the furniture from the flat on the following day. Miss Henson had suddenly left his house, he explained, implying a quarrel. He would pay all expenses and six months' rent.

A quarrel. No explanation beyond that to anyone. On the premise of a quarrel, the Merthyr in his drawing-room, Miss Henson's gift, would be an anomaly. He removed it from the wall. He would lock it up and eventually sell it - for a hundred pounds or more.

But this, on reflection, seemed rather hucksterish behaviour. After all, it had been a very

personal gift - a symbol of a happy and ennobling relationship. As a gesture of respect - presumably to impress himself - he took it upstairs to the flat, to be removed with her furniture.

He went through all her possessions, found three diaries, which he destroyed. Otherwise, only a sketch-book and a litter of charcoal drawings - no letters, no documents. Miss Henson had no roots extending beyond the Bladlow family.

On Wednesday he joined his family at the hotel in Bourne-mouth.

'You were right,' he told Aileen. 'In your absence - well, I couldn't manage her. I'm not going to give you the details and I don't suppose you want them. I had to be pretty firm. She said she was grossly insulted. Walked out of the house with a suitcase. Her furniture has gone - stored at Mental's.'

'I'm glad, in a way,' said Aileen. 'And, you know I was never counting on that will!'

'That will,' he said, 'is in a safe at the office. Unless she definitely makes another, it will stand.'

5

ON December quarter day he paid the half-yearly instalment into Miss Henson's local account, taking, as usual, the bank's receipt.

In the first few weeks there had been a dozen or so casual inquiries. He answered only that Miss Henson had left suddenly and that he did not

know her address. To their own circle he explained further that, in Aileen's absence, Miss Henson had felt herself insulted by a remark he had considered it necessary to make and had walked out of the house with a single suitcase. To this he added nothing. His very reticence suggested that the quarrel had been of an embarrassing nature. People wagged their heads contentedly. Old maids, they loved to believe, were like that sometimes.

The December quarter day ended the phase of anxiety. To the casual glance the floor of the garage bore no trace of once having been fitted with an observation pit. Since August he had stalled four prospective purchasers. He was now ready to accept the next offer. As a good business man, he had the panels removed, and was gratified to receive four hundred pounds for them from a dealer. The house was sold in January.

Mathematically, his chance of being hanged for murder, he calculated, was very substantially smaller than his chance of being killed in a road accident, a fire or shipwreck. It would be as foolish to worry about the one as about the other.

His security lay in the fact that it was nobody's special business to inquire into the whereabouts of Miss Henson. Nobody had any recognisable interest which would justify an

application to the courts to presume death. Even if some freak application were to be made he would not oppose it. He would produce the will, which gave him everything.

He had nothing to fear from the prying of an accountant. Miss Henson's capital was intact, with a file of letters signed by herself, sanctioning his various investments. The money was, in effect, already his. He was not an ostentatious man - felt no temptation to arouse Aileen's suspicion by flinging money about.

With the passing of his fear he was able to take a view of the whole thing which he called realistic. He was not, he reminded himself, a cruel man. Poor Miss Henson, he was sure, had never known what had struck her. Through himself she had enjoyed four years of happiness. Circumstance, for which he could not be blamed, had ended that phase of her life. Her ultimate fate at the hands of a less scrupulous man was so certain that his act had been equivalent to that of putting an about-to-be tortured animal out of its pain.

He suffered a little through his own sentimentality - he missed her. He missed particularly the moral uplift he had derived from being the architect of her happiness - the chivalrous protector of an unattractive woman. There were even moods in which he wished

he had kept the Merthyr as a memento.

Freed from the society of Miss Henson, Aileen became even more satisfactory. But it was Aileen who produced the first ripple on the surface of his complacency.

'Miss Henson!' she exclaimed suddenly at breakfast from behind her picture paper.

It was a second or more before he could bring himself to ask:

'What about Miss Henson?'

'She's sold that picture she gave us - for three hundred and fifty pounds. Look! That's it, all right! '*Julia, daughter of Sir Anstruther Henson, 1880!* I suppose you had to give it back, but it does seem a pity!'

He stared at a photograph which reminded him so vividly of the picture that had hung in the drawing room. On his way to London he took the paper with him to the local furniture Repository.

'Must be a duplicate!' said the manager. 'Nothing of Miss Henson's has left the warehouse. You can inspect it now if you like, Mr. Bladlow.'

'As I'm more or less responsible I think it would be as well,' said Bladlow. It took half an hour to produce the picture for his inspection - the picture which was reported as having been sold at a West End auction the previous day.

'Thank you. As you said, it must be a duplicate. Miss Hen-

son will no doubt decide for herself whether her interests are concerned. I am no art expert.'

In a month, he had forgotten the incident. At the halfyear he increased the housekeeping allotment and doubled Aileen's personal allowance. It was a very happy year. Now and again, while Cedric was away at school, he took Aileen to the coast for a week-end in a good hotel.

A few days before Easter 1938, he received a call from Detective Inspector Rason, of the Department of Dead Ends.

'I asked for you, Mr. Bladlow,' said Rason apologetically, 'but I've really come to see Miss Henson. Her late father's bankers told me that when they last heard from her she was living in your house.'

'Sorry!' said Bladlow. 'Miss Henson left here over eighteen months ago. I don't know her address - I don't even know where she went from here. She took sudden offence - she was - er - an elderly spinster, you know. If there's anything I can do -'

'Can you tell me anything about a picture of herself as a girl? Funny sort of question, you'll say, but the fact is there has been a lot of forgeries of the paintings of well known artists - after they're dead, of course. Last year we nearly got the gang, but we didn't quite - and that sort of thing is pushed on to me.'

Over eighteen months ago, Bladlow had seen that he must never tell a single lie about Miss Henson, except the lie that he did not know where she had gone after she left the house.

'The picture you want, Mr. Rason, is at Mentall's Repository.'

At the Repository, Rason inspected the picture. He was jubilant. The case against the forgers was practically buttoned up. But Chief Inspector Karslake would be sure to say they must get Miss Henson to authenticate. The manager was unhelpful.

'But surely Miss Henson is paying you rent?'

'Yes, but the cheque itself comes from Mr. Bladlow! He told me she had left certain funds in his hands.'

'Funds!' repeated Rason, as he took himself off. 'Bladlow hasn't got the old girl's address, but he has got her funds. Now I'm here, it wouldn't do any harm to have a look round.'

He was looking specifically for Miss Henson's bank - always a good starting point. By a circuitous route he reached the vicar, who had received many a cheque from Miss Henson for charitable purposes.

'We have received no communication from Miss Henson since August, 1936,' said the bank manager.

Under pressure from Rason he interpreted the Bank Acts with

a certain elasticity and revealed that an income of £1,150 was being paid into her account, half yearly, by Mr. Bladlow.

The latter item disappointed Rason. By precedent, her income ought to have stopped abruptly. Without much hope, he returned to The Cedars.

'Oh yes - wasn't that clear in our first conversation!' Bladlow permitted himself to reveal a slight impatience. 'I am her financial agent. I hold securities of hers to the value of around £30,000.'

'Funds!' ejaculated Rason, impressed by the amount. 'Just huffed off and forgot to take her thirty thousand with her? Or has she got other funds besides that lot? And another banking account?'

'I don't know.' Bladlow, indeed, had nothing to add to his previous statement.

Rason went back to the Repository and put an official seal on Miss Henson's property. In the following week, he returned and searched the furniture for relevant documents. He found none, but he pounced on a sketch-book and a litter of charcoal drawings.

'Maybe these are forgeries, too!' he reflected with sublime confusion and carried them back to the Yard for expert examination.

There was plenty of follow-up work to be done. Bladlow did not see him again until August.

6

IT was a couple of days after Bladlow had returned from his summer holiday, this time in North Wales. It had been an enjoyable holiday, on the whole. He had not allowed his mind to dwell unduly on the detective's investigations. He was himself entrenched in a veritable Maginot Line of legality.

He was accountable to no one but Miss Henson for his management of her money. The police, of course, had realized this, or they would have tried to subject him to further questioning. No news was obviously good news. They must either apply to presume death, which would be pointless, or find the body which was, virtually, impossible.

Rason arrived late in the afternoon. With him was another burly looking man whom he introduced as Chief Inspector Karslake.

'My superior officer,' said Rason when they were all seated in the morning room, 'knows a great deal about art.' Ignoring Karslake's glare he went on: 'He's still worried about Miss Henson's ownership of that picture. He wants to ask you -'

'I'll ask my own questions,' snapped Karslake. 'Mr. Bladlow, can you give me the date of Miss Henson's departure?'

'I can't remember whether it

was the Saturday or the Sunday - August 2 or 3.'

'But you do remember,' cut in Rason, 'that your wife and child had gone to Bournemouth and that, as from Saturday morning, you and Miss Henson were alone in the house except for the servants?'

'How thorough your investigations are!' smiled Bladlow.

'Yes, we were alone. Hence our rather embarrassing quarrel.'

'According to the servants and a baker's delivery man, Mr. Bladlow, you left this house in Miss Henson's company on the Saturday morning? That would be before you had the quarrel?'

'Obviously!'

'Where did you go with Miss Henson?'

'Really, Inspector! All that time ago! I often gave Miss Henson a lift. I simply don't remember.'

'Did you take her to Winterbourne Manor?'

That was a bombshell for Bladlow - a fact duly noted by Rason, who pressed on.

'If you did not go with her, you joined her there later. The place was your property then. You gave her permission to go there as often as she liked.'

'She never asked me for any such permission!' Bladlow was at sea. 'I've no reason to be-

lieve she ever went there in her life.'

Rason grinned at Karslake, inviting him to note the answer.

'My superior officer,' he announced, 'is not satisfied with that answer. If you want to know how we traced the body to Winterbourne Manor -'

Bladlow caught his breath. Karslake sprang up.

'You've no right to say that, Rason!' he cried angrily. 'It's flat against the Rules and you know it.'

'My superior officer,' mouthed Rason, 'is quite correct. I ought to have said - if you want to know how we traced *Miss Henson* to Winterbourne Manor, I'll show you.' From a bag, he took a sketch book and a number of charcoal drawings. 'These - before you bother to think up something, Bladlow - are sketches made by the deceased - beg pardon! - made by Miss Henson. Sketches of the Nefeld panels!'

Bladlow forced himself to stare at the sketches, while he thought: She was only in the room for a minute or so and she didn't sketch anything. These sketches are the work of a good many hours. He dimly remembered that she had gushed about having some 'confession' to make.

'Miss Henson might have visited the empty house, unknown to me - not knowing that it was my property.' In the last few seconds he had abandoned hope, but he went on: 'These sketches don't prove anything.'

'Not a thing! They're what Mr. Karslake calls a location clue!' chirped Rason. 'Fact is, that dealer you sold those panels to had 'em written up in an art magazine, with illustrations. And one of our art boys - not Mr. Karslake - linked up these sketches. Funny how these things happen, isn't it, Bladlow! You put a lot o' brain-work into this job - refusing four offers for the house, so's to give the earth time to settle. If you'd only thought to bury those panels along with the - *you know!* - you'd have got away with the boodle.'

'*The boodle!*' An hysterical laugh broke from Bladlow. 'If I had been thinking in terms of *'boodle'*, Mr. Rason, I might have done as you suggest - except that the observation pit wouldn't have been big enough to hold the whole set of panels, as well.'

A couple of hours later the police had located the site of the observation pit, whereupon they began digging operations.

ANOTHER 'DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS' STORY NEXT MONTH



EDMUND
CRISPIN

EXPRESS DELIVERY

THE lightning winked over Westminster. Distantly the thunder spoke. And in a room high up in a corner of New Scotland Yard Detective-inspector Humbleby walked to a window, looking out and down.

'Here they come,' he said. 'And whether they're guilty or innocent the Lord alone knows.' His eye followed the two diminutive, foreshortened figures until they disappeared with their uniformed escort into a doorway below.

'If they're guilty, then their nerve must be colossal. But presumably nerve is one of the things experienced big-game hunters do acquire, so...' He completed the sentence with a shrug.

'They're both that?' Gervase Fen, Professor of English Language and Literature in the University of Oxford, spoke out of a cloud of cigarette smoke. 'The wife as well as the husband?'

'Oh yes, certainly—though I

understand the woman isn't quite as good a shot as the man. And that means—'

A telephone rang on the desk, and Humbleby picked it up.

'Yes,' he said. 'Yes, I saw them come in. Keep them downstairs for a few minutes, will you? I'll let you know when I'm ready for them.' He replaced the instrument with a grimace. 'Cowardice,' he observed. 'Procrastination. But I thought that perhaps you wouldn't mind hearing about it, and telling me what you think.'

Fen nodded. 'By all means.' 'Here's this girl, then,' said Humbleby. 'Eve Crandall. Twenty-four, brunette, pretty, a mannequin. She has a rich old uncle, Maurice Crandall, who's made her his chief legatee. She has a big-game-hunting cousin, Philip Bowyer who's at present downstairs with his wife Hilary. And she has a studious cousin, James Crandall, who teaches at an elementary school in Twelford.

If Eve predeceases Maurice, the estate will be shared on Maurice's death by Philip Bowyer and James Crandall. And if both Eve and James Crandall predecease Maurice, the estate will go to Philip Bowyer intact. Clear so far?

Now Maurice has carcinoma of the lungs. He may live two months or two weeks or only two days, but in any event he's

dying, and, like most of us, he has no particular relish for dying among strangers in a nursing home.

So he asks Philip and Hilary Bowyer, the most well-to-do of his relatives, to take him in at their house near Henley. They agree to have him, and on the day he's due to arrive in his ambulance, Eve travels to Henley to see him settled in.

That was to be expected; what was not to be expected was that James Crandall should forsake his little boys and turn up too.

Turn up, however, he did—in the hope, maybe, of wheedling a rather larger bequest out of Maurice than he was destined for as things stood—and by the early afternoon they were all, excepting Maurice, who was presumably still en route, on the spot.

Eve, it seems, was the last to arrive. By the time she got there Hilary had left for the village to do some shopping, James had gone for a stroll, and Philip was on the point of walking down to meet his wife and help her with her packages.

So, apart from the servant, Eve spent her first hour on the premises alone, and after she'd unpacked she wandered round the garden and eventually settled down in a deck-chair under a beech tree, facing a coppice of beeches about 300 yards away beyond the garden fence.

She sat very still in the chair

with her eyes closed, and anyone watching her must certainly have thought her asleep. But for some unexplained reason she was nervous, and her sideways jerk, when she heard the shot, was about as instantaneous as it's possible for such a reflex to be.

The bullet, from an express rifle, tore a track in her scalp and grazed her skull, another fraction of an inch and it would certainly have killed her.

As it was, she was knocked unconscious, according to the doctors, the moment it touched her, and so failed to hear the second shot which immediately followed.

Both shots, however, were heard by the servant and by the postman on his way up the drive, and these two witnesses converged in front of the house 30 seconds later to find Eve lying in a huddle beside the deck-chair and Hilary, white and shaken, emerging from the coppice opposite.

'Two minutes later Philip arrived. His wife had hurried home ahead of him, leaving him to collect and carry her parcels.

'And the situation was this, that James Crandall, shot through the head by Hilary, was lying in the coppice clutching the express rifle which had been fired at Eve.

Well, the local police took over and in due course I was called in to work with them, and

we got statements from everyone concerned.' Humbleby rummaged among the papers on his desk. 'Here, for instance, is Hilary's, what's relevant of it:

'I left my husband in the village because he had things to buy and I did not want to stay with him in case I should not be home in time to meet the ambulance.

I came home across the fields, which is the shortest way, and entered the house by the back door. At this time I did not see Eve, since she was in the front garden.

I was on my way up to my room to take off my hat when I saw through the open door of the gun-room that a Mannlicher express rifle was missing, and my suspicions were aroused because I knew that my husband did not have the gun, and no one else should have touched it.

I thought of my cousin, James Crandall, who had been asking questions about the guns. I put a small automatic pistol in my pocket and went out to look for him.

I took the pistol because I was afraid James might intend some harm to Eve whose death would benefit him.

I had not liked his manner and was frightened of what he might do.

I went round to the front garden, where Eve was asleep in a deck-chair and I thought I

saw someone moving in the coppice.

As quickly as possible I returned to the back garden and from there crossed into the field where the coppice is, entering the coppice from the side away from the garden.

In the coppice I saw James with the Mannlicher pointed at Eve. I pointed my pistol at him and was about to speak when he fired and Eve fell.

Immediately I fired at him. It was self-defence, I consider, because he would have killed me because I had seen him shoot Eve, but I did not intend to kill him. I am a fairly good shot with a rifle, but not with an automatic, which is a different kind of shooting.'

Humbleby pushed the papers aside. 'So much for that. Philip Bowyer heard the two shots, but by his own account he arrived too late to see anything.

And that, really, is all there is to it. James Crandall's prints were on the Mannlicher all right, and the position of his body was perfectly consistent with his having fired at Eve.

On the other hand, the Bowyers undoubtedly had a very strong motive for wishing both James and Eve dead, and it's easy to see how the thing *could* have been arranged.

Thus: first they shoot off the rifle and hit Eve. (I say 'they' because, of course, there's no

proof whatever that Philip didn't catch up with his wife, in spite of their having left the village separately.) Next, James having been lured to the spot on any pretext you like to think of, they kill him with the automatic before he has time to as much as open his mouth, then Hilary rushes out of the coppice, leaving Philip behind to arrange the scene and put James's fingerprints on the rifle; and finally, two minutes later, Philip appears with the astonished air of one who's just arrived from the village with the weekly groceries.

That, I repeat, is how it *could* have been done.

But *was* it done like that? Or is Hilary's story the simple truth?

If these questions were other than rhetorical, Fen gave no sign of recognizing the fact. 'And Eve,' he said, 'what became of her?'

'She was taken to hospital and is still there; she's pretty well recovered by now. I got her statement this morning.'

Humbleby paused hopefully. 'Well?' he said. 'Any ideas?'

But for once Fen could only shake his head. Lightning filled the room, and Humbleby had counted aloud up to four before the thunder came.

'The storm's going away,' he said, absently. 'Well, well, I suppose there's nothing for it except—'

And then he checked himself, for Fen was staring at him with the eyes of a man half blinded by unaccustomed sunlight. 'And what the devil,' said Humbleby, startled, 'are you —'

He got no further. 'That girl's statement,' said Fen, abruptly. 'Is there a copy of it I could look at?'

'Eve's statement, you mean. Yes, here it is.' Humbleby handed a little sheaf of type-written papers across the desk. 'But why —'

'This is it.' Fen had turned at once to the final page. 'Listen to this. *'I remember moving to one side as I heard the shot; then straight away everything went black.'*

'Well? What about it?'

Fen tapped the papers with a long forefinger. 'Do you consider this girl's story trustworthy?'

'Yes. I most certainly do. Why shouldn't it be?'

'Excellent. And now, two questions—no, sorry, three. First, is it certain that there weren't more than two shots fired?'

