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POPULAR DETECTIVE

FEATURING



SAINT OVERBOARD

AN INDISCREET NOVEL
OF DEATH AND DESIRE

By **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

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POPULAR DETECTIVE

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

SEPTEMBER,
1951

Vol. XLI
No. 2

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SAINT OVERBOARD

by Leslie Charteris

A half-clad girl fleeing for her life draws Simon Templar into a dangerous adventure that promises death—or worse!

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DAVID X. MANNERS
EDITOR

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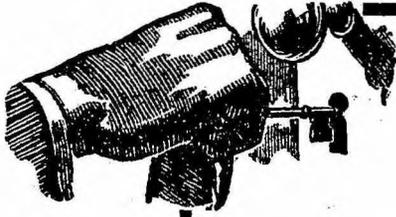
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INSIDE STUFF

“AFTER listening to the radio for the last two, three weeks,” commented my friend the Cynical Sergeant, “I think them stations should sign off at night with someone singin’ My Country ’Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Felony. I never heard such a bunch of guff.”

The Cynical Sergeant—which is what I shall have to call him because he is coming up for pension application shortly and I would not like to cause his wife and kids any hardship—is a good solid citizen and a wise cop.

He’s worn blues since brogans which would pass Muster Room inspection cost two-fifty a pair. During one smelly administration he served a sentence for not playing ball with a crew of grafters who had a through connection to City Hall—said sentence consisting of a ten month walking beat in the bush precinct furthest from his home.

But to hear him tell it, his biggest headache is after listening to the charges and counter charges of Kefauver & Co.

“These crumbs musta been hidin’ under the table the last twenty years if it’s news to ‘em that some lousy politicians, and a few ratty sheriffs or district attorneys or maybe a Commissioner, will listen to the boys who come up with the fat campaign contributions. Who the Senators think they’re kidding when they give out with that hammy double-take on hearin’ some guy in office admit he knew a couple high-spade and dice boys? It’s been goin’ on in *this* town ever since the day I first spit on my badge to polish it, and if this burg is any worse’n the rest of the country I beg leave to doubt it.”

I protested, in the most amiable manner, that he must have a sour-acid-stomach view of this much discussed matter since it seemed to be the consensus that Messrs. Kefauver, Tobey, Halley and cohorts had done an eminently praiseworthy job of uncovering a particular odorous section of our civic sewers.

“Fishfeathers,” was his comment. “All they’re doin’ is scrapin’ up a little of the scum that oozes up out of the ground. Because, see, all they’re worried about is interstate stuff—but the real crimes are 99 and 44/100ths percent local, not bossed by any mysterious syndicate, not organized from Miami to handle all the crookery in Cleveland or schemed up in New York to put things on a crimetable in San Francisco.”

Surely there was much truth in what had been disclosed about cross-country relations of one city gang to another?

“Sure, but look.” He became very earnest. “Ever notice something? The fanfare is mostly about the kind of crime most folks don’t think is a crime, really. Like bootlegging in dry areas—and there’s plenty of it still goin’ on. You remember what happened in prohibition? Some of your best friends prob’ly ran speak-easies. Or take gambling. All right, so in certain places, in certain ways, it’s illegal. They don’t shut up many churches for running bingo games, though, and you can still get a bet down on the machines at Churchill Downs or Belmont or Lincoln Fields. People don’t consider it a serious crime *no matter what the statutes say.*”

What, exactly, would *he* have done, if he’d been on the famous Committee?

“Plenty,” he stated flatly. “I’d a had ‘em televise this Charge Desk here. Let folks see the kind of a job a cop or a plainclothesman actually has, night after night. An old guy with his head all bloody signing charges against a teen-age hoodlum who tried to knock his brains out and steal the nine bucks and forty cents in his pants. By and by, I’d show that kid on trial, gettin’ convicted, gettin’ his eight-to-ten years, follow it right through to Elmira or Sing Sing and let people see how it works out.”

I began to catch his point.

“I’d put a microphone in front of the stick-up boys who’d just gunned a grocer and his wife in their store at closing time—let the world know what a gutless pair of yellow-tailed rats they melt down to when somebody’s got hold of their collars. Look at this blotter here—” he shoved the record of the evening’s events at me—“here’s an old goat, been on here once every couple weeks the year round on a d. and d.—but tonight he crowns his son with a ball-peen hammer an’ the kid’s on the critical list at Memorial. Oh, I could give ‘em a show. I’d give ‘em something to gawk at, if they put it up to me. But it would be the real McCoy. A cop’s kind of crime. Not all that fishfeathers.”

I said he’d made an interesting distinction, and I would ask our readers what they thought about it.

Any ideas, guys and gals?

—Stewart Sterling



IS THERE *Life* ON OTHER PLANETS?

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HAVE YOU EVER, in the stillness of night, gazed at the heavens overhead? If so, you may have wondered if there are living things—perhaps human beings—moving about on the numerous worlds in the vast reaches of space. Do you know that the entire universe is *alive*, vibrant with an intelligence and an energy that can be harnessed by man on earth?

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IT WAS NIP AND TUCK FOR JACK UNTIL...



JACK ROSS AND HIS GROUP OF STATE FORESTRY STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR A CAMPSITE AT THE END OF A DAY-LONG HIKE WHEN...

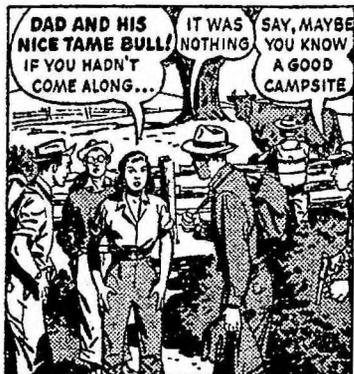


SIT TIGHT, MISS. HANK, LEND ME YOUR AIR PISTOL.

CHASE HIM AWAY!



WAIT 'TILL HE STARTS FOR ME, THEN RUN LIKE BLAZES!



DAD AND HIS NICE TAME BULL! IF YOU HADN'T COME ALONG...

IT WAS NOTHING

SAY, MAYBE YOU KNOW A GOOD CAMPSITE



UNLESS YOUR MEAL'S TOO FAR ALONG, WE'D LIKE YOU TO JOIN US FOR SUPPER.

SOUNDS WONDERFUL! WE CAN CLEAN UP IN A FEW MINUTES.



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TRY A THIN GILLETTE



SAY! I GO FOR THIS BLADE! NEVER ENJOYED A MORE REFRESHING SHAVE

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TWO BULLETS

*The girl held a gun, and said she
had killed a man—but
there was no blood on the corpse!*

by B. J. BENSON

"He was alive when he came
in here," said Ellen



SO THIS was Tuesday night again, and it was eight o'clock, and Tuesday night was the night he always took Ellen to the movies. His name was Paul Tabor and he worked in an engineering office as a draftsman. This

night he was a little late because he had had to work overtime on some rush specifications and he hadn't gotten home until almost a quarter to eight. That meant a quick shave, once over lightly. A little talcum powder on his face, be-

cause when he shaved twice it chafed his skin. A change of shirts. A quick buff of his shoes with the flannel cloth and he was ready. Now all that was left was the short walk to her apartment house. Ring her bell. She would come tripping down the stairs with that wonderful smile on her face. The theatre was around the corner from her house. They would be in their seats by eight-thirty.

He came out of his bedroom and took his hat from the table in the living room. A quick look at himself in the mirror over the fireplace and he was all set. The room was quiet and still. He had a little Swiss clock on the fireplace mantel and it ticked rather loudly and rapidly. It seemed to make the time run quicker than ordinarily—especially when he was late like this.

He had his hat on and he moved quickly across the room to the front door. He opened it to go out. He blinked. Ellen was standing there.

"Paul," she said breathlessly. "Please let me in."