'Absolutely. Philip and Hilary and the postman and the servant are all agreed about that.'

'Good. Secondly, is it certain that the rifle bullet knocked Eve out the moment it touched her?'

'Good Lord, yes.'

'And finally, is it certain that Hilary's shot killed James Crandall instantaneously?'

'My dear chap, his brain was

pulped. Of course it's certain.'

Fen relaxed with a little sigh. 'Then providing Eve's a good witness', he murmured, 'there's a fair chance of getting Philip and Hilary Bowyer hanged.'

Their motive for wanting Eve and James dead is so overwhelming that they'll beat at a disadvantage from the start, and that one little scrap of evidence ought to tip the scales against them.'

Humbleby groaned. 'God give me patience,' he said meekly. 'What little scrap of evidence? You mean that in fact they did arrange it all the way I suggested?'

'Just that. I've no doubt they'd been contemplating something of the sort for some time past, but of course the scheme they eventually adopted, depending as it did on Eve's settling in the deck-chair, must have been improvisation.'

One of them — I presume Hilary—must have fetched the guns from the house while the other got hold of James; and they could take him to the cop-pice on the pretext of showing him—well, perhaps, rabbit-snare traps that would account for their bringing a rifle, and James doesn't sound to me the sort of person who'd know enough about guns to realise the incongruity of a Mannlicher express model in the context of rabbits. On the other hand—'

'These are happy specula-

tions.' said Humbleby with restraint. 'But I have the idea that a moment ago you mentioned evidence. If it wouldn't put you to too much trouble—'

'Evidence!' said Fen affably. 'Yes, I was almost forgetting that. The evidence of the storm—or to be more accurate, of the storm and yourself in combination.

Like so many people, you counted out the interval between the lightning flash and the thunder. Why? Because light travels faster than sound, and by gauging the interval you can gauge how far away the storm is.

But there are other things, as well as light, which travel faster than sound; and one of them, as you well know, is a bullet fired from an express rifle.

On a hot day, sound travels at about 1150 feet per second; but on any sort of day, over a distance of three hundred yards, a bullet from a Mannlicher rifle travels twice as fast, at an average speed of about 3000 feet per second.

Therefore the shot Eve heard was not the rifle-shot at all—she *couldn't* have heard that, since the bullet grazed her, and knocked her out, before the report of the rifle could reach her ears.

But she did hear *a* shot—and since there were admittedly only two shots fired, the report she heard must have been the

report of the automatic which killed James.

'In other words, the report of the automatic *preceded* the report of the rifle; which means that James was dead before the rifle was fired; which means, in turn, that it certainly wasn't he who fired it.'

'Well, I'm damned,' said Humbleby. 'What it amounts to, then, is that the Bowyers fired their two shots in the wrong order. If Eve had been killed, as they intended, that wouldn't have mattered. But as it is—' He reached for the telephone.

'Will you be able,' Fen asked, 'to get a verdict of guilty on that evidence?'

'I think so, yes. With any luck we shall hang them.' Humbleby put the receiver to his ear. 'Charge Room please. . . But it's a pity they should have had all that trouble for nothing.'

'For nothing?'

'Yes. Their servant took the telephone message, but there was no one about to pass it on to. It was from the nursing-home, of course.

You see, Maurice Crandall died—leaving all his money to Eve, whose will was decidedly *not* in the Bowyers' favour—a comfortable two hours before they started shooting. Poor dears—(Yes, Betts, you can send them up now)—they never really had a chance. . .'

A DOG'S LIFE

By *Michael Innes*

HUMAN action,' remarked the surgeon, 'is often oddly disproportioned to the motive prompting it. Men are driven to suicide by mere boredom and to murder by simple curiosity.'

The philosopher stretched out his hand for the decanter. 'My dear Appleby, a capital port.'

'I've seen a good many cases of homicide.' The KC cracked a walnut and inspected its kernel with care. 'That some had boredom behind them and that some had curiosity, I won't deny. But a good many more had respectability.'

The KC chuckled. 'And I think our host would tell you the same thing.'

There was a pause. 'Yes,' said Appleby, 'there was the Lorio case. Interesting? Well, you may judge for yourselves.'

I was a young man at the time, and having my first holiday since being sent into the CID. I was spending it with my aunt at Sheercliffe, to which she withdrew periodically from the harassing life of Harrogate.

It was she who sent me to make the Lorios' acquaintance. Robert Lorio, it seems, came of a good Yorkshire family.

He and his wife Monica lived alone in a farmhouse a couple

of miles outside the little town.

The tremendous cliff from which the place takes its name was hard by; and about a mile farther on again it piled itself up in the famous landmark called High Head.

Off I went one windy morning and presented myself. Lorio proved to be a glum, commonplace-looking chap of middle-age, whose only notion of impressing the world seemed to have been to grow a short black beard.

The dismal condition known as 'reduced circumstances' was written all over him, and all over his house.

'Monica Lorio was decidedly a witch. Dark like her husband, she was at the same time much younger. She had a fine body, which rippled with a sinister grace beneath a slatternly rag of a dress.'

It was she who entertained me, after a fashion—for her husband did little more than stare at me morosely.

I sat there talking rubbish about my aunt's health, and the innumerable calls upon her benevolence, and all the time there was growing on me the conviction that I had strayed into the presence of some bold

approximation to absolute evil.

When I got back that evening, and my aunt asked me about Monica Lorio, a fair answer would have been: 'She is a woman who has sold herself into some depth of degradation I can't at all fathom.'

But that is not the sort of thing one says to an aunt—or not to my aunt. So I held my peace.

Will it surprise you to learn that I took to walking that way almost every day? The views were magnificent, nevertheless, I don't doubt that it was my infant detective faculties that were at work.

Well, I was down there by the shore; it was sunny and warm; I sat down to read, and presently I was asleep.

When I woke it was to the sound of voices coming from not half a dozen yards away—from the next little hollow, in fact, among the sandhills.

One of the voices was a woman's which I recognized instantly as Mrs. Lorio's. The other was a man's, and it was certainly not her husband's.

I didn't hear what was being said. But it was unmistakably the low murmuring of lovers.

I was extremely disconcerted. You see, I had set out that morning with a restless curiosity about the Lorios' in my head. And now here I was without the least intending it, skulking like a little private inquiry agent at the door of an hotel bedroom.

So I bolted, and without a glance. I hadn't yet learnt that policemen can't afford nice feelings. Had I done a little crawling and peeping—but I see that you are getting impatient. I'll hurry on to the kill.'

Appleby paused and the KC nodded. 'We are taking it for granted there is going to be a kill. Is it too much to hazard that our friend Lorio comes to a sudden and sticky end?'

'Sudden—yes. But I don't know that I'd call it sticky.' Appleby paused to draw at his cigar. 'There's no mystification about this, you know. I'm just telling you a straight yarn.'

After that I reckoned never to see a Lorio again. But I was out of luck. For the very next day Robert Lorio called on my aunt.

When he took his leave I strolled along the front with him and tried to say a civil word. In this it seemed that I was only too successful. For three or four days later he turned up again and suggested we go for a walk.

And walk we did—then and on a couple of subsequent occasions.

He had something on his mind. That fact was plain enough. And at first I supposed that he was anxious to unburden himself, and was grooming me for the role of confidential friend.

But then I realized that there was more to it than that; and I remembered with a bit of a

shock that I was a police officer in the CID. Perhaps Lorio was clinging to me in my professional character.

The man was afraid. When I grasped that simple and abject truth about him, and when I pictured him in that lonely house, with his hell-cat of a wife, and that wife's lover lurking perhaps in the next village, I—well, I felt thoroughly sorry for the man. His must have been a dog's life.

He seemed unable to talk—really to talk, that is—-and I believe that at the end of our third walk I'd have questioned him outright. Only that third walk never had an end.

It differed from the earlier walks in two ways. First, we didn't have Rex, his shaggy dog. And that seemed to make Lorio's nervousness worse.

For normally the creature would take great sweeps round us and he would follow it affectionately with his eye.

Now, not having the dog to look at, he kept looking at his watch—instead—for all the world, I thought, as if he were Dr. Faustus waiting for midnight.

The other difference was in the weather. There was a gale blowing that made walking thoroughly hard work, and the sea beneath us was tremendous.

For we had taken the cliff path past Lorio's own house, and were climbing steadily to-

wards High Head. He muttered something incoherent about the dog.

I gathered presently that it had disappeared that morning and he was worried about it.

His agitation was growing, and it struck me that he must be a bit mad about the brute. Perhaps he gave it the affection that it was no good carrying to his wife.

As it happened, I ought to have been a bit more worried than I was. For Robert Lorio had then just about thirty minutes to live.

There is a motor road of sorts leading right to the brow of High Head, and as we approached it I saw three or four parked cars and a little knot of people standing at a discreet distance from the edge.

That was to be expected, since when a bit of a gale is blowing the spectacle from up there is justly famous.

I have a pretty tolerable head for heights, but I can tell you that on that morning I was disposed to keep well away from the edge.

With Lorio, however, it was otherwise. He seemed drawn to the verge and I followed him. 'Rex,' he shouted 'Rex! He's trapped!'

Sure enough, there was the dog, cowering on a narrow ledge some twenty feet below us. It was a horrid enough sight.

Before I knew what he was about, Lorio had started to scramble. I called to him not to be a fool, but he waved his hand and went on.

There seemed to be a practicable path, up which Rex might have been whistled. For a man, the difficulty seemed to be that it was in two places sharply overhung.

The second of these places, which was right on the verge, so that its passage admitted of not the slightest slip without disaster, was partly obscured by a great boulder.

Lorio came to this last and critical place, and I could see him hesitate. Then he bent low to creep past the overhang.

His head disappeared, then his shoulders in that shabby tweed, then all we could see was a single foot, edging cautiously out of sight an inch at a time. It seemed an eternity before anything appeared at the other side.

At last one of the men standing beside me exclaimed softly, and I saw an arm. It was feeling for a hold—and then it was flailing wildly in air.

I heard a single ghastly scream.

For a split second the whole man was visible—the gale lifting his jacket, his curved back pillowed on the void, his bearded mouth gaping in that last despairing scream. Then he was gone.

At one instant a man had hovered in agony before me; at the next a small black blob hit the sea.

There was, of course, nothing whatever to do. I knew very well that what I had seen was sudden death.

Nevertheless, I raced to the coastguard hut on the other side of High Head. For some reason it was deserted. But I knew it had a telephone.

So I broke in through a window and sent a message to the lifeboat station in Sheercliffe—which was futile enough, but the best that could be done. All this took about fifteen minutes.

When I got back to the scene of the accident there was quite a crowd collected.

One group was in particular agitation. And in a moment I saw why.

Rex had apparently managed to rescue himself after all—as I had thought he very well might. They were patting him, shaking their heads over him.

He gave a howl. And at that moment a hand fell on his collar and quietened him. It was Mrs. Lorio's. How she had come upon the scene wasn't clear.

She was as pale as a ghost, and wildly questioning the folk around her. Somebody indeed, was in the middle of explaining the accident; it was one of the two men who had stood by me and watched the thing happen.

But he was confused and stammering. I had no liking for the job but I saw that I must step up to her and tell her the horrible truth as I knew it.

Or was it she who knew the truth? If suspicion had been slow to stir in me, it came flooding in now.

I hadn't actually seen the dead man *begin* to fall. He had disappeared for a second, and then I had seen him actually off balance and falling. And the terrain down there was quite problematical.

I knew only that before the cliff fell away sheer, there were those dizzy little paths and ledges, with here and there niches and shallow caves fit enough for lurking in.

What if Monica Lorio's lover had been lurking there—or even the two of them together? What if the dog had been no more than a decoy?

These questions answered themselves in about thirty seconds. Or rather Rex answered them. He had become restless again, and was straining against his mistress's hand on his collar. Suddenly his restlessness changed to violent excitement; he broke away; and was off along the top of the cliff like a flash. What he was after became clear in a moment.

About a hundred yards away a ragged fellow with a largish bundle on a stick was walking

briskly towards Sheercliffe. He might have been a tramp who had paused on the outskirts of the little crowd to see what had happened, and who was now going on his way.

Rex was up with him like lightning. For an instant I thought he was going to fly at the fellow's throat. But all he did was to leap up at him in mere joy and affection. And the fellow pushed him off with a quick thrust.

I'd have recognized that gesture anywhere, and I put on a turn of speed that wouldn't have disgraced Rex himself.

As I came up on him the fellow turned and faced me. He was dark and clean-shaven—for a tramp, quite absurdly clean-shaven.

Our eyes met, and he knew that I *knew*. Horror and despair flooded his face. Then he took the simplest course open to him. He turned, ran, and jumped.

This time I didn't see the body fall. But the result could be in no doubt. Robert Lorio had gone to join his victim.

Monica Lorio had not the same courage. She was hanged.'

'I think,' said the philosopher, 'that you said there was no mystification in this story?'

'There wasn't very much. Robert and Monica Lorio were devoted to each other—and in penury. Their only possible resource was a very substantial

insurance policy on Robert Lorio's life.

That was the position when one day a tramp turned up at Mrs. Lorio's back door. He was of about her husband's build, dark, and of low intelligence. He was also, as it turned out, open to suggestion—criminal suggestion.

Her plan must have come to her instantaneously. She housed him in the barn, pretending to conceal his presence from her husband. She admitted him as a lover.

Hence the occasion upon which I awakened that afternoon by the sea.

By that time he was already groomed for his part—wearing Lorio's beard, wearing Lorio's old clothes. You can see what she had persuaded him would happen.

They would lurk together in a little cave below the brow of the cliff when Lorio was taking one of his regular walks; they would use Rex as a decoy to lure him down; they would pitch him over the precipice and that would be an end of him.

She was very well able to persuade her miserable accomplice, no doubt, that if the body was ever discovered it would be unrecognizable. And meanwhile there would simply be a new Robert Lorio.

So, from the tramp's point of view, you see, it really was a

special sort of respectability murder that was going forward.

But in actual fact it was nothing of the sort. It was a mercenary murder. And the wretched man was cast for the role not of accomplice but of victim.

The Lorios' plan was complex, but it was feasible. There was to be an observer; and nothing less than a rising young officer from Scotland Yard!

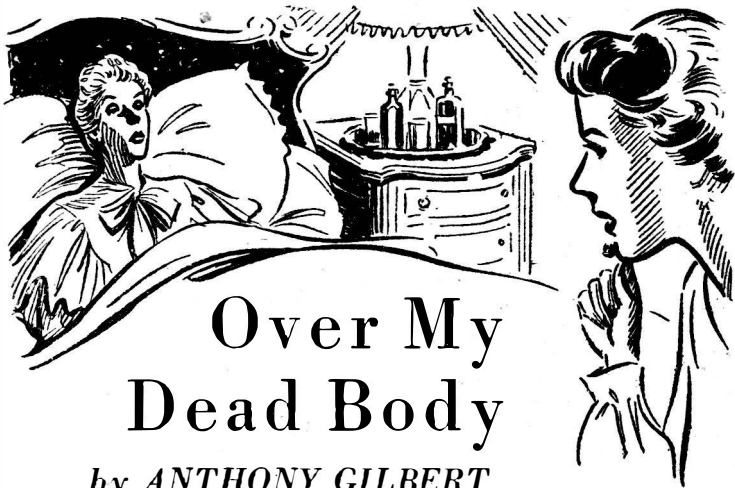
The veritable Robert Lorio was to go to the rescue of his dog, disappear for a moment, and then *seem* to fall to his death. But really it was to be the tramp—whose body would almost certainly be recovered some days afterwards and identified as Lorio's.

'Meanwhile Lorio in the cave was to shave and change, and he and his wife were severally to slip quietly back to ground level. And while she distracted attention by making a scene, he was simply to clear out.

When she had collected the insurance money they would have joined up again in Canada.

Well, it nearly worked. But Rex betrayed the whole thing when it appeared to be all over except the shouting.'

Appleby paused. 'The memory of those two deaths is horrible to me still. But not, in retrospect, so horrible as waking up that afternoon and hearing the murmuring voices of Monica Lorio and the man she was preparing to murder.'



Over My Dead Body

by ANTHONY GILBERT

'NURSE,' called Mrs. Farren, in her fretful voice. 'Nurse, where are you?' 'Coming,' called Nurse Anstruther, and a moment later she bustled into the room, a brisk, trim little woman, as hard as nails, Mrs. Farren complained. 'What is it now?'

'My pillows,' moaned Mrs. Farren. 'And I think I have a temperature.'

Nurse shook up the pillows and took her patient's temperature, which, as she expected, was normal, and said she'd just been down for a cup of tea.

'Tea's poison to me,' moaned Mrs. Farren. 'Isn't it time for my medicine?'

'Not till three o'clock.'

'Time goes so slowly when you're laid aside. Isn't Joy back yet?'

'Your daughter went out to

lunch, Mrs. Farren. She's lunching with Captain Waterhouse, you know . . .'

'I didn't know.' Mrs. Farren forgot her languor. 'Did she tell you?'

Nurse Anstruther laughed. 'Who else does she ever lunch with these days? I expect they're making their final plans.'

'Plans for what?'

'Well a blind man could see they're head over ears in love. He practically lives on your doorstep.'

'Nurse, you must be out of your mind. Thank Heaven Captain Waterhouse goes back to his cannibals and Hottentots next month and then... What's so funny?'

'There aren't any cannibals or Hottentots in Kenya where Joy will be going. My sister's there and . . .'

Mrs. Farren brushed Nurse's sister aside. 'Joy's certainly not going out to Kenya. I shouldn't hear of it.'

'I fancy she'll go just the same. You don't want her to be an old maid, do you? You've had her a long time. Now, it's time you had your medicine. Shall I pour it out for you?'

'You know I always take my own. I prefer it. My life has made me very careful. People are so careless, unscrupulous even, and I don't want any chance of getting the bottles mixed so that I get the wrong dose.'

Mrs. Farren put out her hand and took a tall round bottle off the table beside her. This was 'my medicine' to be taken every six hours. She had another bottle of quite different shape that contained her sleeping-mixture. The two mixtures looked so much alike that Dr. Sampson made a point of putting them up in bottles impossible to confuse, and in addition each was conspicuously labelled. Nurse watched Mrs. Farren measure out a careful dose, and recock the bottle.

'Now you can make my coffee on the gas ring,' she said. 'About Joy, you'll find you're quite wrong. She's very young for her age, but not so young she'd be taken in by that—adventurer.'

At that moment a door downstairs crashed. 'That'll be her back,' remarked Nurse. 'You can ask her for yourself.'

Joy Farren was a tall, fair girl, with brilliant eyes, and a face bright with happiness. She must have been lovely ten years ago, and now that she was in love youth had flowed back to her face.'

'How late you are, darling. I've been so worried. Couldn't you have telephoned or something?'

'It's only just three. We had so much to arrange the time absolutely flew.'

'We?'