He looked at her. Something was wrong. He had known Ellen for six months and she had never come to his apartment. Marriage, she had said, was one thing, but an engagement is another. He opened the door wider for her. She slipped in by him.

"Please," she whispered. "Close the door and lock it."

He pushed the sliding bolt across the door and he heard it snick into place. Now he turned to look at her again. For the first time he noticed that she wasn't wearing shoes. She had on a pair of blue, high heeled, fur trimmed mules. Her face was pale white and without make-up. She usually wore her blond hair pinned up, but now it was tumbled down around her shoulders, careless and disheveled. Her dress was unbuttoned near the top and the belt was unbuckled and dangling from her waist. She had her big white handbag in her hands and she was grasping it so tightly that her knuckles were white.

Her mouth was pinched and her blue eyes were wide with fright.

"What happened?" he asked her.

SHE didn't answer for a moment. Her mouth worked spasmodically. He took her by the shoulders.

"Wait," she whispered. She turned her head to the door, listening. Now there was a loud rap on the panel and he felt her body stiffen.

He stood there undecidedly. Then he said, "Get into the bedroom."

"No," she said intensely. "Don't answer it." The knock came again, louder.

He turned her around and pushed her across the room into the bedroom. He closed the door. He went back to the front door, unlocked it and opened it.

The man standing there was huge and burly. Big hulking shoulders. A dark gray suit with a faint pin stripe. A square flat stolid face and a small thin mouth. A short blunt nose and eyes that were pale and cold.

"A girl just come in here," the man said.

"Who are you?" Paul asked.

The man made a move to come inside. Paul blocked him. The man stopped and his eyes went up and down Paul's long, wiry body.

"The police," the man said. "I'm looking for a girl named Ellen Druse. I want to take a look inside."

"There's no girl here," Paul said. "Nobody came in here."

"I saw her run into the building," the man said. "I was right after her. Yours is the first door. I want to have a look."

"No," Paul said. "Nobody came in here. You can't come in here either."

The man shuffled his feet. "You're looking for trouble, kid."

"No," Paul said. "You come back with a search warrant and I'll let you look. Not before."

The man looked at him carefully and his arms flexed and his elbows came up. Paul's fists tightened.

"Okay," the man finally said. "But I'll be back, kid. Too bad you made yourself some trouble." He turned around and he went down the corridor to the outside door. Paul stepped inside the room and bolted the door again. He went to the bedroom.

"All right," he said. "Come on out, Ellen."

She came back into the living room. "Is he gone?" she asked.

"He's gone. Now you'd better tell me what happened, Ellen."

She twisted away from him and her hands came up to her face and she began to sob. He led her to the divan and she sat down unsteadily. He took out his cigarettes and handed her one. She stopped crying now. Her eyes came up to him, wet and defeated, as she took the cigarette. He took one out for himself and he lit both of them. He sat down in the club chair across from her and waited. The cigarette burned unnoticed in her hand as she looked down at the floor. Now her other hand went to her bag and she opened it and fumbled inside. When her hand came out, there was a gun in it. A pearl handled, .25 caliber, automatic pistol.

"I just killed a man," she said.

There was a silence between them. The little clock on the mantel ticked away louder than ever. Paul took the cigarette from his mouth. The taste of it had turned sour and he mashed it down in the ashtray. Now he stood up and crossed the room to the kitchen. He took the bottle of rye from the cabinet and sloshed some into a tumbler. He brought it back into the living room.

"Drink it," he said.

She took the glass and brought it up. Her hand faltered for a moment. Then she gulped hastily. She coughed—gaspd once, setting down the glass.

"Now," he said. "Tell me how it happened."

ELLEN'S eyes came up to his and turned away. "I made a mistake in coming here, Paul," she said dully. "Now

I can't tell it. Not to you."

"Yes, you can," he said. "You're going to tell it to me."

She picked up the tumbler and gulped again. "Turn your back," she said. "I can't tell it when you look at me that way."

He made no move.

"Talk," he said.

She took a deep breath. "I just killed Wayne Corey."

"Your boss?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

She looked down at the floor and color came to her face. "In my apartment."

He stared at the fur trimmed mules and the half opened dress and he reached for the glass. His hands tightened around it so hard he almost broke it.

"Tell me," he said tonelessly. "Tell it fast. The cops will be back."

"About a half hour ago," she said, "while I was dressing. Wayne—I mean Mr. Corey—came to my apartment. He was drunk, terribly drunk. When I opened the door he staggered in and grabbed me. I broke away from him and ran for my desk. I took the gun out. I was badly frightened because I had never seen him look like that before. He came toward me again. I lifted the gun and fired at him. He stumbled to the floor. I ran over to him. He was dead when I got there."

"You're sure he was dead?"

"Yes." She shuddered. "His eyes were open."

"Where did you get the gun?"

"Wayne gave it to me two years ago as a gift."

"You keep calling him Wayne," he said.

"I worked for him three years."

"He had a sales agency. Is that it?"

"Yes. An aluminum company from Ohio. Wayne was a manufacturer's representative. He had a few large accounts. Big installment houses. He didn't need to work very hard. In fact,

he spent very little time in the business. He was out at the horse track a great deal, and when he wasn't, he made bets through the bookies. He played a lot of poker. He loved to gamble."

"You seem to know a lot about his personal life."

"It was a small office. There were only the two of us."

"Wayne Corey wasn't married," he said.

"No."

"It was nice and cozy," he said. "Just the two of you."

"All right," she said. "I was friendly with him."

"That word covers a lot of ground."

"All right," she said. "I was his girl once. For over two years."

"That you never told me," he said.

"It was before I met you. After that, everything was over between Wayne and me."

"Why didn't you tell me about it before?"

"I didn't have the nerve to, I guess. I knew how sensitive you'd be. Besides, you would have made me quit. He pays me a big salary, Paul. You and I needed that money to get married."

"Not that kind of money. He was still making passes at you, wasn't he?"

Her head turned away from him. "Yes," she said. "But I was going to leave my job."

"When?"

"I was going to give notice Saturday."

"I can believe that."

"No," she said despairingly. "You won't believe it. I knew you wouldn't."

SHE stood up. She went over to the telephone. He moved in front of her.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"What else?" she asked hopelessly. "There's nothing left now. I'm going to call the police. There's no sense waiting for them to come back."

"Wait a minute," he said. "You can't give yourself up yet."

"Yes," she said. "The way you feel about things, it doesn't matter much to me any more. You're forgetting I killed a man."

"I'm not forgetting," he said. "I've been thinking about it. And I'm not so sure of it as you are." He went over to the table and picked up the gun. He examined it. He sniffed at the muzzle. Then he disconnected the magazine safety and slid the magazine out of the butt.

"Was this fully loaded?" he asked.

"Yes."

"The magazine takes six cartridges," he said. "There are only four in here now. You fired two bullets at him."

"I don't remember," she said. "Honestly I don't."

"Two bullets," he said. "Twenty-fives. It wouldn't be enough to kill him unless you shot him right through the heart. Are you that good?"

"Please," she whispered. "Please. I never fired a gun before."

"But you knew how to use it?"

"Wayne showed me once."

"We'll have to make sure he's dead. We're going back to your apartment and see."

"Oh, no," she said, horrified. "I could never go back there again."

"You'll have to," he said, putting the gun in his pocket. "You can't stay here. The police will be back any minute."

He went to the closet and took out his gabardine topcoat. He put it around her shoulders. Then he went to the door and unbolted it. He looked out into the corridor. Empty.

He motioned to her. "They probably have both the front and back of the building covered," he said. "But I've got an idea. Come on."

He took her by the hand and they went down the corridor toward the back. There was a door leading to the fire stairs and he darted in there with her. They went up the fire stairs to the roof. They crossed the roof onto the

next building. Down inside, and down the six flights of emergency stairs to the street floor. Out back. They walked quickly through the yard and crossed over to the next street. They didn't see anybody.