'Guy and I. He's just heard he's to sail next month and he wants us to get married immediately, so that I can go out with him. Oh, mother, I never thought I'd be as happy as this again.'

Mrs. Farren raised herself on one elbow. 'Are you mad. Joy? There can't be any question of your marrying Captain Waterhouse.'

'But I am. I am. Oh, mother, isn't it wonderful . . .?'

'It's preposterous,' said Mrs. Farren shortly. 'The fact is you've let yourself get carried away, and quite lost your head. He's not the sort of man I intend you to marry. And how you can talk in this heartless fashion about leaving me . . .'

'I must marry Guy,' said Joy. 'If I stay, this time it'll be too late.'

'If he's as fickle as that . . .'

'It's not a question of being fickle. But—I haven't forgotten

Alan Pearce and Maurice after him, and . . . The truth is, you don't mean me to marry at all.'

'I should have thought you owed your mother something. Nurse, what are you gaping there for? I shan't want you for the next hour. My daughter and I have important matters to discuss.'

As she passed Joy, Nurse Anstruther whispered. 'Good luck,' but her heart was heavy. Mrs. Farren was an expert at getting her own way and she'd run Joy ragged for years. The row had started when she closed the front door, and it was still going on when she returned an hour later. Now it was clear that Mrs. Farren was going all out for victory.

'Over my dead body,' she was saying as Nurse came in. 'I'm sure you don't want my death on your conscience. Later you'll be grateful to me for saving you from yourself.'

During the days that followed it became increasingly clear that Joy and her lover would be defeated. Mrs. Farren refused to discuss the matter further.

Nurse Anstruther came to a decision. 'Over my dead body,' Mrs. Farren had said, and 'So be it' decided Nurse. Her plan was simplicity itself. She merely proposed to change the contents of the medicine bottles so that when Mrs. Farren took her six o'clock draught she would, in fact, be taking a fatal

dose of sleeping-mixture. She always liked to be left alone between six and seven, and by that time it would be too late to do anything about it.

When the truth was discovered, it would be assumed she'd made a mistake (for Nurse would put the mixtures back again before calling the doctor), or even deliberately taken an overdose to make it impossible for Joy to marry Captain Waterhouse.

On the day the nurse resolved to put it into action Mrs. Farren had a visitor, a Mrs. Christie. Mrs. Farren spent the whole visit bemoaning her daughter's attitude. 'It's a miserable thing to grow old and know you're unwanted,' she said. 'My life's a burden and I shall be thankful when I can lay it down.'

When Nurse let Mrs. Christie out the latter said: 'Dear me, she is in the dumps. I suppose it's all right her having that sleeping mixture beside the bed? I should keep an eye on her if I were you. In her present mood she might do anything.'

'I hadn't thought of that,' murmured Nurse Anstruther, truthfully. 'But thanks for the tip.'

She looked in on Mrs. Farren on her way up; her patient was lying back against the pillows with closed eyes. 'I don't want to be disturbed, Nurse,' she said. 'Mrs. Christie's quite worn me out. I shall try to get some sleep.'

For about an hour the house was perfectly quiet. Then, at a quarter to six. Mrs. Farren's bell rang and her voice could be heard imperiously demanding the attendance of everyone in the household. When she had them all—Joy, Nurse and the cook, Mrs. Palmer—lined up at the foot of the bed, she told them: 'I want you all to hear what I have to say. Then you can alibi each other. And, Joy, you're going to get your own way after all. I only hope you won't regret it.'

'You mean, you're going to agree to our marriage?' Joy couldn't believe her ears.

'I mean, I shan't be here to disagree. It seemed to me the only way out. I'm a burden and so—and so I've taken a double dose of my sleeping-mixture. It's no good looking like that, Joy. It's too late to do anything. Enjoy your marriage. It's cost me my life.'

Joy looked as if she would faint. Mrs. Palmer cried. 'The doctor, Nurse, get the doctor.'

Mrs. Farren repeated triumphantly. 'It's too late.'

Only Nurse Anstruther remained composed. 'Now don't take on anyone,' she said. 'There's no harm done. Mrs. Farren, you haven't taken a fatal dose at all. All you've had is a double helping of your ordinary medicine which wouldn't hurt a fly.

'You see,' she explained to the others, 'when Mrs. Christie warned me Mrs. Farren was in one of her moods, just to be on the safe side I changed over the bottles; so when—she turned to Mrs. Farren—'you took two spoonfuls out of the one marked sleeping mixture, you were just taking two spoonfuls of tonic, like I said. Why, Mrs. Farren, what is it?'

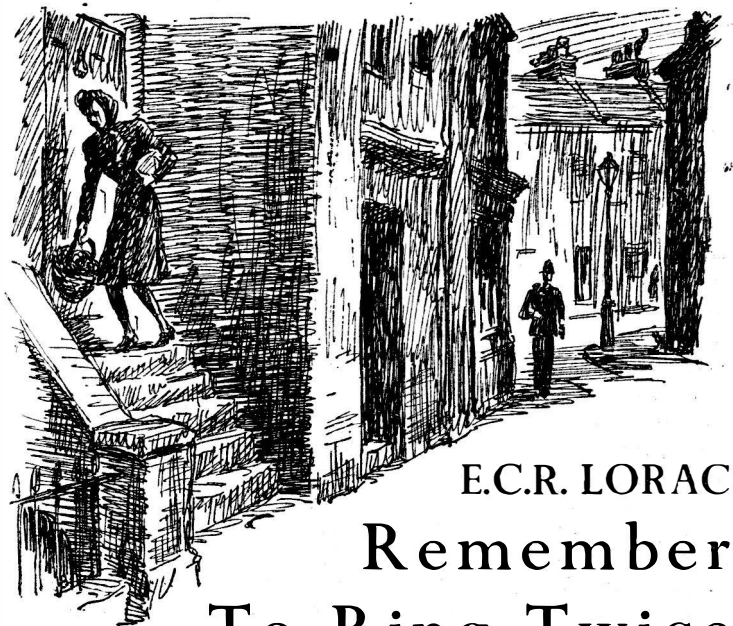
For her patient had suddenly pulled herself erect and her face was ghastly with fear. 'Is—that—true?' she whispered.

'Of course it's true. Now, Mrs. Farren, let's have no more of these theatricals.'

But the woman pushed away her restraining hand. 'Don't touch me, you—you murdering fool,' she panted. 'Do you know what you've done? How was I to guess you'd play a trick like that? I meant to give you all a fright—that was all—and so before I took the dose I changed the bottles back—do you understand?—*I changed them back.*'

A coroner's jury absolved Nurse Anstruther from blame, the coroner remarking that she had taken a somewhat unconventional step to prevent possible tragedy. He did not hold her in any way responsible for Mrs. Farren's death.

But Nurse Anstruther is still not sure whether she was a murderer or not.



E.C.R. LORAC
Remember
To Ring Twice

WHEN P-c Tom Brandon told his friends that he wanted to get into the CID, they laughed at him.

Tom rather enjoyed the humdrum of patrol duty in the East End of London, but because he came from the Norfolk Broads he spent his free time sailing below the Pool of London. After sailing, he often turned into one of the riverside pubs, and sat over a pint.

He had two reasons for sitting in pubs: one was to get accustomed to the sound of East End cockney, which he found hard to understand at first; the other was to study human nature.

One March evening he sat in the bar of The Jolly Sailor in the Isle of Dogs. He heard the publican say: 'Evening, Mr. Copland,' and then a husky voice said:

'Why, Joe Copland, you're the very bloke I 'oped to see. The same again, twice, chum.'

Copland and his friend took their drinks.

'Cheers, Joe! 'Ow's your job?'

'Lousy, Charlie. I'm ruddy well browned off with it.'

'Arr... I reckoned it wasn't your job, Joe. Not good enough. Now I got a little idea. You know old 'Enry 'iggs, 'im with

he little baccy and newspaper shop along the road?"

'You bet I do, and a nice little business that is, too, Charlie. A gold mine, not half. I wouldn't mind that business myself.'

'Arr . . . you're telling me,' wheezed Charlie. 'Now strictly between you and me, 'Iggs is thinking of retiring, and we've been into it together.'

'My friend Bert Williams wants to come in on it, but we needs a spot more capital. Now I says to Bert, wot about putting in Joe Copland as manager? There'd be a nice little flat for you and Clarrie over the shop, Joe.'

'It's 'ard on your missis not 'aving an 'ome of 'er own. That's your auntie's 'ouse you live in, ain't it, and Clarrie must get fed up lookin' after the old lady.'

'Now the point is, can you put up the needful?'

'Five 'undred pounds it'd be, but a fair share o' the profits to you, plus bonus, and the flat rent free. What abaht it?'

'Oh, come orf it,' groaned Joe Copland. 'What's the use o' talking like that? I haven't got five hunded quid.'

'Sorry to disturb you gents. 'Got to shut that there window. It's a cold wind.'

The barman, with a long pole, fumbled at the sloping fanlight at the top of the window. Joe Copland said irritably:

'Here, let me do it. If you'd

a ha'porth of sense you'd fix up two running cords, one to open and one to shut the thing.'

Glancing round at Joe, Tom Brandon saw that he was staring miserably up at the window. Then Joe caught Tom's eye and grinned. 'That window only wants a couple of eyelet holes and some cord,' he said. 'What flats some blokes are. Good night all.'

Some blokes *are* fools, too, thought Tom Brandon soberly. Egging that chap on to get £500 . . . and Auntie with a house of her own and Joe her only relation and Clarrie fed up with looking after Auntie. If that isn't asking for trouble, I don't know what is.

'Well, if it ain't Clarrie Copland! 'Morning, Clarrie. You're an early bird with your shopping.'

' 'Morning, Mrs. Lane. I like to get out early. Along of Auntie, see. I give her her breakfast and leave her in bed while I do the shopping. Don't like her to be about the house alone, she's that shaky, poor old girl.'

Constable Brandon heard this conversation beside the green-grocer's stall in Penny Street. Clarrie Copland? The name rang a bell. Then Brandon remembered the Jolly Sailor a week ago, and the man who hadn't got five hundred pounds.

Keeping his eyes open for a car reported stolen, Brandon

continued on his beat and noticed that Mrs. Copland and her friend Mrs. Lane were walking just ahead of him, both laden with heavy shopping baskets. The street they were in was a narrow one, with gaunt brick houses on either side each front door approached by a steep little flight of steps.

'I mustn't stay, ducks,' said Clarrie Copland, halting at No. 29. 'I don't like leaving Auntie too long.'

She went up the steps and put her basket down on the door step, so clumsily that the oranges piled in it bounced out down the steps into the road.

It was just as Tom was politely handing Clarrie the oranges that he heard a faint scream and a series of heavy thuds inside the house. Clarrie gave a yell.

'Quick, Clarrie, find your key! That must be your auntie a-falling downstairs,' cried Mrs. Lane. 'Poor old thing, she must a' tumbled right down the lot. I always said them stairs is a

death trap. 'Ere you!' she yelled to Tom Brandon, 'there's an accident, you'd better see to it, she'll be badly 'urt.'

Clarrie, her wits all gone hay-wire in her agitation, turned her bag upside down to find her latch key, yelling: 'Auntie, we're coming. Are you hurt, Auntie? Drat the thing. I've got the fair jitters.'

It was Tom Brandon who picked up the latch key and opened the front door. A steep narrow flight of stairs ran almost straight up from the door; in the space at the bottom was huddled an old lady, her neck twisted, her limbs contorted. Brandon knew at once that she was dead, and that she had died less than a minute ago, for her hands and face were still warm.

Clarrie flopped on her knees beside the body, crying: 'Auntie darling, do speak to me, ducks . . . oh why did she ever come downstairs when I was out? I told her not to.'



'They're all the same all the old folks. Plain obstinate,' said Mrs. Lane. 'She do look bad, Clarrie. Got any brandy? Can we get her upstairs?'

'Better not move her until the doctor comes,' said Brandon. 'I'll whistle for my mate, he's not far away.'

Standing at the front door, he blew his whistle and when another constable came running up, Brandon said tersely, 'Surgeon and ambulance. Ring C.O.'

Mrs. Lane let out a sudden yell. 'Who's that upstairs? Gawd? There's someone up there, a thief most likely. Pushed her down. Here, you—.'

But Brandon needed no urging. He wanted to go up those stairs to see if there were a concealed booby trap, a string tied across, a faulty stair, a slit in the linoleum.

But there was no string, no faulty stair, and the linoleum was intact, almost new.

He went into the room whence the sound came out—it was obviously the cat which had made the noise, jumping at the door handle, as cats do. It was evidently the old lady's bedroom, and Brandon had a quick look round. She seemed to have been writing a letter, for a writing block lay on the bed.

As he picked it up, Brandon saw some scribbles on the blotting paper. At some time she had been trying to get a word

spelled right 'Sertain.' 'Certin': and then a sentence 'Be certain you ring twice.'

Putting the block in his tunic pocket, Brandon quickly inspected the upstairs windows—all fastened and secure. 'Ring twice' he thought. He was remembering how Clarrie Copland had leant against the door post when the wind blew her hat, and she had leant against the bell push.

The surgeon and the ambulance had come and gone. Clarrie Copland, weeping noisily, had gone with the body to the mortuary. Chief Inspector Macdonald had arrived from Scotland Yard. He said: 'Well, constable?'

Tom^o Brandon gave his evidence tersely, every bit of it from the Jolly Sailor onwards, but he ended up. 'I don't see how we can get her, sir. She was outside. She only rang the bell.'

'If you suspect a booby trap, constable, it's up to you to look for it,' replied Macdonald. 'You say she fumbled about on the doorstep, by those railings. Let's have a look. Yes, there's a small hook here, and a good half-inch clearance under the front door.'

'Pick that mat up. . . I thought so. A neat little hole in the floor boards. They could have run a cord under the boards, with a spring inserted in it so that it would recoil when unhooked—an expanding curtain wire would do that.'

'Is there a cupboard under the stairs? Screwed up? It would be. You'll have to take the linolcum up.'

It was the third step from the top which showed peculiarities. It was quite steady, but the riser had been sawn through across top, bottom and sides: so was the tread of the stair. Macdonald gave the riser a sharp blow: it fell flat on concealed hinges, and the tread of the stair, also hinged, fell in.

'The stiff linoleum probably kept its shape and the old lady noticed nothing until her foot slipped,' said Macdonald. 'Now go and unscrew the door of the cupboard under the stairs, and you'll see how they worked it. As you know, Joe Copland's a clever craftsman.'

Tom got the door unscrewed and they went into the cupboard with a torch. Two cords were fastened to the hinged riser, one cord was white and the other green. When Tom pulled the white cord the riser fell flat and the stair tread above it collapsed.

The green cord was run through an eyelet hole screwed into the solid stair immediately above: when Tom pulled the green cord the riser went back into place, lifting the tread into the horizontal again.

'Neat and simple,' said Macdonald. 'The principle is the same as two cords fixed to open or close a window or sloping

fanlight. The cords were led under the boards and came up by the front door and were hitched to that hook.'

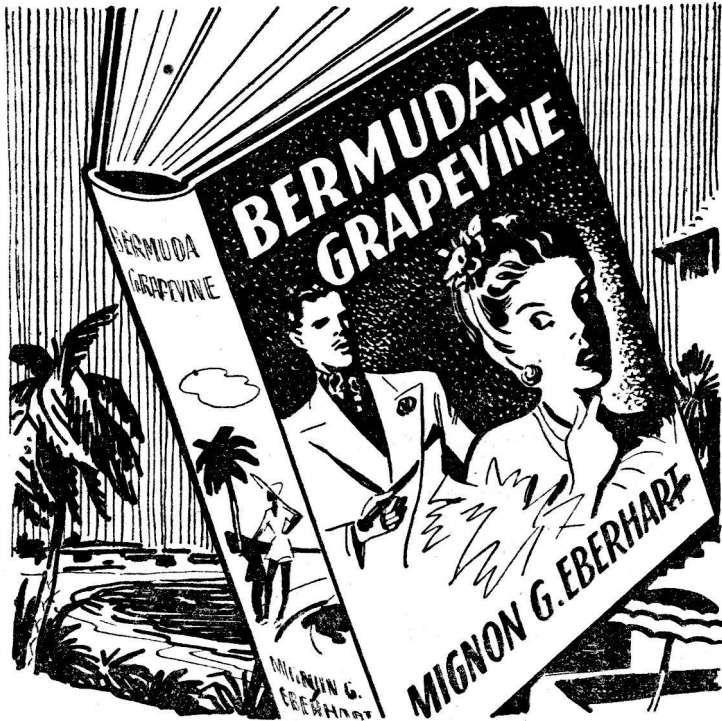
Tom gaped. 'The window in that pub,' he gasped. 'Was that what made him think of it?'

'Would this be relevant, sir?' asked Macdonald's CID sergeant.

'This' was a letter, still in its addressed envelope, though it had not been posted. 'Dear Aggie. I think you'd better come. I'm worried, but I don't like to write about it. Come between nine and ten Thursday morning. She's out shopping, then. And be certain to ring *twice*. I don't answer the door as a rule, being bad on my legs, but if you ring twice I shall know it's you and come down. With love from Alice. P.S.—Remember, ring *twice*.'

'And Alice gave it to Clarrie to post,' said Macdonald, 'and Clarrie opened it and read it, and made arrangements accordingly. Well, I think she deserves what she gets. Hullo, what's that? A double ring? Is this Joe Copland come home to dinner, doing a victory peal?'

Brandon opened the front door and saw Joe's face when the latter saw the rolled back linoleum, the open cupboard door and the collapsed stair. Joe said nothing. There was nothing to say.



THE hotel lay in rambling, irregular levels against a hillside and above a blue lagoon. The Bermuda sun was about to sink, tranquil and rosy after its blazing day, and the Bermuda moon was about to rise, huge and white, and it was the quiet hour between daylight and night.

It was hot, for it was August. Back of the hotel and around the hill behind it wound a narrow white road along which carriages and bicycles took their patient way to Hamilton or to St. George. The tramway was

some miles from the hotel, which increased its inaccessibility and remoteness from all things urban.

It was a substantial, well-built old hotel, so much remodelled and added to that its present owner and manager had had some difficulty, at first, finding his way among its winding corridors and unexpected changes in level. That was James Fanfare Smith, and he sat, as he always did at sunset, on the strip of lawn above the lagoon, drank barley water, and pre-

tended he did not know that light footsteps, presumably feminine, had crossed the veranda and the strip of lawn and halted at the white balustrade above the lagoon not far from him.

For Jim was the victim of his own efficiency; after a few years of struggle his hotel had become inordinately successful. It was with some dismay that he found he had got the lion by the tail and couldn't let go. He became more and more choiced about the guests he accepted. He gave them excellent rooms and a gourmet's cuisine and boosted his prices. He could not stop being a gracious and friendly host, and the popularity of his hotel only increased.

He was a tall man, youngish, and, now that he could afford to be, was very lazy. He had dark hair and a brown face which wore, as a rule, an extremely bland and disingenuous expression. He had light, clear blue eyes which were extraordinarily discerning but by habit and nature friendly. He wore a small, clipped black moustache and affected tropical and informal attire, usually a white linen jacket and, perhaps, a nonchalant bright scarf tucked in the neck of his coat. He affected this mode because it was cool and comfortable and because in this, as in many other things, he had a shrewd eye for effect. It went with the tropical sur-

roundings, the heat, the planter's punches he always had waiting for arriving guests, the blazing suns and opal seas.

He had not yet heard departing footsteps. He permitted a thin, blue slit to show beneath his heavy upper eyelids.

A girl with smooth dark hair was standing at the balustrade a few feet away, looking out to the purpling sea beyond the lagoon opening. She wore a tailored shirt and shorts, and her bare, lightly tanned legs were slender. The blue slit below Jim's eyelids vanished.

If her legs were good they were no better than hundreds that had marched through his lobby during the past five years. He'd been polite to a great many lady guests in shorts. He had, however, a strong sense of taste and propriety and could be, if it became necessary, a master of gentle renunciation, gently implied. Twice a week during at least eight months in the year he went conscientiously into Hamilton to wave farewells to departing guests from the balcony of the Twenty-One Club and perhaps, now and then, to ignore at safe distance from the rails of departing boats sundry handkerchiefs pressed to eyes.

Absently he lifted the barley water to his lips, and the girl must have perceived the slight motion, for she came nearer. He screwed his eyes shut, feeling that this one hour out of the day

(when, as a rule, all his guests were dressing for dinner) belonged to him. It made no difference. She said in an extraordinarily lovely voice, 'You are Mr. Smith?'

He opened his eyes and got to his feet, and in the instant of rising searched his memory for the names of guests who had arrived that day. There had been two boats, one from England and one from New York, and he had met both, but in the confusion some of the guests had escaped him. He granted at once that if he had seen this girl before he would have remembered her. It was his habit to remember, but no one could forget this particular face. It was, James Fanfare Smith was obliged to admit even over his prejudices, lovely. She had large, deep grey eyes, extraordinarily luminous, and a slender, beautifully planed face and sensitive, crimson lips which, when she smiled as she was now doing, were very sweet and gay. She said again, 'You are Mr. Smith?'

What was the girl's name? He made a small and almost imperceptible gesture with his left hand, a gesture which a black boy, in beige porter's uniform, standing at the entrance to the hotel some two hundred feet away, nevertheless perceived and understood.

'Won't you join me?' he said to the girl.

'No, thank you. The boy at the

desk told me I couldn't have a key.'

'A key—oh, you mean a key!' Her sweet mouth and his own failure to select her special card in the index his mind usually carried, disconcerted him a little.

'Yes, a key. To our rooms, you know. I want a key.'

'You—but'. The black boy reached his elbow. He said, 'Excuse me—' and bent his ear.

Along with other qualities of the Bermuda scene which James Fanfare Smith had perceived, adopted, and successfully utilized was the grapevine telegraph, which in its accuracy and incredible swiftness is peculiarly Bermuda's own. He had, so to speak, organized it; the natural aptitude of his staff had been trained and improved upon. He ran his hotel by it, as a matter of fact, for every detail, every small complaint, every idiosyncrasy, every desire, was thus reported to him. He knew what a guest had for breakfast and he knew it if one quarrelled with his wife. There were a great many other things he knew: if a guest closed his door at midnight and pulled down the shades and sneezed, Jim was quite likely to ask that guest, the next morning, how his cold was.

The black boy murmured. His words were altogether indistinguishable twelve inches away but perfectly clear to Mr. Smith's attentive ear. That too had been carefully worked out, and thus

were behind-the-scene emergencies as well as relevant and irrelevant news items reported. The black boy said in the habitual mixture of good English and dialect of the Bermuda Negro:

'Wife of Mr. Peter Blake. Rich. Suite 21. Lots of baggage, foreign labels. Honeymoon. Lawyer man Mr. Pusey, friend. Arrive on New York boat to meet Mr. Blake. All come this morning. Orders, boss?'

'Table 3. Tell the headwaiter to serve them my own Napoleon brandy after dinner with my compliments. That's all.'

His words, too, had been completely unintelligible to the girl (Mrs. Peter Blake, on her honeymoon with her rich husband), who, now, was sitting on the balustrade and had turned a rather chilly and very pretty profile toward him. Her slender figure silhouetted itself against the blue water of the lagoon. All around them the tropic night was gently, softly, and a little threateningly drawing closer.

The black boy vanished. James Fanfare Smith said, frowning a little, 'We don't have any keys. We never lock doors. Our boys are honest. There's no crime in Bermuda. The only objects ever—removed—are torches. They are irresistible, because of bicycle-riding at night. But anything else, money, jewellery, clothing, is perfectly safe. However, if you really want a key—'

'I do want a key. It isn't a torch.'

He said, 'Oh, very well. I'll send one up to you at once. Now won't you have a cocktail—?'

'No, thank you. I'll expect the key.' She gave a pleasant but brief little nod and walked away.

It left him feeling a little flat. His advice was not, as a rule, flouted nor his conversation brought coolly to a close. However, the silence her departure left was soothing. He sat again relaxed, sipping from the tall glass. Behind him in the farflung wings of the old hotel, lights appeared; his guests were changing for dinner. A night bird stirred somewhere and cried eerily. Faint and far away along the road beyond the hotel a black boy strolled and touched a guitar softly.

James Fanfare Smith closed his eyes and let the deep, mysterious night unfold him.

When he roused and entered the hotel at last, guests had already filled the bar with the flutter of voices and women's gowns, the light clash of glass and ice and the scent of cigarettes and perfumes. Men were immaculate, if informal, in white silk or linen jackets; women showed smooth, brown shoulders and arms above bright chiffon and satins.

He stopped at the desk. One of the two desk clerks (both college boys well content with their

summer's jobs) looked up brightly. 'Yes, sir?'

'Find a key for Mr. Blake's suite. Send up a skeleton key if you can't find the key that belongs to that number.'

'Yes, sir . . . Say, Mr. Smith, did you know he's the Peter Blake that invented and manufactures gold-processing equipment and machinery? He won't sell the equipment; leases it. What an income that man must have!'

'Has the fellow in 18 got over his drunk?'

The boy's eyebrows went up. 'Nine Tom Collinses went to his room this afternoon. By actual count; it's on the bar list.'

'Don't let him come into the dining-room.'

'No, sir. But he does carry it well. He's done nothing but order up drinks for the last four days; ever since he arrived, in fact. And I've not seen him drunk. Even his eyes are clear.'

'Don't let him bother anybody. What's his name?'

'James Smith.'

'James Smith. The same as yours, you know, sir.'

'It's not', said James Fanfare Smith a little haughtily, 'an uncommon name. We'd better ship him home. Has he got money?'

'Yes', said the boy economically; 'fifteen hundred or more in the safe.'

'Well, we'd better get him out before he sobers up.'

'Yes, *sir*.'

James Fanfare Smith went to his own rooms. Below and around him the hotel accommodated itself to the night. Out in the gardens tables were laid, and candles in hurricane glasses were lighted upon them. A native orchestra aligned itself under a canopy and began to play a rumba with a soft, insistent beat. A great, yellow moon outlined palms and hibiscus in deep black and shone goldenly upon the water and upon the garden. The whole was curiously theatrical, as if the stage were set for some mysterious, secret drama. As, indeed, it was, though not even the actors knew it.

Later there was dancing under the rising golden moon. Jim, joining his guests, did not see or think of the Blake party. He danced with a pretty, jewelled English woman. He ordered a special dessert, crepes suzette, rolled with a light hand, for a stockbroker from New York. He paused to chat with a rich cattleman from the Argentine and his fat, worldly wife, and to order for them, with his compliments, a light, fragrant claret which bore a label: 'LAID DOWN 1842. BOTTLED 1929 FOR JAMES FANFARE SMITH, Esq.'

By one o'clock the hotel was quiet. Night became deeper, and the moon passed its height and began to descend, and the shadows of tall cacti here and there about the grounds made sprawled, stark arms across silvery

lawn. Crickets crooned; now and then a horse trudged monotonously along the road. By two o'clock the hotel slept, peacefully one would have said. Very quietly, at any rate, with its quota of human passions, human desires, human good and evil, lulled and slumbering.

Suite 21 was quiet, too; it opened upon the long terrace that ran along the second-floor length of the narrow southern wing, and it was the finest suite in the hotel. But in one of its two bedrooms Lana Blake, the girl with smooth, dark hair, lay awake. Oddly, somewhere in her vague and cloudy nimbus of her thoughts hovered the figure of James Fanfare Smith . . .

The moon went down at last.

Morning came, bright, tranquil, sunny, and hot, with the water aquamarine. Mr. Smith, refreshed by the night, automatically set about making his guests comfortable and went to pay his respects to Mr. Peter Blake. That was at exactly tenthirty. Breakfast for two, the lift boy told him, had gone to Suite 21 some time ago and the trays had come down again.

'Eighteen', continued the black boy audibly (since only his employer was in the lift), 'had black coffee and whisky. Second floor, sir.' He opened the lift door. And opened it upon a very curious scene.

Two corridors branched from the lift well; one to the left into

the main and northern section of the building, and one to the right, which bisected the southern wing. There were two stairways in the main part of the hotel, but none for the south wing; thus, the instant the lift door was opened Jim had a full and complete view of the south-wing corridor.

And a porter at that very instant plunged from a doorway along it and ran heavily toward the lift, and beside the lift stood a buxom coloured maid. She had two stacks of sheets in her arms and she was perfectly rigid, with her face ashen, her eyes bulging.

The porter ail but fell upon Jim, and gibbered, 'Murder! Boss! Murder!'

The corridor behind him was empty; Jim was for ever after sure of that.

The maid screamed, and dropped the sheets.

'What do you mean? Stop that noise, you! Now then, what's all this?'

'He shouted murder! Help! In there—' The black boy's hands were shaking as he gestured down the corridor behind him. The lift boy gaped over Jim's shoulder. The maid sat down on the floor amid tumbled sheets.

Jim grasped the porter's shoulder. 'Not so much noise? Who? Where?'

The porter choked. 'The room hummed. Then he yelled 'Help-Murder-' I think he'm dead.'

Under the blazing blue eyes of his employer he achieved an instant's lucidity. 'The man in 21', he gurgled.

All of them followed Jim down the corridor. He was conscious of their presence behind him as he opened the door of the living-room of Suite 21. 'You stay here', he ordered the lift boy. 'Watch the corridor.'

He didn't knock. The room was empty and the door opposite, which led upon the long terrace, was open. The porter gasped, 'In there,' and Jim ran across the room toward the bedroom which the porter's shaking, purple hand indicated. Ran across and stopped dead still in the doorway.

For the porter was right. A man lay face down upon the floor, and there was red all across the back of the dressing gown he wore and upon the floor, and his head was twisted at an odd angle. And the girl, Mrs. Peter Blake, in pyjamas, with her dark hair dishevelled, knelt beside him and held something in her hands and looked up at Jim. She didn't say anything; just looked at him dazedly, and the thing in her white hand was a knife.

The knife was long, slender, and oddly domestic in appearance; it was a plain kitchen knife with a wooden handle, and its nine-inch blade was wet. The girl's white hands were stained.

The porter breathed heavily over Jim's shoulder. Something

about the pose of the man on the floor convinced Jim that he was quite dead.

He said, the words sounding harsh in that utter stillness, 'Why did you kill him?'

He addressed the girl, Lana Blake. She did not appear to realize it; her face was perfectly white and her dark grey eyes were enormous and completely without expression.

Jim stepped nearer her, bent and took the knife out of her hands, and laid it on the table. There was a red smear on the sleeve of her lounging pyjamas. He said, 'Get up.'

She had given up the knife without question, and, now, stumbling a little, got to her feet and stood there looking down. Jim said, 'Louise.'

The maid, still ashen and open-mouthed, stepped forward.

'Put a sheet over him. No, wait.'

The maid waited, arrested in motion; they all waited while Jim, steeling himself to the task, knelt beside the man on the floor. After a moment or two he got up again. No one had moved. He said, 'He's dead. There's not a flicker of a pulse or breath... All right, Louise.'

The maid skirted the body cautiously and took a sheet from the bed near-by and laid it shrinkingly across the murdered man.

Jim looked at the girl. 'I've got to call the police, you know.'

She still did not speak; did not, indeed, appear to hear him. And he heard himself saying again, still harshly, 'Why did you kill him?'

At last she looked up at him. Her eyes had lost their dazed, blank look and were focused upon him. 'What—what did you say?'

'I said, why did you kill him?'

'Kill him! Kill *him*? I didn't kill him. I—'

Jim's face tightened. His eyes were bright and clear and had hard black pupils. He said, 'If you didn't kill him, who did?'

She put out her hands in a helpless gesture. 'I don't know! I don't know what could have happened. I—he was just there, you see. When I came in. I don't know—'

'Madam, you had the knife in your hands when I entered the room.'

'But I—why, yes, of course. I—' She struggled to get the words out. 'I had to take it out. He—I didn't think he was dead. Of course, I tried to pull it out and—' She stopped and said, 'How could it have happened! He—'

'You claim you didn't kill him, then?'

'But I didn't kill him. I didn't! You are wicked—cruel—you—!'

'Don't scream.' He motioned to Luzo, the porter. Together, swiftly they searched the suite. There was no one. It took perhaps sixty seconds to make sure

of that. They looked everywhere.

The girl was still standing rigid, as if frozen, when he returned to her. 'There is no one else in the suite', he said.

'I tell you I didn't—I don't know who—there was nobody—he had no enemies. I had to take the knife—' She was trembling and incoherent. Her voice all at once became faint. 'I couldn't have murdered—' she whispered, and swayed.

Jim caught her in his arms. She didn't faint, but she was perfectly limp and nerveless against him and startlingly white. He said to Louise, 'Help me. Get water. I'll put her on the bed in the other bedroom.'

The girl walked, stumbling and supported by his arm, across the living-room and into her own bedroom. He put her on the bed, and took the pillow from under her head and put it under her feet. Her eyes were still open and very dark and followed him in an anguish of appeal as he went to the door again.

He said, 'Louise will stay with you. I'll call the police.'

In the living-room the porter Luzo waited, and outside in the hall the lift boy stood against the door. He stepped quickly aside when Jim opened the door. His eyes were popping with excitement. Jim glanced along the row of closed doors on a line with Suite 21.

'Has anyone come into the hall?'

'No, sir.'

'All right. Let me know if anyone comes out, and stay here and keep your mouth shut if anybody inquires. If anything frightens you—shout.'

'Yes, boss.'

In the living-room of 21 again, Jim took the telephone. The desk clerk answered at once, in a polite voice.

'Get the police at Hamilton. Tell them there's been an accident. Don't let anyone hear you.'

He could hear the boy's excited gasp: 'Yes, sir.'

'Be quick about it . . . Oh, yes. Put Mark on the lift.' He put down the instrument sharply.

'Now then, Luzo, what about it? Quick. Exactly what happened?'

With a sheet properly over the body and the bedroom door closed upon it, the porter was more lucid. Still, it took ten minutes to get the story straight, brief though it was. For Luzo had been in the living-room of the suite when sounds of voices in the next room attracted his attention.

'What were you doing in this room?'

'The umbrella, sir. The one for the terrace. I was going to put it out for the day. I knocked on the door of this room, and as no one answered I knocked again and then entered. It is the only door upon the terrace.'

'Was anyone in here when you came in?'

'No, sir, and the bedroom doors were closed. So I went quietly across the room and then I heard voices in the bedroom. Loud voices. Quarrelling.'

'Who was it?'

'I don't know, boss.'

'Did you hear words?'

'No, sir, not until he yelled "Murder" and "Help". No words, just voices and—a queer sound, too, sir. The room—he paused, searched for a word, did not find it, and concluded with an effect of inadequacy—'hummed.'

'The room hummed!' Jim frowned. 'You said that before. What on earth do you mean?'

The porter made a helpless gesture with his hands. 'I don't know, boss, sir. Just a—a humming sound. Like it was hollow.'

'But can't you—?' Jim paused. The porter was evidently perplexed and evidently had done his best at what, in all probability, was an unimportant bit of description. 'What did you do then?'

'I heard it, boss. I heard a sort of yell, a scream maybe it was, but not very loud. But he screamed "Help" and "Murder" and then stopped as if—as if he'd choked or something. It wasn't very loud, any of it. I ran to tell you.'

'Why didn't you go into the bedroom?'

Luzo looked frightened. 'I—I thought I'd better tell you, sir.'

The scream sounded—sounded bad, sir. Dreadful. I—’ He stopped and passed his hands across his glistening black forehead. ‘It sounded like death.’

‘You didn’t see anyone go into or come from the bedroom?’

‘No, sir. There was only the voices.’

‘Men’s voices?’

‘Oh, yes, sir. Men’s. Low and deep. And then the room hummed—’

‘Listen. Stop talking about the room humming. Stay with facts. Did you hear a woman’s voice in there, too?’

Luzo was uncertain; he said doubtfully he wasn’t sure.

‘But you are sure you heard men’s voices.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How many?’

‘Two, at least.’

Jim took a turn up and down the room. The door upon the terrace was open and outside soft morning sunlight made a light pattern on the old stone floor. The woman had killed him, despite her white, stunned look, or the murderer had simply walked out of that door while the porter had run to find help, and vanished.

But it would have been, Jim thought suddenly, a very natural thing to withdraw that knife. It would be your first, instinctive action, if you came upon a scene—a man dying with a knife in his back. If you could summon the courage to do it.

The porter waited. Jim said, ‘All right. Stand at that door. On the inside of the room. Don’t stir from it and don’t let anybody come in, and don’t tell anybody what has happened.’

He went back to the girl’s bedroom door, knocked, and went in.

The maid was sitting on a chair watching the girl; the maid was the colour of a plum, but her eyes were beginning to show a dark gleam of excitement. The girl lay perfectly inert on the bed, her face as white as the sheet below it, and stared with great, dark eyes at the ceiling. He spoke very clearly and distinctly:

‘Mrs. Blake. Please tell me as clearly as you can just what happened. Take your time, and don’t be frightened.’

‘I don’t know—who did it. I can’t understand. There isn’t anyone who would want to kill him.’

‘Tell me—’ He paused and told himself to be patient. By this time the desk clerk had got the police and they were doubtless on their way. The hotel was a good hour from Hamilton but no more. ‘Well’, he addressed the girl. ‘When did you go into your husband’s room?’

It was horror and pain, he decided, that made her eyes so dark.

She flinched a little and said, ‘Just before you came in. He

was there—on the floor. There was blood and I saw the knife and I—I made myself pull it out. But it was too late—and then you came in.'

'Why did you enter his room?'

'Because I thought I heard him call me. I wasn't sure. I was in this room. The door was closed and the door to his room was closed. But I thought I heard him call and I—I put on these pyjamas and my slippers—'

'Immediately?'