They walked the two blocks that took them to the rear of Ellen's apartment house. She had trouble keeping up with him, the mules kept slipping from her feet. Once she stumbled on the uneven pavement, and he had to reach out and grab her to keep her from falling. He stopped when they reached her back yard. He looked up.

"The light's on in your apartment," he said.

"The police," she said, out of breath. "They're waiting for us."

"Maybe. But you might have left the light on yourself. You wait here and I'll go around front and see."

He left her standing there and went out through the alley to the front of the building. The street was empty. He went inside. Nobody in the hallway. He tiptoed up the stairs to her door. He put his ear to the panel. Silence. He went back down the stairs again and through the alley to the back. She hadn't moved. She stood there rigidly, staring up at the lighted window dully fascinated.

"Something funny is going on," he said. "There are no cops around. Nobody in your apartment."

"I don't understand," she said.

"This cop who followed you to my place," he said. "When did you first see him?"

"Right after the shooting," she said. "I ran out of my apartment. He was coming down the hall from the back stairs. He called out to me. But I ran for the front stairs. I saw him go to my door and try it. It was locked. I didn't wait. I ran down the stairs and outside. I was halfway down the block when he came out of the building and shouted to me to stop. I kept going. He ran after me. Then I came to your house."

PAUL thought that over; then he asked a question.

"He didn't blow a whistle or anything?"

"No."

"A big man in a dark gray suit?"

"Yes. But I didn't get too good a look at him."

"Darn funny," Paul said. "He got to your apartment too quick. It couldn't have been about the shooting. Maybe he was coming to see you about something else."

"I don't know," she said. "I hadn't done anything wrong. Before then, I mean."

"It looks fishy to me," he said. "Well, let's go inside."

"Oh no," she said frantically. "I can't go back there."

"Yes," he said. "It's possible that Wayne Corey wasn't hurt bad and he's out of there. Come on."

He took her by the arm and they went through the alley into the street. Inside the building and up the stairs. She groped for her keys, the breath rasping in and out of her. He took the key from her limp fingers and opened the door.

The room was like a tomb in its stillness. Simple, unpretentious. A tapestry sofa with overstuffed pillows. Two small table lamps with white silk shades. Two lawson chairs. A coffee table; on it, a cut glass vase filled with fresh flowers.

And a body.

The body lay face down on the rug. One knee crumpled under. The suit, a tan summer weave, wrinkled now like crepe paper.

Paul heard her moan behind him and he turned and grabbed her. He closed the door. "Stay here," he said harshly. "I don't care what you do. Close your eyes. But stay here. I want to ask you questions."

He went over to the body. He bent down and lifted the head. The eyes were open. The face, once young, was now waxen gray in death.

"Is this Wayne Corey?" he asked her.

She nodded mutely, her head averted toward the wall. Paul stood up and went over to her.

"There has to be a reason why he came here," Paul said. "A man doesn't get drunk and barge in on a girl for nothing. When was the last time he was at your apartment?"

"Six months ago. Before I met you, Paul."

"You're sure?"

"I swear it."

"Anything happen between you two today? Anything to encourage him coming here again?"

"No, nothing. I hardly saw him today. He was gone almost all afternoon."

"Where was he?"

"He left at noon. He was going out to play cards. He said he had himself a cookie named Eddie Majek—or something like that. They were going to play at a hotel. It was to be a big game."

"Then what?"

"Then he came in the office again when it was almost five. He was excited and also a little nervous. He had a manila envelope with a rubber band around it. He threw it on my desk and told me it was his poker winnings. He told me to put it in my bag and deposit it to his account before I came in tomorrow morning."

"Why didn't he do that himself?"

"I asked him. He said it was safer with me than with him. It was too late to go to the bank then. We don't have an office safe."

"Where's the envelope now?"

"In my handbag."

"Let's see it."

ELLEN opened her bag and handed him a long manila envelope. He pulled off the elastic band. He took a sheaf of bills out. He riffled them.

"It was no ordinary poker game," he said. "There's at least ten thousand dollars here."

"No!" she said. "All of that?"

"Yes." He put the bills back in the envelope and put the envelope back in her bag. He went over to the body again. He knelt and turned it over. He unbuttoned the coat jacket. Now the shirt. He lifted the white undershirt. He frowned.

"Funny," he said. "No blood. Not a speck. Nowhere." He looked at the skin over the stomach. It was badly discolored. He stood up.

"Where were you standing when you fired the gun?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "Let's get out of here. Please, Paul."

"Tell me," he said stubbornly.

"Back here," she said. "Near the bedroom."

He went over and stood in front of the bedroom door. "Here?" he asked.

"Yes. I think so."

"Which way were you facing. Straight ahead?"

"No. A little toward the side wall, I think."

He looked obliquely across the room. Then he walked diagonally across the floor. His eyes roamed the wall.

"Here they are," he said, pointing. "In the wall. Your two bullets. You missed him completely. You're a bad shot, Ellen."

She sat bolt upright. "You mean I didn't kill him?"

"No."

She sank down on the sofa again. "Don't kid me, Paul. Please. He was alive when he came in here. He was drunk, but he was alive. After I fired at him, he was dead."

"I know. Only he wasn't drunk. He came staggering in here because he was badly hurt. He was beaten around the stomach and he was probably bleeding to death inside. He came here for that packet of money. I guess he didn't know he was dying."

"Poor Wayne," she said. "I think I'd better call the police now."

"Don't have to," somebody said. "I'm the police." They both turned around. The front door was open. Framed in

the doorway was the man in the dark gray suit. He closed the door and came in.

"I'll take the girlie's gun," the man said.

"How did you know she had a gun?" Paul asked.

"I was listening at the door, kid. Hand it over."

"Go ahead, Paul," said Ellen. "Give him the gun. We've got nothing to hide now."

"Wait a minute," Paul said slowly. "How do I know he's a cop? I'll have to see a badge."

The man moved in on him. "No badge, kid," he said. His voice was flat and expressionless. "Just hand over the gun."

"No badge, no gun," Paul said. "Get out of here."

"Now he's getting tough," the man said sadly. His hand went swiftly into his pocket and came out with an ugly blackjack. He slapped it into the palm of his other hand.

"Now I'll tell you," the man said. "I'm Eddie Majek. This punk," he said, pointing the blackjack at the body on the floor, "got into a card game with me this afternoon. He took me for eight grand. He was using marked cards. I want the dough back. I don't care about nothing else."

"How do we know it belongs to you?"

"Because I'll tell you. There was five thousand bucks in hundred-dollar bills. Twenty-five hundred in fifties. The rest in tens. You can check it. Give me the dough and I'll get out of here."

"I'll give it to him," Ellen said.

"Not yet," Paul told her. "Did Wayne Corey ever cheat at cards?"

THE girl shook her head. "No," she said thoughtfully. "He was a lot of other things. But he didn't cheat at cards. He didn't have to. He was good at it. So good, that often he would joke about making it his living."

"This ain't getting us no place," Majek said stolidly. "I want the cash."

"Corey won it from you fair and square," Paul said.

"Corey's dead," Majek said briefly. He pushed at the body with his toe.

"Not only dead," Paul said. "He was murdered."

Majek sighed. "All the time I have to explain things," he said. "I'll have to get it through your dumb head, kid; that dough wasn't mine. I'm a runner for a horse syndicate and that dough was the play from one of the rooms. If I don't come back with it tonight, I'll be in the river with a concrete overcoat."

"You're not very smart," Paul said. "You shouldn't have sat down and played cards with Corey."

"Cripes, you're dumb," Majek said. "I come over to Corey's place earlier tonight and I tell him I want the dough back. He gives me a bad time. So I have to give him a little going over with the sap, where it won't show."

"Across the stomach," Paul said. "You killed him."

"Naw, he wasn't dead then. But he finally listens to reason. He tells me to wait in his place while he goes to get it. But me, I'm not that stupid. I follow him. Right here. The girl runs out and I figure she's the one who's got the dough. I follow her to your place. I still don't get the dough—only conversation. I want the dough, kid."

"I'll give you the money," Paul said. "But you can't square the murder, Majek."

"No murder," Majek said. "That's why I want the girlie's gun."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"She fired two bullets at him, didn't she? All I got to do is fire two into him. And I won't miss. Let her explain it to the cops. You figure she'd be able to?"

"Yes," Paul said. "You're not smart at all, Majek. The cops will know that the bullets were put into Corey when he was already dead."

Majek scratched his head dubiously. "Say, maybe you're right. I got a bet-

ter idea. You and Corey had a fight over the girlie here. The cops come and find all three of you stiff on the floor." He chuckled. "How's that?"

"You're crazy," Paul said.

"Don't give me no talk," Majek said. He held out his hand. "The gun."

Paul moved. He came up with his right hand and swung for the heavy jaw. Majek grunted as it hit him, but he didn't budge. He shook his head slowly. The blackjack in his hand flicked up. The blow struck Paul on the side of the head and rocked him over. There was a bright flash in Paul's eyes as he went down to his hands and knees. Waves of sickening pain rose up over him.

He heard Ellen scream. Dully he watched as Ellen grabbed the cut glass vase from the table. Majek grunted again. He shuffled over to her, like a boxer in the ring. Majek reached her, twisted the vase from her hands, and knocked it to the floor. He pushed her against the wall and slapped her across the mouth with the flat of his hand. Then slowly and deliberately the blackjack went up and down.

She sagged to the floor in a crumpled heap.

PAUL moved again. On his feet, unsteadily. The small automatic came out of his pocket and in his hand. Majek turned to him.

"You shouldn't have hit her," Paul said metallically. "She's only a girl."

"The popgun don't scare me none, kid," Majek said. He ambled over and put out his hand. "Give it to me."

Paul hesitated.

Majek said, "That popgun wouldn't stop me. I'd tear you apart. But I ain't going to hurt you if you hand it over, kid."

Paul hesitated again. Then he nodded his head in agreement. He reversed the gun and held it out, butt first. Majek put out his hand to take it.

"Sure," Majek said. "Now you're sensible kid."

"You shouldn't have hit my girl," Paul said tautly. He lashed out suddenly with his leg. He caught Majek in the shin. Majek yelped with pain. His head bobbed forward automatically. As it did, Paul swung hard. The pistol butt caught Majek to the side of the jaw. Majek straightened, pawed in the air. His eyes became glazed and vacant, his jaw went slack. He slumped limply to the floor.

Paul bent down, listened to Majek's labored breathing. He stood up again. He went over to the telephone and dialed the police.

When he was through, he went over to Ellen.

There was a faint trickle of blood from a scalp cut. He went into the bathroom and came back with a water soaked towel. He dabbed away at the cut. He bathed her face and chafed her wrists.

Ellen stirred. Her hands went to her head as she opened her eyes.

"Are you all right?" Paul asked.

"Yes," she said shakily. "But I—I think I have a headache."

"You'll be all right. Your hair acted as a cushion."

"I'm sorry about everything," she whispered. "I should have told you about Corey and me before, Paul."

"That's okay," he said. "What's passed has passed. Sure, a fellow likes to feel that the girl he marries was all for him and nobody else. But you can't always have it that way. Anyway, whatever passed between you and Corey, was before you met me." He patted her hand. "I wouldn't want anybody else but you."

She tried to smile. "Thanks, darling," she said. Then she remembered Majek and she looked wildly around the room.

"Don't worry about Majek," Paul said. "He's sleeping it off until the police come. You know, it was a good try with that vase. That took courage. But I don't think you would have hit him. Your aim isn't very good."

Her eyes were brimming happily. "I'm glad of that," she said. ●

THE ALIBI Club



HALED INTO COURT by a \$25,000 damage suit brought by a woman who claimed he had left her waiting at the church, a Chicago man declared he would have been there—only his daughter had hidden all his clothes.

AN OKLAHOMA CITY woman, arrested for discharging a shotgun within the city limits while in the company of two soldiers, explained: "I was orienting the boys for the big fight."

SEIZED BY Cedar Falls, Ia., police after his car had zig-zagged down the street, a motorist declared self-righteously: "I wasn't drinking. If someone would trim the low branches along the street, I wouldn't have to weave all over the road to avoid scratching my new car."

A CLINTON, OKLAHOMA, convict, nabbed by officers at his home after he broke out of jail, explained: "I didn't run away. My beard was beginning to bother me, and I came home to shave."

CAUGHT STEALING a dress, a Detroit woman explained that she was only doing this to become a better writer. Publishers, she elucidated, had been rejecting her stories because they lacked "realism."

ARRESTED ON an intoxication charge, an Indian chief from the Tonawanda, N.Y., reservation explained that a sunstroke was responsible for his being found lying stretched out in the street—at one in the morning.

IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, a man was fined ten dollars for barking like a dog. He explained neighborhood dogs kept him awake so he was retaliating.

A SEATTLE man set fire to his car because—"I got mad when the darn thing wouldn't start."

A LEFOR, NORTH DAKOTA, farmer was treated for a dislocated knee suffered when he kicked a cow. He said the cow kicked him first.

A YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, man was carted off to jail for invading a radio station, rushing around throwing switches, interrupting six programs and bringing a ten minute silence. He said he just didn't like radio.

PETER STANDISH, New Bedford, Massachusetts, appeared as a witness for his barber who was accused of drunkenness and drunken driving. The barber was acquitted. Standish had testified: "He couldn't have been drunk. Just thirty minutes before he'd given me a shave."

IN NASHVILLE, a man was brought into court for taking a swipe with a switchblade knife at another man. "We were just playing," the man who had had the switchblade knife coming at him told the judge. "Playing!" the judge exclaimed. "What would have happened if you had got your head cut off?" . . . "It would have been just bad luck," replied the witness.

Conducted by CALABOOSE CAL

Saint

OVERBOARD

CHAPTER I

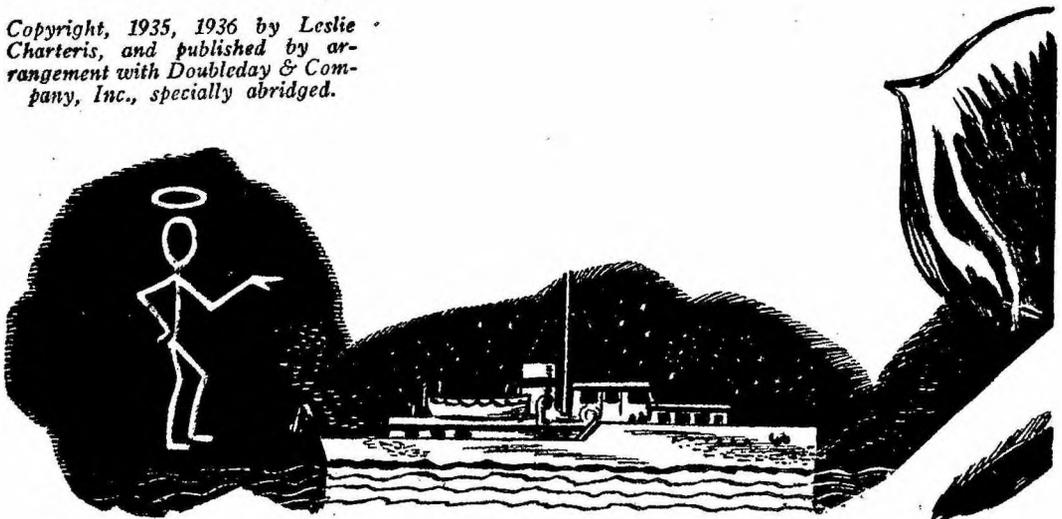
SIMON TEMPLAR woke at the shout, when most men would probably have stirred uneasily and gone on sleeping. It was distant enough for that, muffled by the veils of white summer fog that laid mist on the portholes and filled the night with a cool dampness. He woke in a flash, without any alteration in his rate of breathing. . . . And then he heard the sharp voice of a gun, its echoes drumming in a crisp clatter through the humid dark; another fainter yell, and a splash. . . .