'Yes, of course. That is, it took a moment or two because I couldn't find my slippers. I had to look around.'

'Did you feel his voice was urgent?'

'No. I wasn't sure he had called.'

'Had you heard any voices preceding his—calling you?'

'No. But there might have been voices. I had just got out of the shower. The sound of the water—'

Would have drowned the sound of the voices. That and two closed doors. He frowned and glanced at the windows which gave upon the terrace.

'Did anyone pass the window?'

'I don't know. I don't think so. I believe I would have noticed it.'

'I see.' But did he? Well—'The police are coming.' He paused, and then, rather to his own astonishment, heard himself giving orders: 'The police are on their way here. When they

come they'll question you. All of us. I think it would be better not to bring up the matter of your having—withdrawn the knife. Tell everything but that.'

Her eyes seemed to take it in and understand it. He said to the maid, 'You heard me, Louise?'

'Yes, sir.'

There was gratitude in the girl's eyes. Or did he imagine it? He turned abruptly and left the room.

He would have to wipe the finger-prints, his own and the girl's, off the knife. He would thereby destroy evidence and make himself an accomplice, an accessory after the fact. Well, he was a fool. And it would accomplish nothing; her presence beside the murdered man was almost as damning as the knife in her hands. But not quite. His hotel would be ruined; there existed among travellers a good, old-fashioned prejudice against murder.

Well—he'd better take a look at the terrace. The porter's eyes followed him as he opened the door upon the terrace and went out.

It was a long terrace, running the full length of that particular wing of the second floor. The hotel was built against a hillside and, owing to a resultant irregularity of levels, there were no rooms below that particular portion of the second floor; the terrace itself rose sharply, with a

high, stone retaining wall, from the very edge of the lagoon. One end of it was backed by an angle of the building, the other end rose above the water, as did the outward side. Thus, the only approach to the terrace (other than through the hotel) would have been accomplished by scaling the wall from the water and clambering over a high stone balustrade.

There were no footholds anywhere in the retaining wall; a hook and rope would have done the trick, with a boat anchored below, but the whole process in the bright light of that sunny morning would have been clearly visible, not only from overlooking windows and the opposite shore of the lagoon, but from the hotel's bathing beach some three hundred feet to the left.

Jim began to see that there was a certain scarcity of approaches and exits from the terrace room in which the murdered man lay, and consequently a definite isolation of any possible murder suspects.

For, if the only door to the terrace was the door from the living-room of 21, still there were four other bedrooms along the terrace side of that wing, each of them having a window or windows upon the terrace. Reaching the terrace from any of those four bedrooms was only a matter of unhooking a screen and stepping out.

He frowned as he began to consider the implications of that particular situation. The porter had been in the living-room almost certainly when the blow had been struck. Luzo had burst immediately from the door at an instant when Louise and Jim, himself, had commanded a view of the corridor leading to 21, and no one had escaped in that way. This meant that whoever had killed Peter Blake had to escape by means of the terrace. Always provided the murderer was not actually Peter Blake's young wife.

He considered the occupants of those four rooms. No. 18, nearest the lift, was, of course, occupied by the man bearing his own name, James Smith. He had been drinking steadily and prodigiously ever since his arrival, and ought to be in a stupor by this time.

The next room, 19, was occupied. It was a Mr. and Mrs. Fritz von Holzen from New York. They were a vaguely pleasant, middle-aged couple, quiet, placid. There was about them something faintly foreign, an accent perhaps.

Well, then, who was in the next room, 20? Yes, of course, John Toverly, the actor; a handsome fellow in his forties, fresh from a Broadway success which had closed merely for the summer and was to open again in the fall. He was by way of being a pal of Jim's. They'd had drink

together and had gone sailing.

The next three rooms belonged to the suite, 21, and were a bedroom (in which the murder occurred), a living-room, and the bedroom in which the girl lay and stared with great, dark eyes at the ceiling.

He went on swiftly in his mind to the next and last room along the terrace wing. That was Room 22 and it was occupied—he gave a start as he remembered—it was occupied by Ernest Pusey, who had come from New York, expressly to meet the Blakes and was, as the boy had said, a ‘lawyer man’.

Well, then he was obviously the man to be informed of the murder and to represent young Mrs. Blake in all the troublesome details to follow. There was certainly no need for him, Jim, to undertake the unaccustomed and reluctant role of knight-errant. Unless, of course, it was Pusey himself who had murdered his client. On the face of it, it sounded unreasonable; for, even aside from the probably friendly relations existing between them, murdering your client was in the nature of killing the goose that laid the golden egg. And yet, as decidedly, the lawyer must fall within the range of suspects, because his room lay along the terrace and because, which was as important, he knew Peter Blake.

As important? It was, Jim saw at once, far more important.

For in all probability the only people in the hotel who knew Peter Blake were, naturally, his wife and this lawyer who had come to meet him. And total strangers do not as a rule walk up and plunge a knife into you. No, it was clear that this Pusey was not only a suspect; he was, outside the girl, the prime and only suspect. Well, then, Jim had better take steps.

The whole point, of course, lay in the fact that no one had escaped by the corridor during that time. From the moment the alarm was given, it had been utterly impossible for anyone to have entered the corridor from the wing without being seen. And since then he had had the boy on guard. That meant that whoever had murdered Peter Blake was almost certainly still bottled up within that wing.

He turned, jerkily and instinctively, to look along the screened, blank windows, and a man was sitting quietly in one of the steamer chairs, watching him. It was Fritz von Holzen and he held a newspaper in his hands. ‘Good morning’, he said affably.

He was perhaps fifty or fifty-five, plump and slightly bald. His eyes were very sharp behind his glasses. And he commanded a full view of the terrace.

Queer, thought Jim, that I didn’t notice his presence when I came out on the terrace. Still,

perhaps it wasn't queer; he'd been thinking hard and fast. He had been only vaguely aware of the terrace itself, with its clusters of brightly painted tables and chairs and the gay red-and-white umbrella at the south end. He walked now toward Fritz von Holzen.

'Good morning. I didn't see you when I came out just now', Jim said.

'I beg your pardon', said Von Holzen, cupping a hand around one ear. Evidently he was deaf. Jim repeated his remark in a louder voice, and Von Holzen replied, 'No. You were in what is called a brown study, Mr. Smith.'

'Oh, you saw me?'

'Why, certainly. I'm deaf but I'm not blind. I've been sitting here for—oh, since nine-thirty or so.'

Nine-thirty. Here, then, was a witness. Jim said tensely, 'Has anyone else been on the terrace?'

'No. At least not within the past hour or so. Unless—yes, it seems to me, there was a boy with an umbrella. That's all.'

'Are you sure of that? Hasn't anyone else come out of that door over there?'

'No one but you, Mr. Smith', said Von Holzen cheerily. 'I've been sitting here without moving for the last hour and would have seen anyone.'

'You—I suppose you heard nothing?'

'Heard nothing?' Von Hol-

zen's sharp eyes were now definitely aware of purpose back of this inquiry. 'What do you mean, heard nothing? If you mean anything—out of the way or unusual, no, I have not.'

'You didn't hear—anyone call out—for help?' persisted Jim.

'No. You'd better tell me just what has happened.'

'A hotel crisis. You are altogether sure that no one passed you?'

'Well, yes. I'm certain. Who called for help and why?'

It was the girl, then. It had to be the girl who had murdered Blake, for there was no one else. Yet, despite Von Holzen's story and its clinching evidence against Lana Blake, he was still loath to believe her guilty.

The main, indeed, the only evidence to the contrary, was Luzo's statement that there had been two voices—loud voices—in Blake's room.

He said, 'It's a police affair. I'm afraid my guests are going to be questioned and annoyed. I'm sorry.'

'You must mean murder' observed Von Holzen coolly. 'Who was murdered?'

'The man in there', admitted Jim. 'Now, if you'll excuse me—'

He had expected a flood of questions and commotion and was prepared to cut it short. But Von Holzen took it without the faintest change of expression. He said, 'In that case your hands are full, Mr. Smith. I'm afraid

I'm delaying you. If I can be of any assistance—'

'Thank you—I'll try to keep it as long as possible from my guests—' (His guests; there would be trouble there.)

There was courteous understanding in the gesture of a small hand which promised discretion. Jim left Von Holzen and went into the living-room of 21.

He entered the bedroom and closed the door behind him and lifted the sheet. There was no more to be seen than he had already seen. A middle-aged man, florid and heavy, with a mouth that suggested temper, violently done to death. He replaced the sheet somewhat hurriedly and turned again to the knife, lying on a table near-by.

Jim had the usual layman's respect and fear for the evidence of finger-prints. He did not know that police expect to find innocent finger-prints, with, if they are in luck, one guilty one among them. Jim in that instant was convinced that the discovery of the girl's finger-prints on that knife would be proof of her guilt.

He wiped the knife.

Then he put the knife on the table again, shoved his handkerchief back in his pocket, and went swiftly through the living-room into the corridor.

George still remained on guard and no one, he said, had entered the corridor. Jim looked at his watch and started with Room 18.

The man in that room, James Smith, his namesake, did not respond when Jim knocked and was, when he opened the door at last, to all intents and purposes dead to the world and would not rouse. There were six empty glasses on the table.

In Room 19 Mrs. von Holzen, a stout, placid woman of fifty or so, came promptly and cheerily to the door. Obviously her husband had not yet told her the news, for she was altogether calm, said she had not left her room yet that morning, and thanked him for a hastily concocted inquiry as to the comfort of the room.

John Tovery, the actor, in Room 20, had also been in his room all the morning. Jim's cautious inquiry as to persons on the terrace brought a prompt confirmation of Von Holzen's story. For Tovery had been writing letters for the past half-hour at a table facing the window and the terrace, and Von Holzen had been in full view all the time.

'He's been there the full time. I'm sure I would have known it if he had moved a foot away from the chair. You know how a movement attracts one's eyes. Why?'

'Did you know Peter Blake?'

'Who's Peter Blake?'

Jim murmured and went on, passing Suite 21 again, to Room 22. 'My prime suspect', he thought, knocking.

But when the lawyer, Ernest Pusey, came to the door Jim's heart sank. For Ernest Pusey was a dry, grey, upright man in his middle fifties and the very personification of a corporation lawyer. Probably, reflected Jim ruefully, he didn't brush his teeth without, first, considering any possible legal consequences of the action.

'Mr. Pusey?'

'Yes?'

He wore neat, coffee-coloured trousers and coat, and his shirt, as a slight concession to the heat, was open at the throat. His thin grey hair was brushed neatly back and his pince-nez glittered.

'Mr. Blake is your client?'

'Yes, of course.'

There was a commotion at the lift—feet marching toward them and voices.

Jim risked a rebuff. 'You've been in your room all the morning?'

Pusey's precise eyebrows lifted.

'Yes. Why do you ask?'

'You've—heard nothing—out of the way?'

'See here—what's the meaning of this?'

'Mr. Pusey—do you know of any reason for Peter Blake's—' . .

'Blake's—what? What do you mean?'

The feet came closer. Jim swallowed hastily and said, 'For Peter Blake's murder. Here are the police—'

Ernest Pusey stared at him, rigid and grey and wordless for

the moment it took the police to reach Suite 21. Then he said in a harsh, deep voice that sounded rusted, 'Murdered! My God!' And thrust Jim out of the way and went to meet the police. Jim followed . . .

By seven o'clock that night the commotion induced by the arrival of the police and the subsequent investigation had in a measure died down. Somewhat to Jim's surprise his guests did not arise and depart in a body at first word of the murder. Instead, they submitted with the best possible grace to the prolonged inquiry, which embraced a statement from every single one of them. But Jim would have expected a complaint or two, and so far he had none.

None from his guests and none from his staff, who were also questioned.

It had taken time and a steady, patient sifting of facts. But in the end, so far as Jim knew, the police still had only the few initial facts he, the maid and two boys, and Lana Blake herself had been able to give them. Von Holzen's story remained firm (regrettably, Jim felt) and John Tovey gave Von Holzen himself a sound alibi.

There was only one item which Jim knew and the police did not know. That was the fact that Lana had had the knife actually in her hands.

Unfortunately the omission did not much lighten the weight

of evidence against Lana Blake. Yet, too, it might have proved to be the deciding factor.

The inspector in charge was Willaker, a man whom Jim knew and liked. He was extremely thorough, extremely deliberate and he left no stone unturned. It was he, indeed, who found that the knife had been removed, when or by whom no one could say, from the hotel kitchen. At night there was no one, as a rule in the kitchen. Thus anyone in the hotel might have removed the knife.

However, there still were, when all evidence and stories were sifted, only six people, besides the porter himself, who had had access to the room in which Peter Blake was murdered. And of those people, in the end, there was only one who they could prove had been in Peter Blake's bedroom, and that was, of course, Lana.

'Von Holzen himself could have murdered Blake', said Inspector Willaker to Jim, 'and then walked out on to the terrace and made of himself a witness instead of an obvious culprit. But since they, themselves (Von Holzen and his wife, I mean), both say they had never laid eyes on Blake, at least, knowingly, there's the question of motive. John Tovery backs up Von Holzen's story, anyway. Yes, it all simmers down to the question of escape. If no one left the suite, then the person remaining

there must have murdered Blake.'

'Mrs. Blake?'

'Yes.'

'Somehow—I don't think she did it.'

'There's nobody else. Don't let a pretty face carry you away, Jim, my boy.'

Jim shook his head impatiently. 'Are you—arresting her?'

'Not to-night', said Willaker cautiously. 'Not so long as there's the faintest loophole in our case.'

'What's the loophole?'

'Your porter's story of the voices. Men's voices, he said. He thinks there were two voices only. But he swears neither of the voices he heard was a woman's voice. If he heard two men talking, then what happened to the other man?'

'Exactly', said Jim with a little too much enthusiasm.

Willaker looked at him sharply. 'I take it you're willing to give us every possible assistance on this case?'

'Why, certainly. The sooner it's over, the better for my hotel.'

'Right. I'm leaving a couple of policemen on guard in the suite. By the way, are your boys superstitious?'

'Not inordinately. Why?'

'The boy who heard Blake call for help keeps saying something about the room humming. He implies a kind of death song. Know anything about it?'

Jim searched his knowledge of

Bermuda—of the secret order the natives call Gombies, of night ceremonies along deserted coves. 'No. He may have heard some coincident sound. A motor-boat or a vacuum cleaner—'

'He would have recognized those sounds. This special thing seems to worry him. Well, our investigation may take time. We've had to cable in order to check the stories these people tell of themselves.' Willaker sighed. 'It's a bad business but I think it'll be cleared shortly. We have opportunity and motive.'

'Motive? I suppose you mean he leaves his widow with plenty of money?'

'Certainly. She—' Willaker looked at his watch and rose. 'She was his secretary, you know; he'd only known her six weeks before he married her. His only living relative is a nephew with whom he quarrelled over the marriage. The nephew's name is Sandy Blake. We've cabled him.'

'Did she tell you that?'

'No. Pusey—against his will. He's her lawyer, and right on the job. She denied knowledge of the quarrel with his nephew. Pusey advised her to say nothing. . . . Oh, that reminds me. Give your barman orders not to send any more drinks to the fellow in 18. We haven't been able to get a word out of him.'

'All right, Inspector.'

'And you might keep after your kitchen boys a bit about that knife. In case one of them

remembers anything. Although, as a matter of fact, there's something phony about that knife. It doesn't seem just right somehow to find it there on the table, wiped free of finger-prints.'

'Seems quite natural to me. Fellow sticks another fellow with knife, pulls it out and wipes off his finger-prints, puts it down on the handiest table.'

Inspector Willaker's intelligent eyes looked a little too intelligent. 'Um', he said. 'Sound natural to you, does it?' And went away. Without, which was the important thing, arresting Lana Blake.

Jim sighed. The lobby and lounge had gradually cleared, for, come what may, life and meals went on and people still dressed for dinner. It was sunset, with the water in the lagoon tranquil again and blue. He went out to his favourite seat above the lagoon, and a black boy instantly produced a tall, cold drink, and withdrew.

Jim closed his eyes wearily. The affair gave every indication of putting him to very much more energy and effort than he ever willingly expended. He wished for his own sake he could find a quick and easy way out of it. And one, said a small voice within him, that would clear a girl with the loveliest face and sweetest mouth Jim had ever seen. A girl who was frightened and helpless and all too definitely on the spot.

Twenty-four hours ago, Lana Blake had sat there on the balustrade, and had looked steadily at him and asked for a key.

A key!

He sat up abruptly. She'd asked for a key, and she'd said, what? Something that, even then, struck him as unusual, for she'd said firmly that 'it' wasn't a torch... What wasn't a torch?

And why had she wanted a key? Did it argue fear? Or merely that she'd wanted to lock the door?

Or—he sank back suddenly. The police would say she'd wanted the key in order to ensure that there would be no interruption during a certain half-hour that morning. And thus would argue a cool, devilish premeditation.

But it wasn't premeditation. And the door had not been locked when Luzo entered it that morning. Well, then, why? He half rose, and a voice behind him said, 'Mr. Smith.'

It was the lawyer, Ernest Pusey. He said, 'May I sit down? ... No, thank you, no cocktail. I—I only wanted to say, Mr. Smith, that I'm sorry I was so obtuse when you came to break the news to me this morning. It was good of you to try to spare me some of the shock, and I appreciate it.'

'How is Mrs. Blake?'

'Poor girl. It's a dreadful thing. But if it had to happen I suppose

it's lucky I was here to take over. But Peter was my oldest friend—since school days—and my best client. Well, so the world goes. Lana will be well provided for.'

'I suppose this makes her an extremely rich woman.'

'Well, yes and no. There's a rather odd—still, not at all an unusual—situation involved. Lana is not actually Peter's heir and yet will certainly inherit a great deal of money. Peter was a very rich man. The income from his leases alone—'

'Leases?'

'You don't know his business? Not leases in the ordinary sense; I referred to the leasing of the gold-smelting equipment and machinery which Peter long ago invented and on which he holds patents, and which he also manufactures. If he sold the equipment, you see, he would have money from the outright sale, but that's all. By retaining possession and only leasing equipment and machinery he ensures himself a steady income; in fact, he has almost a monopoly. He has had only a few competitors, and not many of them lasted very long. So long as no similar process is discovered Peter (and Peter's heirs) will be very rich.'

'Well, as I was saying, his heir is his nephew, Sandy. Peter never really expected to marry and was very fond of Sandy always. In fact, the only quarrel I

ever knew them to have was about—well, never mind. The fact remains his will has been unaltered since his marriage. He did, however, write a letter the day of his wedding, requesting Sandy, if the need arose, to provide generously for Lana. He intended to make a new will as soon as he returned from his honeymoon; in fact, that is the main reason for my meeting him here. Peter cabled, asking me to come.'

'That's putting a lot of faith in this man Sandy.'

'Peter trusted Sandy. And I'm sure Sandy will be generous with Lana.'