He swung his long legs over the side of the bunk with the stealth of a cat. The chill of the fog goosefleshed his skin through the silk of his pyjamas as he hauled himself up the narrow companion. His bare feet touched the dew-damp deck; and then he was nervelessly relaxed, leaning a little forward.

The banks of sea-mist which had rolled up towards midnight, in one of those freakish fits of temperament that sometimes strike the north coast of France in early summer, had blanketed the moon's light down to a glimmer. On the other side of the estuary St. Malo was lost without trace: even the riding lights of the yacht nearest to his own were a mere phosphorescent blur in the baffling obscurity. His own lights shed a thin diffused aurora over the sleek seaworthy lines of the *Corsair*, and reached no further beyond than he could have spun a match. He could see nothing; but he could listen, and presently heard an ethereal swish of water, a tiny pitter of stray drops from an incautiously lifted head. He knew that this was the sound he had been waiting for.

He listened, ears pricked for a more pre-

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A half-clad girl fleeing for her life draws Simon Templar

*into his most dangerous adventure . . . with the murderous odds
promising a watery grave for him—and much worse for her!*



A Novel by

LESLIE CHARTERIS

cise definition of the sound. He heard the sluicing ripple of an expert swimmer striving to pass through water quickly but without noise. Nearer, now. Coming directly towards him.

Still Simon Templar did not move, but his immobility had an electric tension about it. Whatever might be happening out in that steamy darkness was not strictly any concern of his, except in the rôle of public-spirited citizen—which he was not. But it was for just that blithe willingness to meddle in affairs which did not concern him that he had come by the *Corsair* herself and all his other outward tokens of unlimited wealth, and which made certain persons think it epically absurd that he should go about with the nickname of the Saint. Wherefore he listened, and heard the swimmer coming closer.

And then he saw her, saw her suddenly in the down-seeping nimbus of his riding lights.

Her.

It was that realization of sex, guessed rather than positively asserted by the dimly seen contour of her features and the glistening curve of a green bathing cap, which sent a skin-deep tingle of intuition plunging into profound and utter certainty. A girl swimming stealthily through a fog-bound sea at three o'clock in the morning could not be associated with yells and shooting in the dark by any prosaic theory. Somewhere out there in the leaden haze big medicine was seething up, and inevitably he must dip his spoon in the brew.

He was standing so motionless that she had taken three more long strokes towards the ketch before she saw him. She stopped swimming abruptly, and stared up—and he caught in her upturned eyes a frantic, forlorn-hope appeal. He leaned over, grasped her wrist, and lifted her inboard with one hand. Without a word he pushed her down on the floor of the cockpit and unhitched a fender, dipping it in the water to repeat the faint splash she made as she came out.

At that moment an outboard loomed up through the mist and coughed itself to silence. As the boat glided up under its own momentum, he was able to make a swift summary of its occupants. There were three of them. Two, in rough seamen's jerseys,

sat in the sternsheets. The third man was sitting on one of the thwarts forward, but as the boat slid nearer he rose to his feet.

Simon Templar studied him with interest. From his position in the boat, his well-cut reefer jacket and white trousers, and the way he stood up, he was obviously the leader of the party. A tallish well-built man with one hand resting rather limply in his coat pocket—a typical wealthy yachtsman going about his own mysterious business. And yet, to the Saint, who had in his time walked out alive from the twisted places where men who keep one hand in a side pocket are a phenomenon that commands lightning alertness, there was something in the well-groomed impassivity of the man that touched the night with a new tingling chill. For a couple of seconds the Saint saw his face as the dinghy hissed under the lee of the *Corsair*, a long swarthy black-browed face with a great eagle's beak of a nose.

Then the beam of a powerful flashlight blazed from the man's free hand. For a moment it dwelt on Simon's straightening figure, then the light swept on, surveyed the lines of the ketch from stern to bow, and went flickering over the surrounding water.

"Lost something?" Simon inquired genially; and the light came back to him.

"Not exactly." The voice was almost lackadaisical. "Have you seen anyone swimming around here?"

"A few unemployed fish," murmured the Saint pleasantly. "Or are you looking for the latest Channel swimmer? They usually hit the beach further east, towards Calais."

There was a barely perceptible pause before the man chuckled, "No—nothing like that. Just one of our party took on a silly bet. I expect he's gone back."

And with that, for Simon Templar, a mystery had crept out of the night and caught him. For the tall hook-nosed man's reply presumed that he hadn't heard any of the other sounds associated with the swimmer—the shouts and the gunplay.

Simon Templar watched the search party vanishing on their way into the fog, the flashlight in the hook-nosed man's hand blinking through the mist; then he slid down the companion into the saloon, switching on the lights as he did so. He heard the girl

follow him down, but he drew the curtains over the portholes before he turned to look at her.

SHE had pulled off the green bathing cap, and her hair had tumbled to her shoulders in a soft disorder of chestnut rippled with spun gold. Her steady grey eyes held a gleam of mischief.

"A bit wet in the water tonight, isn't it?" he remarked coolly.

"Just a little."

Her fine brows came together for a moment.

"That was just part of the make-believe. We were pretending that I'd come out to rob the ship—"

"And the shouting?"

"That was part of it, too. I suppose it all sounds very idiotic—"

The Saint smiled. He slipped a cigarette out of a packet on the shelf close by and tapped it.

"Oh, not a bit. These games do help to



THIS MAN IS DANGEROUS

HE'S Leslie Charteris—who has "killed" more people than any criminal who ever died in the chair. He's free to continue his career of blood and violence only because all his crimes are—you guessed it—confined to books.

Son of a Chinese surgeon and an English woman, Charteris was born in Singapore in 1907 and learned Chinese and Malay from native servants before he could speak English. His parents took him around the world three times before he was twelve.

At eighteen, he was sent to Cambridge University, but at that point "a life of crime" appealed to him more. After devouring all the crime fiction he could lay hand to, Charteris wrote and sold his first full-length detective novel.

He's been too busy writing books ever since to find time to burgle any banks. He thought about **SAINT OVERBOARD** for two years, then wrote it—in two days!

He pulled open a drawer and selected a couple of towels. As an afterthought, he detached a bathrobe from its hook and dropped that also on the couch.

"D'you prefer brandy or hot coffee?"

"Thanks. But I think I'd better be getting back—to collect my bet. It was awfully good of you to—to help me. It was rather a stupid bet, I suppose." Her voice steadied. "We were just talking about how easy it would be to get away with anything on a foggy night, and somehow or other it got around to my saying that I could swim to Dinard and back without them finding me. They'd nearly caught me when you pulled me on board. I don't know if that was allowed for in the bet, but—"

"And the shooting?"

pass the long evenings. Who did the shooting?"

"The man who spoke to you from the dinghy."

"I suppose he didn't shoot himself by mistake? It was a most realistic job of yelling." Simon's smile was lazy. And then he left the cigarette in his mouth and stretched out his hand. "By the way, that's a jolly-looking gadget."

There was a curious kind of thick rubber pouch strapped on her swim suit, and he had touched it before she could draw back.

"It's just one of those waterproof carriers for cigarettes and a vanity case."