'At any rate it removes a motive for your client's having murdered her husband.'

'My client? Oh, you mean Lana Blake. Unfortunately, she believed Peter had already changed his will. And when the police questioned her, before I could persuade her not to talk, she admitted it. The letter to Sandy, of which I knew, was a shock to her. I don't mind saying—to you, Mr. Smith, because I believe you are inclined to be friendly—'

'She told you about the knife.'

'She—' Pusey glanced quickly around, but they were alone. 'Yes, she did. It was kind of you, Mr. Smith.'

'But not much help. You are going to get her out of it, aren't you?'

'I hope so. She—' He took off

his glasses and polished them. 'I hope so, I'm sure, Mr. Smith. But I don't mind telling you it's a bad business. However, I'm going to do my very best.'

Jim rose with the lawyer and they walked together back to the veranda.

That night, too, there were candles on the tables and a native orchestra playing rumbas and its own version of swing tunes. There were women with soft, brown shoulders and bright gowns and men very festive in white dinner jackets. But there was a subtle difference between that night and the night before.

During the daytime the guests had been good sports. They had talked of the murder with interest and speculation and excitement. It had seemed, however, quite remote, an impersonal thing.

But by night murder became a different thing. It assumed gradually, with the darkness, its own sinister and hideously personal property. Where there is murder there is also a murderer.

Not a nice thought.

It induced an early going to bed and an unprecedented number of requests at the desk for keys.

Jim Fanfare Smith, on his way to the lift, was accosted by the actor, John Toverly. 'Look here, Jim.'

'Yes.'

'This murder. I—well, gosh, I don't like it, Jim. Do you realize

that the police seem to regard me as a suspect, merely because my room has a window on that damn' terrace! They won't let me leave. I'm due in New York on Monday of next week. I've got to be there for rehearsals.'

'I thought you were going to stay another two weeks.'

'Yes, I was. But I just had word from my manager. I've got to go. I can't hang around here until this thing is settled. It may be weeks. Say a good word for me, will you, Jim?'

'Von Holzen wouldn't much like your leaving just now. You are his alibi.'

John Tovery ran expressive hands through his fine and beautifully waved dark hair. 'If I had known I was going to be anybody's alibi I'd have kept my mouth shut', he said. 'Do help me out.'

'There's nothing I can do. However, I don't imagine they'll keep you here long.'

Out of the corner of his eyes he perceived the chef waiting at the door leading from the main hall into the kitchen passage. The chef was standing perfectly immobile but his eyes were fixed on Jim, and Jim knew the chef, Jean, wanted to speak to him. He disengaged himself from Tovery. 'I'll do my best.'

'But you—' Tovery stopped and listened. 'Hey, what's that?'

An eerie, rhythmic sound of drums, beating in a curiously quick and stirring tempo, was

growing out of the dark night somewhere at a distance. The drumbeats thudded in the air like an intangible pulse and grew more distinct rapidly, and all at once you heard, besides, and high above the beat of the drums, shrill, confused whistles and the rattle of horses' hoofs and wheels going at a furious pace.

'What, under heaven—?'

'Gombies. It hasn't rained for a while, and they're praying all over the island for rains. Holding ceremonies.'

The drums came quickly nearer. Obviously, the centre of the tumult was rapidly moving past the hotel and along the white, moonlit road beyond. Drums, whistles, shouts, the rattle of the omnibus, the sounds of voices, the thud and patter of feet running after the horse-pulled vehicle.

'Aren't they dangerous?'

'No. It's all right. The police watch them. They hold their ceremonies and then go home.'

'Gombies, did you say?'

'So they call themselves. It's some obscure, mysterious relation, I imagine, to the African Zombi—that is, the living dead. If you want to see them you'll have to hurry; they'll soon be out of sight.'

The actor hesitated, looked at Jim, and then hurried out on to the veranda.

The chef still waited. Jim approached him.

'Well? . . . Why, Jean, what's wrong?' He saw, on closer view, that the chef was very pale.

Jean whispered. 'The knife. Another knife. It's gone. And I saw her in the kitchen passage.'

Jim glanced quickly about. No one was within earshot. 'What do you mean?'

'Another knife has been taken. I counted this morning when the police inquired. There were eleven altogether. Now there are ten. And I saw her.'

'Saw who?'

'The woman. The fat woman with the German name. In the terrace wing—'

'Do you mean Mrs. von Holzen?'

'Yes! Yes, that's the woman. She was hurrying away when I came in the kitchen.'

'When?'

'About fifteen minutes ago. I had gone to the kitchen to see that all was closed for the night. After I saw her I looked around my kitchen and I—the knife is gone, sir.'

A kind of constriction closed upon Jim's heart. 'All right. Thanks, Jean.'

The chef gave him an uneasy, irresolute look and scurried out of sight.

The clerk sprang to attention. 'Yes, sir.'

'Is Louise still with Mrs. Blake?'

'Yes, sir.'

Jim hesitated. The police were in the living-room of 21 and a telephone was in 21. The sens-

ible thing, of course, was to tell the police—well, tell them what? That the chef was frightened. That he'd counted the kitchen knives and said one was missing. That he'd seen a woman he believed to be Mrs. von Holzen, scurrying away.

He decided not to telephone to them. And the boy at the desk leaned forward.

'Mr. Smith. I heard that the only people in the hotel who were acquainted with the man that was murdered were, of course, his wife and the lawyer, Pusey.'

'So I understand. Why?'

'Well, that's wrong, sir. Mr. Blake knew Von Holzen.'

'What's that?'

'I saw them meet. Here in the lobby, right in front of the desk. They spoke—'

'What did they say?'

'Well, not much, I guess. Didn't seem very friendly. Called each other by their first names, though.'

'Did you tell the police?'

'No, sir. I didn't think of it until after they had questioned us.'

'All right. I'll telephone Willaker.'

Jim took the lift upstairs, walked briskly to the living-room of Suite 21, and knocked.

Two minutes later he was walking a little less briskly toward the lift again, having been denied an audience with Lana Blake. 'Inspector Willaker's or-

ders', said one of the two policemen. 'He said only her lawyer could see her.'

Jim could accept it. 'I'd better tell you', he said, 'that my chef believes there's another knife missing from the kitchen.'

The two policemen looked at each other and back at Jim. 'Is he sure?'

'So he says.'

The policeman acting as spokesman looked a bit sceptical.

'Well—I don't imagine there'll be any trouble. Not with us here. Maybe that knife's been lost for months. Maybe it isn't lost.'

'But—'

'Don't worry, Mr. Smith. I'll tell the inspector about it in the morning.'

There was nothing to do but retreat, leaving the two policemen to their interrupted game of cribbage at the little table with its checked cloth.

Jim passed the door to 20, John Tover's room, and, rather to his surprise, saw a light in the crack of the closed transom. Tover had come upstairs, then, almost immediately after the Gombies had passed the hotel. The door to 19 was closed, too. The picture of Adelaide von Holzen stealing surreptitiously out of the kitchen wing with a knife in her hand was, now that he was removed from the chef's convincing earnestness, patently absurd. He recalled her bland, middle-aged *hausfrau's* face. Yet

Blake had known Von Holzen.

He passed the door of 18, stopped, and cautiously opened the door of 18. It was dark inside. There was no movement in the room. His namesake in all probability was sleeping off the effects of four days of uninterrupted bar orders.

Jim listened, and then tiptoed quietly across the room; the screen, which opened on a hinge, was already unhooked; he opened it carefully. The bed was in a mass of shadow in one corner and there was no motion or voice. He closed the screen gently and was on the terrace.

It was yet in deep shadow; later it would be flooded with moonlight. Upon the flat, black floor lay areas of light from the window of Tover's room, the living-room of 21, and (less well defined, for the shades were drawn) from Pusey's room at the south end of the terrace. By going along the balustrade he skirted the rectangles of light, and a moment later reached the black windows of Lana Blake's room and, mindful of police in the next room, scratched lightly on the screen.

There was a movement in the room. Someone approached the window cautiously and tiptoed away again, and there was a murmured colloquy.

'Mr. Smith—' It was Lana herself. 'Louise said it was you.'

'Can you come out on the terrace?'

The screen clicked a little and opened. She was a slender, shadowy figure, dressed in something soft and silky.

'This way', he said, and guided her into the area of deep shadow at the end of the terrace. They leaned against the balustrade. No one was about. He caught himself watching the shadows and was annoyed to discover a small sense of danger tweaking at his nerves.

'No one can hear', he said, 'if we talk low.'

'You were right about the—the knife', she said. 'Thank you. I didn't know how difficult—how horrible it was going to be.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Louise stayed with me all day—at your orders, I suppose. It's good of you. Mrs. von Holzen came and asked the police if she could stay with me to-night. They refused, but I thought it was awfully kind.'

Mrs. von Holzen! He said, 'Look here. Why did you ask me for a key?'

'Peter told me to get one.'

'But why did he want a key? You said, 'It isn't a torch.'

She hesitated and then spoke: 'Yes, there was a special reason. Peter had some work with him; there is a new process he was perfecting, and he brought all the papers along with him in a brief case.'

'Did you get the key?'

'Yes, It's in the door now, I think. Or was. But I had un-

locked the door to the living-room this morning in order to let the waiter bring the breakfast trays into the suite.'

'Where is the brief case containing the papers?'

'It's in my room. Peter had left it there because he wanted me to copy some notes he had made. I—was his secretary, you know, before he married me.' Her voice faltered. 'He was so good. So kind. He had a temper, but he always controlled it. He had no enemies. It's so cruel—'

'Don't.' She was trembling; he could sense it.

'He was good to me. No one was ever so good to me.' She was crying softly.

He put his arms around her lightly and thought she was scarcely aware of it. Presently she stopped crying and wiped her eyes.

'Do you know what this process Blake was perfecting consisted of?' Jim asked.

'Oh, yes. He told me. I was the only person who knew anything of it, I think. Unless he told Sandy.'

'Sandy? That's his nephew?'

'Yes.'

'You know him, of course.'

'No. I've seen him only once. He came into the office once before I was married; I don't think he saw me. He didn't come to our wedding. Peter loved Sandy dearly. He wanted us to be friends.'

She didn't know then that

Peter had quarrelled with his nephew, or why.

'About the process—'

'Oh, yes. Well, it was nothing Peter could ever use, you see. He was only doing it in order to take out patents himself on it, and thus prevent anyone else (who might have the same idea) from using it.'

'Why couldn't he use it? Was it something about gold smelting?'

'Yes, of course. He couldn't use it, because it was a new way to refine gold—a chemical process which was very cheap and readily available, and would have put Peter out of business altogether. You see, a long time ago, he invented a gold-smelting process, and then invented and manufactured the machinery for that process, and leases the machinery—'

'Yes, I know. So this new process would have put him out of business.'

'Yes, of course. Oh, he could have patented it and sold it for a big sum of money, but the factory and business he had already established would have been a total loss, as well as the income from leasing his machinery. It's—a little ironical, I suppose—to discover such a process, I mean, and then in order to protect yourself be obliged to bottle it up.'

'It isn't unusual', said Jim slowly. 'It happens fairly frequently with big manufacturing concerns. He thought this new

process was cheap and successful?'

'Oh, yes; he knew it was.'

'And you—you still have the papers in your room?'

'Yes. Isn't it safe? I mean—' She leaned forward. 'Do you think that was a motive for his murder?'

'You say he had no enemies.'

'And he had none. But there is no one here who would know—'

'Did he know this Von Holzen?'

'I don't know.'

'Did Pusey know of this new process?'

'No. He said he'd never heard of it until I told him this morning.'

'Did he offer to keep the papers for you?'

'No.'

'Look here. Do you want me to put them in the safe?'

'Why—why, yes. If you think—'

'I think it's just as well.'

'I'll get the brief case.'

She vanished into the rim of shadow and presently was briefly and dimly silhouetted against the light from 21.

He wanted to light a cigarette, and stopped in the act, lest the little flame betray his presence on the terrace. The night was no longer clear. Clouds had gradually obscured the moon. He could barely discern along the terrace solid shapes of deeper black that were occasional chairs and tables and the umbrella,

closed and thus tall and slender like a man; it ought to have been in for the night as usual, he thought absently.

He turned and leaned his elbows upon the balustrade and waited. Lana ought to be returning. The thick, dark night was laden with scent—salt water and flower fragrances mingled. Vague shapes loomed out of the shadows below.

Lana ought to have returned.

Struck, by the notion that a very long time had elapsed, he turned abruptly. The area of light from the living-room of the suite still lay flat and empty upon the terrace floor. No one moved. Nothing had changed. Except, the umbrella had moved. Its vague, dark shape was at least three feet nearer the wall of the building than it had been. And it was moving again.

It was moving again, and it wasn't the umbrella, for now he saw the umbrella's dark silhouette remained stiff and straight beside the balustrade.

And it wasn't Lana.

Instinct alone told him that. The shadow outlined itself for an instant against the path of light fifty feet away. It was a fleeting glimpse; but certain. Someone—a man—was on the terrace and was moving stealthily toward Pusey's window.

Jim started forward, and then drew back again. Better watch and make certain. He could always shout and attract the

attention of the police in 21.

There was, except for the murmuring water below, utter silence. Then quite suddenly there was the slight scuffle of a footstep, and a shadow outlined itself definitely against Pusey's lighted window. A shadow that hesitated. And then Jim heard a rasp of fingers against the screen. He said, 'What are you doing there?'

But he was not prepared for what happened. For the shadow jerked away from the window, was momentarily lost in the darkness all about, and then became solid muscle which hurled itself upon him. He clutched, tried to get a grip, and missed, and a fist shot hard at his chin, and Jim quietly and neatly sat down, bumping his head hard against the balustrade. There was a soft patter of footsteps and then utter silence.

He rubbed his chin and swore under his breath. For his fingers had encountered the smooth, cool leather of a brief case.

And his assailant had gone as unexpectedly and much more swiftly than he had come. But he had given up his attempt to break into Pusey's room. That was certain. Jim got to his feet and ran along the terrace. He passed Lana's darkened window and stopped at the door of 21. To his intense astonishment, the policemen were not there. The table was bare; the cribbage board and cards were strewn

on the floor, and the room was bare of human presence.

Lana's window was beside him. He pulled at the screen and it opened. The room was dark, and he stepped over the sill quickly and whispered, 'Lana! Lana!'

No one answered.

It was very still and very black. He took a step into the room, and another, and trod on something inert and soft.

He stumbled—knelt—groping into the blackness at his feet.

He had an instant of cold panic. And then his hands encountered the crisply starched folds of a maid's uniform. It was Louise. It must be Louise. He spoke to her softly, and she did not answer, but she was breathing.

He turned on the light. By its soft glow he saw that the room had been ransacked and that Lana was not there. Louise lay in a huddle near the window. He bent over her again. He thought she must have been struck.

There was an adjoining bathroom, empty, for the door was open, and a long, narrow clothes closet. Obviously Lana was not in the room, but nevertheless he went to the closet. Rows of gowns hanging like fragile, fragrant ghosts confronted him. He stepped inside in order to thrust aside the soft folds, bent, groping among them, and all at once heard a small, cautious motion behind him in the bed-

room, and whirled around, and was too late.

Darkness came upon him and the door was closed and fastened. Probably by a chair under the knob, for when he hurled himself against it it did not budge an inch.

He was capable of sudden, tempestuous rages and one overtook him now. He'd be damned if he'd let anyone bottle him up in a closet in his own hotel. He'd be—a chill, little wind seemed to cut through his anger. What was going on out there? He must get out of that closet.

The door was stubborn against his repeated onslaughts, and in the end it was Louise who released him. She looked and probably felt dizzy and was very wild-eyed.

She put her hand to a rapidly swelling temple and asked him as he emerged why he hit her.

'I didn't. What happened? Where's Mrs. Blake?'

Louise moaned and sank into a jabbering heap on the bed. She didn't know. She didn't know anything at all.

He questioned her swiftly. She'd been sitting beside the window waiting for Mrs. Blake to return. Maybe she dozed. The first thing she knew something came out of the dark and struck her, and that was all.

'Where are the police?'

She shook her head. She'd heard them talking over the telephone just before she dozed

off. She'd heard a door close somewhere, too.

'What door?'

She didn't know. It might have been the window. And she didn't know who had silently entered the room after Jim and closed the door into the closet and propped a chair under the knob. She didn't know anything except that her head hurt.

'Can you get to your room?'

'Yes, sir.'

Jim went with her through the living-room of the suite, still oddly empty of police, and watched her wavering progress as far as the lift. Then he went back to the living-room of 21 and got the desk clerk on the telephone.

'Where are the police?'

'They went out. Had a telephone call from outside—'

'Well, what was it?' demanded Jim impatiently, brushing aside the fiction that the desk clerk who handled the switch-board at night wouldn't know.

'Gombies, sir. It was a bad connection, but I heard enough. Willaker heard there was going to be some trouble, and sent the two police who were here because they were nearest.'

Jim swore. 'How long ago?'

'Eleven-forty exactly, sir. It's now twelve-forty-one.'

'Get Willaker. Tell him—there's trouble here. Have you seen Mrs. Blake?'

'No, sir.'

'Never mind. Call Willaker.

Tell him I told you to tell him to hurry.'

He put down the telephone. Odd that the racket he'd made had not waked the hotel. But perhaps not so odd, because the suite above was empty and the rooms on the back of the terrace wing were undesirable and hot, and tenanted only when the hotel was full.

He turned, and Ernest Pusey, in a dressing gown, stood on the threshold.

'What is all the noise about? Has anything happened?' His eyes took in the room and he said, 'Where are the police?'

'Have you seen Mrs. Blake?'

'Mrs. Blake! Heavens, no! I've been in bed.'

'Asleep?' asked Jim, thinking of his lighted window.

'Reading. I was just going to sleep when somebody dropped a number of bricks in Lana's room.'

'It wasn't bricks', said Jim, and told him briefly what had happened.

'Good Lord!' said Pusey, going white. 'Who was the man who attacked you?'

'I tell you I don't know who the fellow was, except he's got good biceps. I've just called the police. Those who were here were very stupidly called away by their superior. But it'll be an hour before the police can get here, and in the meantime anything can happen to Lana.'

'Yes, certainly. We must find

Lana at once. I suppose the search leads first to the rooms in this wing and—' Pusey strode to the Von Holzen door and knocked.

Von Holzen himself, in pyjamas, opened the door and blinked.

'There's been a little trouble in the hotel', began Pusey smoothly. 'Mr. Smith is obliged to ask to search the guests' rooms—' He broke off suddenly, adjusted his eyeglasses, and peered at the face of the man in the doorway, and said, 'Ah—so you are Von Holzen!'

'What d'you mean? Of course I'm Von Holzen', began Von Holzen, blustering a little.

'You know what I mean', said Pusey. 'I take it you didn't tell the police of your connection with Mr. Blake.'

'I had no connection with Mr. Blake. I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Don't be a fool. You may as well admit it. I never forget a face. I was in Blake's outer office one day three years ago when you came in, and Blake refused to see you. I never knew your name, but I know your face and I know why you were trying to make trouble, because he told me.'