"May I look?"

The note of casual inquisitiveness was perfect, yet she stepped back before he could

touch the case again.

"I—I think I'd better be getting back. Really. The others will be starting to worry about me."

He nodded.

"Perhaps they will," he admitted. "But you can't possibly go swimming about in this mess. It's a hundred to one you'd miss your boat, and it's cold work splashing around in circles. I'll run you back."

"Please don't bother. Honestly, the water isn't so cold—"

"But you are." His smiling eyes took in the slight shiver of her brown body. "And it's no trouble."

"I won't go with you. Please don't make it difficult."

"You won't go without me."

He sat down on the companion, filling the narrow exit with his broad shoulders. She bit her lip.

"It's sweet of you," she said hesitantly. "But I couldn't give you any more trouble. I'm not going."

"Then you ought to use those towels and decide about the brandy and—or coffee," said the Saint amiably. "Of course, it may compromise you a bit, but I'm broad-minded. And while we're on the subject, don't you know that it's immoral for anyone to have legs like yours? They put the wickedest ideas—"

"Please." There was a beginning of reluctant anger creeping into her gaze. "It's been nice of you to help me. Don't spoil it now."

Simon Templar inhaled deeply from his cigarette and said nothing. Then suddenly she tried to pass him. One of his long arms reached out and closed the way. She fought against it, half playfully at first, and then with all her lithe young strength she beat at his chest and shoulders with her fists, but it was like hitting pads of tough rubber. He laughed softly, and she became aware that his other hand had been carefully exploring the form of the curious little pouch on her suit.

"I thought it clunked," he murmured, "when I pulled you in. And you don't look as if you had a cast-iron vanity."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Will you let me out?"

"No."

"Have you thought," she asked slowly, "what would happen if I screamed? I could rouse half the harbor."

Simon Templar nodded, without shifting his strategic position on the companion.

"Sister," he said, "have you stopped to consider what would happen if I screamed?"

"What?"

"You see, it isn't as if this was your boat. If I'd swum out and invaded you at this hour, and you'd been wearing pyjamas instead of me, then I guess you could have screamed most effectively. But this tub is mine, and you're trespassing. Presumably you couldn't put up a story that I kidnapped you, because then people would ask why you hadn't screamed before. Besides, you're wearing a wet bathing costume, and the time is now moving on to half-past three in the morning. Taking it by and large, I can't help feeling that you'd have to answer a lot of embarrassing questions." He paused and the grey eyes cut him with ice-cold lights. "Come now, darling, I want to know what this gay game is that causes shooting in the night and sends you swimming through the fog. I want to know what makes you and Hooknose string along with the same crazy story, and what sort of a bet it is that makes you go bathing with a gun on you!"

The last fragment of his speech was not quite accurate. Even as he uttered it, her hand flashed to the waterproof pouch; and he looked down the muzzle of a tiny automatic.

"You're quite right about the gun," she said, with glacial evenness. "And, as you know, Frenchmen have a wonderful grip on the facts of life. Their juries are pretty easy on a woman who shoots her lover. . . . Don't you think you'd better change your mind?"

Simon considered this. She saw the chiseling of his handsome reckless face, the bantering lines of devil-may-care mouth and eyebrow, settle for a moment into quiet calculation, and then go back to the same irresponsible amusement.

"Anyway," he remarked, "she does give the fellow his fun first. Stay the night and shoot me after breakfast, and I won't complain."

His unflinching audacity left her for a mo-

ment without words. For the first time her eyes wavered, and he read in them something that might have been an unwilling regret.

"I'm going now," she said. "I mean it. Don't think I'm afraid to shoot, because I'm ready for accidents. I'll count five while you get out of the way."

The Saint looked at her for a second.

"Oh, well," he said philosophically. "If you feel that way about it. . . ."

He stood up unhurriedly. And as he stood up, he touched the light switch. The darkness in the cabin was absolute as his fingers closed and tightened on her wrist. She struggled and tripped against the couch, falling on the soft cushions; but he went down with her, and her hand went numb as he took the automatic away.

"I'm sorry, kid."

As they had fallen, his lips were an inch from hers. He bent his head, so that his mouth touched them. She fought him wildly, but the kiss clung against all her fighting; and then suddenly she was passive in his arms.

Simon got up and switched on the lights.

"I'M Loretta Page," she said.

She sat wrapped in his great woolly bathrobe, sipping hot coffee and smoking one of his cigarettes. The Saint sat opposite her, with his feet up and his head tilted back on the bulkhead.

"It's a nice name," he said.

"And yours?"

"I have dozens. Simon Templar is the only real one. Some people call me the Saint."

She looked at him with a new intentness.

"Why?"

"Because I'm so very, very respectable."

"I've read about you," she said. "But I never heard anything like that before."

He smiled.

"Perhaps it isn't true."

"There was a Professor Vargan who—got killed, wasn't there? And an attempt to blow up a royal train and start a war which went wrong."

"I believe so."

"I've heard of a revolution in South America that you had something to do with, and a plot to hijack a bullion shipment where

you got in the way. I've heard that there's a Chief Inspector at Scotland Yard who'd sell his soul to pin something on you; and another one in New York who thinks you're one of the greatest things that ever happened. I've heard that there isn't a racket running that doesn't get cold shivers at the name of a certain freelance vigilante—"

"Loretta," said the Saint, "you know far too much about this life of sin."

"I ought to," she said. "I'm a detective."

She arose and sat down on the berth beside him. "Listen. You've stolen, haven't you?"

"With discretion."

"You've tackled some big things."

"I pick up elephants and wring their necks."

"Have you ever thought of stealing millions?"

"Often," said the Saint, lying back. "I thought of burgling the Bank of England once, but I decided it was too easy."

She stirred impatiently.

"Saint," she said, "there's one racket working today that steals millions. It's been running for years; and it's still running. And I don't mean any of the old things like boot-legging or kidnapping. It's a racket that goes over most of the world, wherever there's anything for it to work on; and it hits where there's no protection. I couldn't begin to guess how much money has been taken out of it since it began."

"I know, darling," said the Saint. "It's called income tax."

"Have you heard of the *Lutine*?"

He studied her intently.

"It sank, didn't it?" he said.

"In 1799—with about a million pounds' worth of gold on board. There've been plenty of attempts to save the cargo, but so far the sand's been too much for them. Then the *Lutine* Company took over with a new idea: they were going to suck away the silt through a big conical sort of bell which was to be lowered over the wreck. It was quite a simple scheme, and there's no reason why it shouldn't have worked. The company received a few letters warning them not to go on with it, but naturally they didn't pay much attention to them."

"Well?"

"Well, they haven't tried out their sand-sucker yet. The whole thing was blown sky-high in 1933—and the explosion wasn't an accident."

The Saint sat up. Something like a breath of frozen feathers strolled up his spine—an instinct, a queer clairvoyance.

"Is that all the story?" he asked, and knew that it was not.

She shook her head.

"Something else happened in the same year. And American salvage ship, the *Salvor*, went out to search a wreck off Cape Charles. The *Merida*, which sank in 1911 and took the Emperor Maximilian's crown jewels to the bottom with her—another million-pound cargo. They didn't find anything. Somebody had beaten them to the treasure."

"I remember the *Lutine* fireworks. But that's a new one."

"It's not the only one. Two years before that another salvage company went over the *Turbantia* with a fine comb. She was torpedoed in 1916, and she had seven hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of German bullion on her—then. But they didn't find it. . . . Then in 1928 the Sorima Company made an official search for the collection of uncut diamonds which were on board the *Elizabethville* when another U-boat got her during the war. They found thirty shillings in the safe; which didn't show a big dividend."

"And this sort of piracy has been going on for years?"

"I don't know how long. But just look at those three jobs. They average out at over a million pounds a time. Leave out all the other official treasure hunts that are going on now, and all the other millions that may have been sneaked away before the authorized salvage companies get there. Leave out all the other jobs that haven't been discovered yet. Doesn't it tell you anything?"

Simon Templar sat back and let the electric tingles play up his vertebrae. He saw the only possible, the only plausible corollary: the ghostly pirate stealing through grey dawns to drop her divers and her steel grabs, the unsuspected gangsters of the sea who had discovered the most pluperfect racket of all time. He knew that the girl was not

romancing. She threw up terse facts and left him to find the link; and the supernatural creep of his nerves told him where the link was.

"Why?" he said, "didn't I know all this before?"

"Perhaps you were too busy."

"Anything else could have waited," said the Saint. "Except perhaps the Bank of England. . . . And is that what you're detecting?"

She took a cigarette from his pack, and a light from the butt between his fingers.

"Yes. I work for the Ingerbeck Agency—we have a contract with Lloyds. You see, where we work, there's no ordinary police force. Where a ship sinks, the wreck is nominally under the protection of the country that covers the water; but if the underwriters have paid out a total loss, the salvage rights belong to them. Which means precisely nothing. In the last fifty years alone, the insurance companies have paid out millions of pounds on this kind of risk. Of course they hoped to get a lot of it back in salvage, but the amounts they've seen would make you laugh."

"Is it always a loss?"

"Of course not. But we've known—they've known—for a long time, that there was some highly organized racket cheating them out of six figures or more a year. It has clever men, and the best equipment. We went out to look for them."

"You?"

"Oh, no. Ingerbeck's. They've been on it for the last five years. Some of their men went a long way. Three of them went too far—and didn't come back." She met his eyes steadily. "But one of them found a trail that led somewhere; and it's been followed up."

"To here?"

She nodded. "But we came to a brick wall. The men couldn't get inside the racket. Well, there was one other way. Somewhere at the top of the racket there must be a head man, and the odds are that he's human."

He took in the grace of her as she lounged there in the oversized bathrobe, understanding the rest.

"You came out to be human with him."

The turn of her head was sorcery, the

sculpture of her neck merging into the first hinted curve between the lapels of the bathrobe was a pattern of magic that made murder and sudden death egregious intrusions.

"I didn't succeed—so far. I've tried. I've even had dinner with him, and danced at the Casino. But I haven't had an invitation to go on board his boat. Tonight I got the devil in me, or something. I tried to go on board without an invitation. He caught me, but let go when I fired a shot beside his ear—I didn't hurt him—and I dived overboard."

"And thereby hangs a tale," said the Saint.

He stood up and flicked his cigarette-end through a porthole.

"You didn't tell me all this to pass the time, did you?" he smiled.

"I told you because you're—you." She was looking at him directly. "Maybe I thought you might be interested."

"Maybe I might," he said. "Where are you staying?"

"The Hotel de la Mer."

"I'm going to row you home now," he said. "Or do we have another argument?"

"I wouldn't argue," she smiled. "But thanks for the drink—and everything."

"There are only two things you haven't told me," he said. "One is the name of this boat you wanted to look at."

"The *Falkenberg*."

"And the other is the name of the boy friend—"

"Kurt Vogel."

"How very appropriate," said the Saint. "Vogel—the German word for bird. I think I shall call him Birdie when we get acquainted. But that can wait. . . . I want to

finish my beauty sleep, and I suppose you haven't even started yours. But I've got a hunch that if you're on the beach before lunch we may talk some more. I'm glad you dropped in."

THE fog was thinning to a pearl-grey vagueness lightening with the dawn when he rowed her back; and when he woke up there were ovals of yellow sunlight stenciled along the bulkhead from the opposite portholes.

He stretched himself like a cat, freshening his lungs with the heady nectar of the morning, and lighted a cigarette. For a while he lay sprawled in delicious laziness, taking in the familiar cabin with a sense of new discovery. There she had sat, there was the cup and glass she had used, there was the crushed stub of her cigarette in the ashtray. There on the carpet was still a darkened patch of damp, where she had stood with the salt water dewing her slim legs and pooling on the floor. He saw the ripple of gold in her hair, the shift of challenge in her eyes, the exquisite shape of her as he first saw her like a shy nymph spiced with the devil's temper; and knew a supreme content which was not artistically rewarded by the abrupt apparition of a belligerent face sheltering behind a loose walrus moustache in the door leading to the galley.

"Lovely morn'n, sir," said the face. "Brekfuss narf a minnit."

The Saint grinned ruefully and hauled himself up.

"Make it two minutes, Orace," he said. "I had company last night."

• [Turn page]

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active ingredients. Anacin is specially compounded to give FAST, LONG LASTING relief. Don't wait. Buy Anacin today.



"Yessir," said Orace phlegmatically and retired to the galley.

The mist had receded under the sun until it was only a haze on the horizon, and a sky of pale translucent azure loomed over a sea like glass. Simon went up on deck with a towel round his middle and slipped adroitly into the water, leaving the towel behind. He cut away across the estuary in a straight line of hissing crawl, turned and rolled over on his back to wallow in the invigorating delight of cold water sheathing his naked limbs, and made his way back more leisurely to eat bacon and eggs in a deck chair in the spacious cockpit while the strengthening sun warmed his shoulders.

All these things, then, were real—the physical gusto of life, quickened by unmasked romance and laced with the wine of danger. Even the privileged cynicism of Orace only served as a touchstone to prove reality, rather than to destroy illusion. It was like the old days—which as a matter of fact were by no means so old. He lighted a cigarette and scanned the other boats which he could see from his anchorage.

A cable's length away, towards the Pointe de la Vicomté, he picked a white rakish motor cruiser of about a hundred tons, and knew that this must be the one even before he went down to the saloon for a pair of binoculars and read the name from a lifebelt. *Falkenberg*. Simon's lips twitched in a half-smile that was entirely Saintly. The name of the legendary Flying Dutchman was a perfect baptism for the pirate ship of that hawk-faced black-browed man who called himself Kurt Vogel, and the Saint mentally saluted the antarctic quality of bravado that must have chosen it. Still using his binoculars from the prudent obscurity of the saloon, he took in the high outswept bows and the streamlined angles of the wheelhouse forward, the clean lines of superstructure dipping to the unusually low flat counter, and credited her with twin racing engines and a comfortable thirty knots. Aft the saloon there was a curious projection neatly shrouded in canvas—for the moment he could not guess what it was.

He stropped his razor and ran water into a basin; and he was finishing his shave when his man came through with the breakfast

plates. Simon rounded his chin carefully and said: "Orace, have you still got that blunderbuss of yours—the young howitzer you bought once in mistake for a gun?"

"Yessir," said Orace unemotionally.

"Good." The Saint wiped his razor. "You'd better get out my automatic as well and look it over."

"Yessir."

"Put a spot of oil in the works and load up a couple of spare magazines. And grease the cartridges—in case I take a swim with it."

"Yessir."

"We may be busy."

Orace had a limp which was a souvenir of authorized commotion as a sergeant of His Majesty's Marines, but it is doubtful whether even in years of international discord he had heard as many different calls to arms as had come his way since he first took service with the Saint.

"'Ave you bin gettin' in trouble again?" he demanded fiercely.

The Saint laughed behind his towel.

"Not trouble, Orace—just fun. I won't try to tell you how beautiful she is, because you have no soul. But she came out of the sea like a mermaid, and the standard of living went up again like a rocket. And would you mind moving off that bit of the carpet, because the comparison is too hideous. She stood there with the water on her, and she said 'Will you let me out?' And I said 'No! Just like that.'"

"Did yer, sir?"

"And she pulled a gun on me."

"Go on, did she?"