'You're crazy—'

Pusey turned to Jim:

'This man was once president of the Consolidated Ore Company. He was at that time a competitor of Mr. Blake's. He

failed, and blamed Peter for it, and wrote some threatening letters and tried to see him a few times.' He turned to Von Holzen. 'I'd have recognized you this morning when the police were here if you hadn't taken care not to let me have a good look at you.'

'Listen, Pusey. I'm telling you the truth. It is sheer, unlucky coincidence—our being here. I'd forgotten my quarrel with Blake long ago. I'm in no sense a competitor of his now. Do you have to tell the police—?'

'Fritz—'

Adelaide von Holzen, her hair dishevelled, a robe caught around her, and her plump face distraught, was at Von Holzen's side. 'Fritz, I told you you ought to tell them. You had nothing to do with Peter Blake's murder. My husband is perfectly innocent—as innocent as I, myself. What motive—what possible motive—?'

Jim interrupted: 'Mrs. von Holzen—were you near the kitchen wing to-night?'

She said, 'No—Yes. Yes, I asked one of the kitchen boys for some baking soda. Fritz has nervous indigestion and he's been so worried. It's—it's only a coincidence—our being here. It's—'

Jim interrupted again: 'Can't we thrash this out later, Pusey? Lana—'

'Yes, of course. If Mr. Smith may search your room—'

'What for? If you think you can

implicate me in this thing—' began Von Holzen truculently.

His wife, weeping, watched a search which was as rapid as it was futile. As they turned toward the corridor again Adelaide von Holzen grasped Pusey's arm pleadingly. 'Must you tell the police?'

'You ought to have told the truth in the first place. They'll find out for themselves', said Pusey, and knocked at Tovery's door.

Lana was not in that room, either, and Tovery, roused from sleep, was indignant.

'I came here for rest', he said glaring at Jim. 'Not to step into the position of a prime suspect in a murder investigation. My advice to you both is to leave this to the police and let innocent people alone. If you must pry, look in the next room.'

'Eighteen? Why?' demanded Jim.

'Why?' said Tovery. 'Because he's wearing a black wig, that's why.'

The two men in the corridor looked at each other a little blankly.

'What does he mean, a wig?'

'Just that, likely', said Jim. He looked at Pusey thoughtfully. 'Did you see the man in 18?'

'No. I understood he was dead drunk and couldn't be roused. What about him?'

'I think', said Jim slowly, 'it's Sandy. And I think he's the man with the brief case.'

'Sandy! Sandy Blake! Impossible.'

Jim shrugged. 'Perhaps.' He knocked at the door of 18.

'But Sandy—' gasped Pusey.

Jim opened the door of 18 and snapped on the light. The bed was tumbled; there were the usual empty glasses on the table, and no one was in the room.

'It can't be Sandy Blake', said the lawyer.

'All right', said Jim. 'Maybe it isn't. This fellow's got dead black hair and Tovery spotted it as a wig. Since he's arrived he's kept completely out of sight—sending a constant stream of orders to the bar and yet never getting drunk. Probably the drinks went down the drain. What colour's Sandy's hair?'

'Red.'

'Well—a fellow with black hair, registered as James Smith, and staying in his room on a bender, wouldn't sound, by the description, like Sandy, would it?'

'I suppose you're right.'

'Then what's he done with Lana?'

Pusey's face was grey and deeply troubled. 'He'd be the heir', he said. 'If Peter was murdered before he had time to make a new will. And it was no secret at Peter's office why I was coming down here . . . Where are you going?'

'To the terrace—'

Pusey said slowly and reluctantly, 'If it is Sandy—if he did get past Von Holzen on the ter-

race and murder Peter Blake, and Lana—Lana knew it, you see, both of them stand to profit.'

'You mean they could be together on this thing? But she said she didn't know him—Sandy!'

'Didn't know him!' Pusey looked startled. 'Did she say that?'

'Yes.'

'I see. Well, I suppose it may be true. There would be no special point in her denying it if she does know him. We'd better continue our search. I feel sure they are not escaping together. I do not for a moment credit my own suggestion; it was forced upon me. Please forget it. I think, really, that they are both innocent.'

Triple fool, thought Jim wryly to himself. To be taken in by a pair of shining, deep grey eyes and a lovely face. And yet, stubbornly, he believed in her.

'Von Holzen', he said aloud, 'could so easily have murdered Blake. He was there on the terrace all the time.'

Pusey gave the suggestion a moment of thought and agreed.

'To very might have failed to observe Von Holzen leaving his chair. And grudges have been cherished as long as this. Or Von Holzen might have had a stronger motive than a long-ago hatred.'

The new process was what he meant, of course. He thought Jim didn't know. But then, that would be a motive for Sandy, too. And where was Sandy? Odd

how strong and certain was his conviction that the man in 18 was actually Sandy Blake.

'You stay here', he said to Pusey. 'If the man calling himself James Smith comes back, nab him. Make sure whether or not it's Sandy and whether or not he has a brief-case belonging to Peter Blake.'

'Where are you going?'

'To look for Lana.'

He let himself into the corridor again, and paused. A search for Lana resolved itself simply into a room-to-room search. Continuing naturally, as he had already started, with that particular wing. There were still those untenanted and undesirable bedrooms along the back of the wing; the corridor that night had not been under observation as it had been at the time the murder occurred. Therefore anybody could have crossed it to take advantage of the varied hiding-places offered by those empty, small rooms.

There were seven of them, each with an adjoining bath. He started at the end nearest the lift and opposite Room 18 and covered them swiftly; it didn't take long; the rooms were brightly, starkly empty of human occupancy. It was a simple and quick procedure which involved only a glance at each.

Until he came to a door about midway along the corridor. He went through the same procedure. He opened the door, snap-

ped on the light, glanced about—and stopped, unbelieving and frightened. For a long, shining kitchen knife lay on the bureau.

His heart got up into his throat and his shoulder blades prickled. The knife had no place in that room. It couldn't have been taken there and left by accident.

A little gingerly he picked up the knife and went to the corridor. And, as he did so, somewhere along that dimly lighted hall a door closed softly.

He heard it distinctly, for the hotel was as silent as a house of the dead. But in the corridor he had no way of knowing what door it was. A row of blank, closed panels confronted him.

Holding the knife under his coat, he concluded his rapid survey of the unoccupied rooms at the back of the wing. He closed the last one, opposite Pusey's room, and wiped his wet forehead. It hadn't been easy, looking in those rooms with that knife at hand and knowing what he might find.

Now what? He hesitated. There was still the darkened terrace; he'd been so sure it was empty. Yet, after all, it was on the terrace that he'd last seen Lana. Perhaps by now she had returned and was waiting for him.

Pusey's room offered the quickest exit to the terrace. He opened the door and entered. The light burned over the bed and no one was in the room. He started toward the window, unpleas-

antly conscious of the knife under his coat . . . And someone moved outside the window.

Jim jerked backward and took up a position at one side of the window. He wished he'd had time to turn off the light. But he couldn't do so now, for the screen was being opened, and a man crept cautiously through the aperture and stood looking about him, his back to Jim. And it was the man calling himself James Smith. His hair was startlingly black. And he carried a leather brief case under his arm.

What did one say at such a time?

'Hands up', said Jim, reverting to childhood games with a feeling of incredulity.

The man whirled and put up his hands, and the brief case dropped.

'What—who are you?' he said coolly enough after staring at Jim for a moment. He glanced at the fallen brief case and started to lower his hands.

'Keep 'em up there.' Jim's hand was under his coat. He said, with truth, 'I have a weapon here. Move over there, across the room. Sit on the bed.'

The man from Room 18 hesitated and finally did so, backing cautiously away. The leather case lay on the floor. Above it the two James Smiths stared at each other.

James Smith, the second, was a young fellow. He had the kind of very pale blue eyes that go

sometimes with red hair. Just now his face was sullen.

Jim said, 'Take off your wig.'

'My—say, who are you?'

'Take it off. Hurry.'

Jim made what he trusted was a threatening gesture. James Smith, the second, looked still more sullen, and finally reached up and yanked off an extremely luxuriant black wig. Red hair, damp and dishevelled, lay below where the wig had been.

'You're Sandy Blake', said Jim.

'Not much use my denying it, I fancy.'

'Not in the least. Why didn't you come out and admit your identity this morning? The police will know to-morrow, anyway; by that time they'll have had answers to their cabled inquiries.'

Sandy Blake's eyes narrowed. 'What's it to you?'

'I'm the owner of this hotel; you came here under a false name. I've caught you making a burglarious entrance into a guest's room—'

'Pusey?' Blake eyed him for a moment and then said, 'Look here. Pusey's my lawyer. I came for—for advice.'

'Surreptitiously. As you came to my hotel.'

'No, I—okay, I'll tell you the truth', said Blake, eyeing Jim. 'I came to Bermuda because I wanted to—to see my uncle. I knew he was going to be here.'

'Apparently you didn't want him to see you.'

'I didn't. Not, at least, until I had satisfied myself about this—this marriage. After all when an elderly man—'

'Fifty—if you mean Peter Blake—'

'—Marries his pretty secretary after six weeks' acquaintance, don't you think it's the—er—duty of his nearest relative to do something about it?'

'What did you propose to do?'

'It's none of your business.' He changed suddenly and became communicative: 'Look. I know I've got into a mess. I wanted to ask Pusey what to do.'

'Are you trying to make me believe that your coming here was inspired by sheer affection for your uncle?'

Blake nodded quickly. 'Yes. Yes, that's exactly it. It was an impulse. I thought if I could see them together, without their knowing I was here, I could tell whether she was really—fond of him. Whether or not he was happy. If she was sincere and he was happy, it was all right. It was fine. But I wanted to be sure.'

'I suppose you're going to tell me next you were bringing this brief case to Pusey to ask him what to do about it—after you knocked out the maid and searched Mrs. Blake's room and barricaded me in the closet.'

Blake's wary eyes became more guarded, as if a shutter had dropped down. 'That's—that's exactly what I was doing. Bringing it to Pusey. Certainly.'

l—I thought it would be safe. And naturally I—I wanted legal advice before—’

‘Before the police got on to you. Where is Lana?’

The look in Blake’s pale blue eyes instantly became sheer, cold hatred. ‘I don’t know and I don’t care, and you won’t get another word out of me.’

Jim touched his chin meditatively. Then he bent cautiously, eyes on Blake, and picked up the brief case.

‘What are you doing? This is no concern of yours. Where are you going?’

‘To the telephone. I wouldn’t move if I were you.’ Jim felt nervously behind him for the telephone.

Blake edged forward a little, looking tense and white. ‘I didn’t murder him. If you’re going to call the police—’

Jim got the telephone in his hand and a voice said instantly, ‘Desk clerk—’

‘Come up here to Room 22. Quick’, said Jim into the telephone, and as he said it Blake sprang. Jim dropped the telephone and Blake jerked the screen aside and was out on the terrace and was gone. But Jim still had the brief case. And he still had the knife.

He checked himself on the verge of pursuit. First, get that brief case safely put away. And put the knife where it could do no harm. He opened the brief case, thrust the knife into folds of pa-

pers, and closed it again. His own finger-prints would be on it but there might be others, too. He met the boy at the lift.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Here.’ Jim glanced along the corridor and whispered. ‘Take this down to the safe. Don’t let anybody see you—’

‘Yes, sir.’ The boy took it quickly and, impressed by Jim’s manner, thrust it under his coat.

‘And listen. I need help. Call Mark and Luzo to help, and tell Tom to take the desk and switchboard. Then get my revolver out of my right-hand desk drawer and get some torches and come back here. I may be on the terrace. Step on it.’

The boy closed the lift door. Jim ran lightly back into Pusey’s room. He would have preferred to see the brief case and knife in the safe, himself. But he didn’t dare leave Sandy Blake at large. Sandy Blake, who had the only sound motive for murdering Peter Blake (if you except revenge on Von Holzen’s part as a motive) that they had yet uncovered. Sandy Blake, who had quarrelled with his uncle and who stood to lose a considerable sum of money when the new will was drawn and signed. Well, now that will would never be made. Sandy Blake, who must have known that the brief case held papers of value.

Was it Blake who had taken that knife from the kitchen and placed it in the unoccupied

room—thinking it would be safe there until it was needed?

Blake hated Lana, and had been unable to disguise it. No, Jim didn't dare leave him at large. However, he couldn't go far. And the brief case was safe. But where was Lana?

He went through the window of Pusey's room on to the terrace. The whole sky was heavily overcast with clouds, so it was as if a pitch-black blanket closed upon him.

With a stubborn hope that Lana might have returned to the end of the terrace where they had talked (an hour ago, now), he felt his way in that direction. He found the balustrade unexpectedly by bringing up sharp against it, and called softly, 'Lana—Lana'.

Well, she wasn't there. She wasn't anywhere in the wing. And so much can happen in an hour. He began to feel as if he were caught in the endless, peculiarly baffling gyrations of a nightmare. Even the failure of the police and of his hotel staff to materialize was a recognizable quotient of nightmare. He listened to the water below but could not see it, and he thought how shallow the lagoon was just below the terrace.

But she'd have screamed! Surely she'd have screamed or made some outcry if anyone had molested her.

It must be, by that time, after
●ne. The ●nly thing left to do

was to get lights and make an organized search of the whole place. And by this time the boys ought to have reached the second floor—the boys and his revolver. He went through Pusey's room again, along a still corridor and rang for the lift. There was no answering rumble, and he rang again.

Impatiently, feeling that everything in his hotel had set itself for his own bafflement, he ran down the branching corridor through the main body of the hotel and down a twisting flight of stairs to the lobby.

He stopped short. The lobby was entirely empty; no one was at the desk. No one was on the lift bench, and the lift was not, as it was as a rule, standing idle with its door open.

The emptiness and silence were ominous. He turned, ran up the stairs again, convinced that the desk clerk had never reached the safe with the brief case and the knife. He reached the lift and jerked the door open. The lift was lighted and the boy lay in a huddled heap on the bottom of the cage, and there was no brief case anywhere.

But the silence was gone. For there was somewhere a trembling and agitation of the air which grew into a deep, muffled beat. It grew louder, and Jim recognized it. The Gombies had finished their brief ceremonies and were returning along the same route. Then the two police sent

by Willaker to watch the Gombies would be returning, too—or so he hoped.

He felt the boy's head and pulse. He was only stunned, as Louise had been stunned. Blake had swift and hard fists. And he wouldn't give up the brief case without a struggle.

The beat of the drums was confusing. It seemed to fill the air, to hover just over your heartbeats, to suck you into its own quick rhythm.

Jim considered. He'd better try to carry the boy out of harm's way, but he—

Another sound rose in the air, piercing the waves of drumbeats. A shrill, high sound that rose horribly to the very roofs of the old hotel, sobbed and swelled shrilly and stopped at its very height.

It was a woman's scream.

It was not far from him. Shrill and high with terror though it was, in all probability no one in the hotel beyond that wing heard it; if they did and awoke, the sound was submerged instantly by the tumult of whistles and drums and horses' hoofs which was reaching its peak along the road behind the hotel.

And, oddly, in the very moment of hearing it, Jim knew it was not Lana. It wasn't because he instinctively felt that she couldn't—wouldn't—scream. It wasn't because of any recognizable timbre in that strained pitch of stark terror.

But it wasn't Lana. And it was somewhere in the wing; therefore it must be Mrs. von Holzen. He ran into the corridor.

It was. The door to 19 flew open and Adelaide von Holzen surged out, her dressing gown swirling around her. She saw Jim and clutched at him with shaking hands.

'Addie, for heaven's sake—!' It was Von Holzen himself, flinging himself out from 19 also and grasping his wife's heaving shoulders. 'What happened? What's the matter?' Her eyes bulged and she tried to speak and couldn't, and Von Holzen shook her briskly. 'Now speak up. What's wrong?'

'A man', she gasped, her head jerking under her husband's somewhat strenuous propulsion. 'With a knife. On the terrace. I saw him—'

'You're dreaming. She's had a nightmare, Mr. Smith. Don't pay any attention to her.'

His wife turned the colour of milk and put shaking hands on Jim's arm. 'I did see him. It wasn't a nightmare. I was upset about Fritz's being recognized. I couldn't sleep, and I got up quietly, so Fritz in the other bed wouldn't hear me, and went to the window. And there was a man with a knife—'

'It was dark', cried Von Holzen. 'You couldn't see a man with a trunk, let alone a knife—'

'I had my little torch. The one I keep on the bed table when

I'm travelling. I had it in my hand and it flashed over him and—'

Jim detached himself from her grasping fingers and, halfway through the door of 19, jerked back. 'Who was it? Quick!'

'I don't know. I only saw the knife. Long and sharp. The light shone on it and—'

He left them. Two strides took him through 19 and he jerked open the screen over one of the windows. Blackness and the eerie retreating throb of drums fell upon him. The nearest window beyond led to the bedroom of Suite 21, in which Peter Blake had been murdered.

It gave him the queerest shock to realize suddenly that, searching the wing as he had, still he'd missed that room. How? There was no time to think. He felt along the wall, listening for a sound near at hand. Here was the screen. But it was in the wrong place—it was standing directly before him. It was standing open, of course.

He swung around it and the long rectangle of the window made a deeper patch of blackness before him. There was no sound at all inside the room. He stepped cautiously over the sill and stepped on something small and hard that clattered along the floor and was a knife. He bent, groping, and found it.

He plunged into the blackness of the room, heard no sound at all except the great pounding

of his own heart, and halted smartly by a chair. Where was the electric switch? By the door, of course. He made himself pause and reflect and grope for the wall and follow the cool touch of painted plaster to the panels of the door, and then explore up and down.

He found the switch, and bright, hard light flooded the room.

And there was nothing and no one there. No one, except—a closet door was barely open. A small foot and a wisp of silk showed in the slight aperture.

It was Lana. And if he had been any kind of a detective, he'd have guessed what had happened. Lana was huddled on the floor of the closet, half sitting, half lying, wholly helpless, because a checked tablecloth was wound around her head and her arms and tied at the back. A towel was stuffed in her mouth and another very efficiently secured her ankles.

'Lana—'

But she was alive and uninjured. He untied the cloth and jerked away the towels and lifted the girl in his arms; and then others reached the room.

'Are you hurt?'

'No.' She said it wearily, as if the word came from some great distance, and looked with great, dazed dark eyes at the people crowding into the room, and all at once her inert body tautened in his arms and she lifted her

head from his shoulder and gasped, 'Sandy—Sandy Blake.'

Jim looked up.

The Von Holzens were there, very much in dishabille; Pusey and Sandy Blake were in the doorway, Sandy staring with cold, pale eyes at Lana.

'My dear child!' cried Pusey. 'What on earth—how did you find her—?'

'Sandy Blake', said Lana again.

'My poor child', said Adelaide von Holzen, advancing. 'Let me take her, Mr. Smith. What happened, dear?'

She put out her arms and Lana pressed a little closer against Jim; her eyes looked enormous in her white face, and she watched Sandy Blake.

'Why did you come here?' she demanded. 'What have you done—?'

John Tovery, his hair smooth and wavy, himself clad in a handsome dressing gown, strolled through the door and stopped just behind Pusey and Sandy Blake. 'Good grief!' he said, eyeing the dishevelled group. 'More murder? Or is it a love scene?'

No one seemed to hear him. Fritz von Holzen's shrewd eyes were like little jewels peering behind his glasses. Jim could just see his wrist-watch across Lana's small shoulder and it said twenty minutes after one. If he could hold the fort another twenty minutes the police would be there. One of those people had

murdered Peter Blake—cold-bloodedly, brutally; and one of them, without any reasonable doubt, had tried to murder the girl in his arms.

He'd got to keep them together. And he'd got to hear Lana's story. She must know who had attacked her, who had flung that tablecloth over her head and arms and dragged her into that closet, and then—why?—had gone away, intending to return. He must get Lana alone.

He said, 'I'll take you to your room. Will you others stay here, please.'

He couldn't count on it, of course. And he had to make them stay together. He didn't dare let any of them leave before the police came. A knife was silent and thus more desirable, but it was perfectly possible that the murderer was also armed with a gun. Not so silent, but swift.

He urged Lana toward the door. The living-room was still empty and the cards and cribbage pegs flung on the floor. If he hadn't been an idiot he would have noted the significance of those tossed cards and pegs; it meant that someone had snatched off the table cover. Letting Blake go was another blunder.

Sandy Blake, still looking at Lana with that look of distilled hatred, stood aside to permit her to pass out the door.

Jim paused. 'Suppose you all come into the living-room; there

are chairs here. You'll have to wait—'

'Wait!' cried Tovery. 'What do you mean? What for?'

How to keep them together? Jim, as always, found the truth less of an effort than any other course. 'Because one of you murdered Peter Blake. Because one of you tried to murder—Lana. And because the police are on their way and you've got to stay in this room together until they arrive.'

Would they do it? Probably not. Jim wore authority like a cloak but he couldn't force them to wait. He added thoughtfully, 'I am assuming, as you are, that of the five people here, four must be innocent of murder. Therefore, I ask those four to— to cooperate—'

Tovery burst out, 'Don't be an idiot, Jim! I'm not going to stay here and get mixed up any further with this thing. The police questioned every one of us this morning. If they had anything against any one of us they would have held him for further questioning. They'd have arrested him. You can't go around saying one of—of us murdered Blake. That's criminal—well, libel or something—'

'All right', said Jim. 'I'll put it this way. If one of you leaves this room, you'll have me to reckon with.' He was about to say more but observed in time that there was a cryptic lack of explanation as to his meaning that

caught their attention and held it. He could almost read the successive speculations in Tovery's handsome eyes. Had Jim a revolver? Had he a hotel staff armed and ready to back him up? Did he mean only his not inconsiderable strength of muscle? In any case Tovery drew back a little. He said, 'Now, don't get all worked up about this, Smith. Don't do anything rash. I've got my looks to consider, you know. After all, an actor—'

Pusey said dryly, 'He'll stay here, Jim. Take her into her bedroom. Don't worry, Lana—'

'Take her into the bedroom! Don't worry, Lana', burst out Sandy Blake. 'Take care of the little helpless dear—she's only killed her husband—!'

'Shut up!' said Jim, and led Lana into her bedroom. Once out of sight of the others he put his lips to her ear. 'Tell me quickly. Who took you in there?'

'I don't know. I—did one of them kill him?'

'What happened after you left me?'

She stared at him, swallowed hard, and told him in an incoherent little whisper: Her room had been dark when she entered it after leaving him on the terrace. She'd found, as he had, the maid senseless on the floor. As soon as she realized that it was Louise and that she'd been struck, she flung open the door to the living-room, expecting to find the police there. They were

gone, and she'd hurried across to the opposite bedroom, thinking they must be in that room. And then someone had come from somewhere behind her and jerked something dark and binding over her head and thrust a gag into her mouth and warned her not to scream. 'He said—Peter had called for help. He said—'

'Who said, for heaven's sake?'

But she didn't know. 'Everything was confused. I was struggling, scared—'

'What was his voice like?'

She put her white hands to her head and stared at him blankly. 'I don't know. Very low—deep, I mean. I didn't recognize it. But it—I don't think it was his normal voice. I think I came very near to fainting—it's all confused in my mind. Except I knew I mustn't scream. Even when he was gone it was as if his voice kept saying it over and over again in my ears, but I knew it wasn't, because the room didn't—hum.'

Jim started violently. 'What did you say?'

'I said—I don't know who—'

'You said the room didn't hum.'

'Oh. That. It was the room—or my ears—I felt as if there was a kind of—vibration. A hollow sort of hum. As if the room—'

Jim stared back at her. His eyes narrowed until they became lazy blue slits, except they were not lazy, for all at once he

was thinking furiously. Thinking back to college physics classes.

'What is it? You look so—'

Jim's eyes snapped. 'Listen. If anybody comes in this room—so much as puts his foot over the threshold, no matter who it is, you scream like hell. I'll be in the other bedroom.'

He went into the living-room and singled out Tovery. 'Come in here, will you, Tovery. I want to talk to you.'

'Certainly not', said Tovery. 'I have nothing to do with this affair. You can't pin this thing on me. You—'

'Get the hell in that room over there', said Jim, and Tovery went. Jim closed the door. Their voices could be heard by those in the living-room, but not what they said.

'See here, what do you mean—?' began Tovery, blustering.

'You killed Peter Blake.'

'I didn't. I didn't kill him. You can't—' Tovery, as white as the counterpane behind him, was pressing backward away from Jim. His cultivated voice rose to a thin, high squeal.

'I say you did. You came in here with a knife when Von Holzen wasn't looking. You—'

'I tell you I didn't.' The actor's voice rose another shrill pitch. 'Don't look at me like that! I had nothing to do with murder! I—'

'All right', said Jim in a low voice; 'you didn't. Now then, I want you to tell me something—'

Two minutes later the closet

door closed cautiously upon Tovery. The actor opened it an inch to peer at Jim. 'You say you want me to listen?' whispered Tovery.

'Just listen. I need a witness who knows what to listen for.'

Tovery nodded and closed the closet door quietly. Jim went to the door to the living-room. It seemed fruitless but he'd got to make four direct, definite accusations of murder. Adelaide and Fritz von Holzen; Sandy Blake and Ernest Pusey. And it was quite on the cards that he would have to make a fifth.

Again the need for haste possessed him. The police would not believe the small thing he knew; it was too tenuous a clue, they would say; too airy and unsubstantial. But it led to murder.

'Von Holzen—will you come in here, please.'

Again he closed the door between. 'You killed Peter Blake, Von Holzen. You wanted the invention—the chemical process which would put him out of business. It would be priceless in the hands of a competitor. You—'

'I—!' cried Von Holzen. 'You're crazy!—What chemical process?'

Shrewdness and quick interest struggled with fright in his eyes. Jim was annoyed. He came nearer threateningly. 'You came in here and stabbed him, and I've got proof of it. You were on the terrace. No one else could have done it. And you—'

It was convincing. Von Holzen's protestations rose in earnestness and tone: 'You're nuts. I didn't know there was a new process. I didn't explain I'd ever known Peter—had had a grudge—'

'Why?'

'Because I didn't want to be mixed up in it. If I'd thought twice I'd have realized it was bound to come out soon as the police got going on their investigation. But I didn't like the idea of being a suspect. There I was on the terrace, and grudge was a motive and—but I didn't do it, I tell you! You can't prove—!' He was at last frightened. It was in his lifted voice and his sparkling, bright little eyes.

Jim thought, and said a little dubiously, 'Okay?'

'What do you mean, okay?'

'I mean, get out. Anywhere. On the terrace. And keep your mouth shut.'

He scuttled away. Jim turned back to the living-room door. Suppose he was all wrong. Suppose his tenuous, fleeting little clue wasn't a clue at all. Suppose . . .

Lana was standing in the bedroom door, tall and slender. She'd pulled her lovely hair together so it looked smooth.

'Pusey', said Jim. 'Will you help me a moment?'

'Why—certainly. But what—?'

'In here.'

It meant leaving the girl and Sandy Blake together, but Ade-

laide von Holzen was there, too. And it wasn't conceivable that Adelaide von Holzen and young Blake could have leagued together for any purpose whatever. One would serve as a check to the other.

He closed the door. And began again: 'You killed Peter Blake.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'I mean, you killed him. You knew of his invention—this chemical process—and you wanted it. All your life you've seen Peter Blake making tons of money, and you were jealous. Possession of the chemical process meant money for you and failure for him. You came in here this morning and killed him. You came into this room to talk to him before Von Holzen came out on the terrace. You talked to him and you—you quarrelled, and you had a knife and you suddenly realized the thing had to be done—'

Pusey said, 'Now, now, Mr. Smith.' He was quite composed; his voice was, if anything, deeper and altogether unagitated.

Driven, Jim went on: 'You escaped—' He stopped.

Pusey smiled. 'Escape? That's the problem, isn't it? With Von Holzen on the terrace, nobody could have escaped. You're a good fellow, Jim, and you're trying to get the girl off, and I'm going to try to save her, too. But it's no go.'

Jim didn't answer. There was a small memory nagging at him,

of something said, something done or implied, something later disproved. What? A small discrepancy, noted at the time, but not put in its proper alignment. He just stared at Pusey, caught in the meshes of recollection.

'By golly!' said Jim.

He was right. He knew he was right. An umbrella out on the terrace where it ought not to have been. Beige uniform and coffee-coloured legs.

'By golly!' said Jim Smith. 'You *did* do it!'

Pusey's grey eyes retreated; the conviction in Jim's surprised voice became a living thing, charging the very air about them.

Pusey said deeply, harshly, 'You fool, you! How dare you!'

His voice was curiously deep under excitement. Deep and very vibrant—and suddenly a small, queer vibrance answered it, deep and hollow and low in pitch. It stopped when Pusey stopped speaking. And footsteps ran across the living-room, and Lana Blake jerked open the door and cried, 'That's it! That's the sound I heard—!' Adelaide von Holzen and Sandy Blake were behind her.

And Ernest Pusey said, still low and harsh, so that the betraying hum arose again hollowly, 'You fool! Do you think I'm going to stay here and answer such absurd accusations?'

All Jim's attention was sud-

denly riveted upon a revolver, black and ugly, which came like magic from a pocket of Pusey's bathrobe. And Pusey was ten feet from him and he had nothing whatever in the way of defence. The police ought to be rounding Castle Point about now. Five more long minutes.

'This revolver', said Pusey—odd how the steel and concrete walls answered him—'this revolver does not mean that I'm guilty. It means only that I'm going to defend myself against a—a madman.'

But he held the thing pointed at Lana. Jim was afraid to move. One touch of that neat, precise finger would send a quick messenger of death, and he knew it. Self-defence would be Pusey's plea. What—? Jim was suddenly aware that the closet door behind Pusey was moving. Tovery was about to undertake his first heroic role.

Would Blake's eyes shift? Jim prayed they wouldn't. Would Adelaide von Holzen scream? No, she was like a wooden woman—eyes bulging, face rigid. Would Pusey—?

Tovery leaped, and Jim leaped and revolver shots thudded, and Adelaide von Holzen screamed, and in the middle of a writhing, shouting, smoke-filled mêlée a heavy voice shouted authoritatively from the doorway, 'Here, here! What's all this?' . . .

The water in the lagoon was

clear and grey, and the greying sky very soft and gentle, and the treetops were beginning to show faint gold touches, when Jim and Lana stood again alone beside the balustrade.

'It was the tone pitch of the room', said Jim, throwing away his cigarette. It hissed gently as it struck the water. 'College physics. The same principle as a tuning fork. If your voice happens to strike the tone pitch of a room, it sets up a vibration. Sounds like someone humming—at a short distance, at any rate. It's not uncommon, especially with concrete and steel structures. I asked Tovery—when I remembered it suddenly—and he said, yes, it happened often. That it was one of the problems of construction in modern theatres, because there was not so much wood as formerly used in their construction. He says especially in an opera house they do all kinds of things to make sure that their basso profundo doesn't get a neat little vibration hum. It happens mainly with a very deep, very harsh voice. Pusey's voice roughened and deepened under excitement. Tovery's and Von Holzen's went up—became thin and sharp—and there was no answering vibration.' Jim yawned. 'That's all.'

'But the umbrella and Von Holzen.'

'Oh, that. Well, I ought to have known that right away. It was so simple and so obvious. It

was a case of not seeing the forest for the trees. Von Holzen said nobody had passed but a boy with the umbrella. The porter said he had entered the living-room for the purpose of putting out the umbrella, but had immediately heard the voices and then Blake's call for help, and had instantly run for help. Well, the umbrella ought to have been in the living-room (where presumably Luzo dropped it) but it wasn't. It was in its place on the terrace. And then all at once I remembered the coffee-coloured suit Pusey wore this morning; it was almost exactly the colour of the porters' uniforms.

'Pusey had simply walked out of the living-room of the suite carrying the umbrella, holding the handle of it down and the umbrella itself between him and Von Holzen. Von Holzen had glanced up, seen an umbrella and beige-coloured legs below it, assumed it, naturally, to be a porter, and had gone back to his paper. Then, as soon as Von Holzen became absorbed in reading, Pusey was able to slip into his own room through the window.' Jim yawned again. 'The police have checked Luzo's story, and it's right; he dropped the umbrella where he stood in the living-room and ran for me. But a little later the umbrella was in place on the terrace.'

'But Sandy—'

'Sandy's reasoning seems a

little muddled. But I do think he was simply telling the truth when he explained himself and his motives.'

'Sandy loved Peter', said Lana. 'As I did. Peter had told him of the new process, and Sandy had actually worked with Peter on it, so it was part Sandy's. Peter had told Pusey about it, too. And each of us thought he was the only person in whom Peter had confided. Peter was—like that. A little secretive, I mean.'

'Then this morning—yesterday morning, I mean—when Peter Blake told Pusey he was ready to take out patents, Pusey knew he had to act then or not at all. Queer to think of the jealousy and hatred that must have been seething in Pusey all these years. Perhaps he and Blake quarrelled first. Certainly there were violent words. Then Pusey struck. It's queer, too', said Jim thoughtfully, 'that if Pusey had waited in his room Sandy would have brought him the brief case. But it might have cost Sandy his life.'

Lana gave a little shiver. 'It's not nice', she said, 'feeling that somebody has wanted to murder you—'

Footsteps crossed the terrace, and Willaker, solid and thick as a column in the grey dawn, stood beside them. He had heard Lana's last words, for he said coolly, 'Pusey had to murder you or give up his whole project. We've got the thing put together, I think, Jim.'

He leaned on the balustrade and talked:

'To-night's ructions really began yesterday when Mrs. Blake told Pusey that she knew of the new process and that she actually had the notes relating to it in her own possession. He had been disappointed in not finding them in Blake's room after the murder, and in being obliged to make a quick and expedient escape when the porter gave the alarm. Her knowledge of the notes meant that mere possession of them would not be enough for him; he would have to silence Mrs. Blake before he could patent and sell the invention as his own. Having murdered once successfully, it was easy to decide to murder again. It was to be in almost every detail like the first, with the important exception that, this time, he would make sure of the brief case before the murder was done.

He secured another knife and placed it where it would be near at hand but not incriminating. Then he took advantage of the uproar caused by the passing Gombies to send a message to the police (purporting to be from me) from the telephone booth in the store below the hotel. You know how successful that was', said Willaker a little dryly. 'But, while Pusey was gone from the hotel, Sandy Blake entered Mrs. Blake's room, discovered the brief case,

and removed it. So, when Pusey returned and searched Mrs. Blake's room, the brief case was already gone. And while Pusey was searching, Mrs. Blake came back to the room. He didn't want to murder her until he had the brief case; yet he must have her where he could later—'

Lana uttered a stifled little cry.

Willaker said hurriedly, 'Well well—you know all about that. And then you came on the scene Jim, after having scared young Blake away at his first attempt to reach Pusey. When you came into Mrs. Blake's room, Pusey again had to retire hurriedly and watch, and when you gave him a chance by entering the closet, he fastened the door and searched the room again, this time in the light. Again he failed to find the brief case, and when the maid showed signs of returning consciousness Pusey left. Then, as you remember, you met him in the corridor. You talked, and he very cleverly led you to suspect Mrs. Blake and Sandy Blake. He leaped at the chance to make a scapegoat of either or both of them; you couldn't have given him a more welcome bit of news than that of Sandy's presence, for he didn't know, then, that Sandy also had been taken into Blake's confidence about the new process.

When you continued your search for Mrs. Blake, Pusey remained in Room 18, ostensibly

to wait for Sandy, who was still lurking about in the shadows of the terrace and about to make another attempt to reach Pusey. Pusey, probably, was watching you, Jim, when you found the knife. Certainly he was watching when you gave the case to the desk clerk. He rang the lift bell as soon as you entered his room again, and the boy, naturally, thought it was you ringing and came back. It was simple for Pusey to get the brief case, and when he reached his room with it at last, the knife was there. So he hid the case in his room and went back to Mrs. Blake and—that's all', said Willaker. 'He failed.'

Lana looked slowly at Jim through the soft, grey light. 'Thanks to you', she whispered..

Two days later a boat left, and Lana and Sandy Blake went away on it. The sun was very bright and the sea very blue and the coral roofs of the houses looked newly scrubbed. Jim rode to Hamilton alone with Lana Blake, in the back seat of a swaying victoria. Lana seemed sad, and her profile was clear and beautiful against the blue sea beyond them.

She turned, and caught his eyes. 'I can't thank you enough'.

He had been thinking how desirable and sweet her mouth was. He murmured that he hadn't done anything, really.

She smiled a little wistfully.

She put a small hand upon his own. 'I've not known many men. I—I've never known anyone like you.'

Jim took the hand. It was a nice hand, small and warm and clinging gently to his stronger one. He put it down rather quickly. 'Things will be happier for you after a while. When all this is over. You'll meet people and—'

She was shaking her head. Her eyes were the candid eyes of a child. She said, as if it must be so, 'No one like you.'

Jim stirred uneasily. He heard himself say, 'You'll come back. Sometime.'

The girl turned and looked deeply at him again. She said slowly, 'Yes. I'll come back. Sometime.'

An hour later from the balcony of the Twenty-one Club he watched her boat go to sea. The girl was standing at the rail and she did not have a handkerchief pressed to her eyes. Gradually her slender figure became indistinct. Jim sighed a little sadly and lifted his glass.

● On the boat the girl leaned against the railing. The tall, brown figure on the balcony became smaller and farther away. Green shores and white houses and opal bays slipped past her. They were heading for the open purple seas.

Well, she would see those opal bays and green shores again.

Sometime.

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