"She pulled a gun. Look, you pull a gun. Hold your hand like that. Right. Well, I said 'Ha, ha,'—like that, very sinister. I switched out the lights! I leapt upon her! I grabbed her wrist! We fell on the bunk—"

"Steady on, sir, yer 'urting!"

"You shut up. She was *crushed* against me. Her lips were an inch from mine. For heaven's sake stop whiffing your moustache like that. I felt her breath on my face. I was on fire with passion. I seized her in my arms . . . and . . ." Simon planted a smacking kiss on his crew's horrified brow. "I said 'Don't you think Strindberg is *too* sweet?' Now go and drown yourself."

He picked himself up and erupted out of the cabin, slinging the towel round his neck, while Orace gaped goggle-eyed after him. In a few minutes he was back, tightening the belt of a pair of swimming trunks and stuffing cigarettes into a waterproof metal case.

"By the way," he said, "we aren't full up on juice for the auxiliary. You'd better take the dinghy and fetch a couple of dozen *bidons*. Get some oil, too, and see that there's plenty of food and drink. There's another bird mixed up in this who's less beautiful—a guy named Kurt Vogel—and we ought to be ready for traveling."

He went up on deck and looked around. The sun was flooding down on the stucco villas of Dinand and cutting innumerable diamonds from the surface of the water. The *Falkenberg* was too far away for him to be able to distinguish its signs of life. He noticed that besides the outboard dinghy there was now a small speed tender also tied up alongside.

After a while he dived off and swam round the Pointe du Moutinet to the beach. He strolled the length of the beach, then chose a clear space to stretch himself out opposite the Casino.

He had not seen Loretta Page during his walk, but he knew she would come. He lay basking in the voluptuous warmth, blowing smoke into the sparkling air and considered the profile of Kurt Vogel. Properly worked on by an octet of bunched knuckles. . .

"Hullo, old timer. Did you sleep well?"

She wore the same elementary swim-suit, with a bathrobe that fitted her better than his had done. The grey eyes were dark with devilment.

"I saw ghosts," he said sepulchrally. "Ghosts of the past. They wiggled their bony fingers at me, and said 'You are not worthy of her!' I woke up and burst into tears."

She slipped out of the striped gown and sat down beside him.

"Wasn't there any hope?"

"Not unless you stretched out your little hand and lifted me out of the abyss."

She smiled. "I wonder why Ingerbeck's 'They might have tried, but I'm afraid I didn't think of signing you up years ago.' haven't got any sort of affinity for dotted

lines. Besides, I'm not naturally honest. You try to recover stolen property for the insurance companies, don't you?"

"That's part of the job."

"Well, I do the same thing, but not for any insurance company."

"Not even on a ten per cent commission? It's not a bad reward, when there are millions to look for."

He sighed.

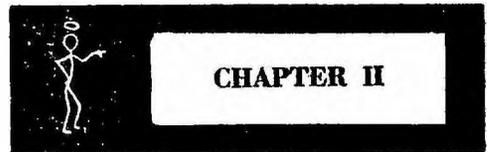
"It's so dull to be honest. Nobody but you could make it even bearable. But I know what you mean. I'm on a vacation, and I can always pick up a few millions some other time. It was your picnic originally, and you let me in on it—"

"I needn't have done that. I mean I needn't have gone in for such desperate measures so soon."

"What's happened?" he asked.

She looked at him steadily.

"I had a note this morning," she said. "It was an invitation to have dinner with Vogel on the *Falkenberg*."



THE SAINT remembered the speedboat tied up alongside the *Falkenberg*, which had not been there before.

"You hadn't got some crazy idea of accepting his invitation, had you?" he said.

"It's what I've been waiting for."

"I know, but . . . what do you think happened last night?"

She took one of his cigarettes.

"I don't think I could have been recognized. It was pretty dark and the man who caught me came up behind. I fired the shot, he let go, and I dived."

"He'd know it was a woman."

"Not necessarily. Don't you remember that Vogel said he was looking for a man?"

"An obvious lie."

"A very stupid one—if it was. Aren't you rather looking for trouble?"

"That's my job," answered the Saint evenly. "I'll give you something else. Sup-

pose Vogel wasn't quite happy about me last night?"

"Well?"

"It was rather an unusual hour for anyone to be up and about—messing around with fenders. And if Vogel's the kind of man we think he is, he keeps alive by sorting out unusual things—like I do. He couldn't make any fuss, because that'd be letting himself in if he was wrong. But he could puff away in that outboard, stop the engine, and paddle back quietly on the oars. He couldn't have seen you—probably he couldn't even have heard what you said—but he could hear that there was a girl on board."

"Which isn't impossible either," she said demurely.

Simon frowned.

"You forget my Saintry reputation. But still, maybe to Vogel, with his low criminal mind, it isn't impossible either. But it's still unusual enough to be worth looking at. And then there's you."

"Without a reputation."

"And not deserving one. You've been making a clear set at him for several days—weeks—whatever it is. If I were in his place I'd think it was—interesting. Interesting enough, maybe, to try and find out some more about you."

She pressed his hand. "Dear man, don't you think I know all this?"

"And if he only wants to see exactly where you stand in the game?"

"I can pack a gun."

"Like any other ordinary innocent woman."

"Then I'll go without it."

"You wouldn't be much worse off."

"All the same, I'll go."

"Three," he quoted her, "didn't come back."

She nodded. "When you join Ingerbeck's, you take an oath to do your job and take the consequences."

He stared thoughtfully over the water. "Then I take it you've already accepted the invitation?"

"The messenger was going to call back for my answer. I left a letter when I came out. I said I'd be delighted."

"Does that leave me out?"

"I don't know," she said. "Have you de-

cidated to break off your vacation?"

"Let's have a drink and talk about it."

She shook her head. "Vogel may be ashore now. I've risked enough to talk to you at all. If you've changed your mind since last night, we'll fight over it."

"Did I tell you I'd made up my mind?"

"You let me think you had. I took a chance when I told you the story." She was facing him, cool and possessed. "I think Ingerbeck himself would have done the same. We might get a long way together; and if we came through there'd be plenty of commission to split. Just once, it might be fun for you to look at a dotted line."

His eyebrows slanted quizzically. "Where should we meet on this—dotted line?"

"I'll be here tomorrow. No, not here—we can't take this risk again. Suppose I swam out and met you, off the Pointe du Moulinet. Halfway house. At eleven." She smiled. "Are you looking for your pen?"

"I can't write, Loretta."

"You can make a cross."

He watched her walking up towards the white spires of the Casino Balnéum, with all the maddening delight of movement in the swing of her brown body, and searched his vocabulary for words to describe the capriciousness of fortune. Admitted that all the gifts of that immoral goddess had strings harnessed to them—there were strings and strings. There was no real need in adventure for quite such a disturbing complication. And the Saint smiled in spite of that. The beach was empty after she had left it; that is to say, there were about a thousand other people on the Plage de l'Ecluse, but he found all of them sickeningly bovine. He turned away from the repulsive spectacle, and was rewarded by the almost equally unwelcome vision of Orace's moustache, through which something more than the sea air was filtering.

"You do break out at the most unromantic moments, Orace," he complained; and then he saw that Orace's eyes were still fixed glassily on the middle distance.

"Is that the lidy, sir?"

The Saint frowned. "She isn't a lady," he said firmly. "No lady would use such shameless eyes to try and seduce a self-respecting buccaneer from his duty. Come along."

They walked towards the bend where the Promenade curves out towards the sea.

It was nearly one o'clock when the fuel tanks had been replenished from the cans which Orace had acquired. Orace produced a drink—and required to know whether he should get lunch.

"I don't know," said the Saint, with unusual brusqueness.

He had no idea what he wanted to do. He felt suddenly restless and dissatisfied. The day had gone flat in prospect. *They* might have lazed through the long afternoon, steeping themselves in sunlight, or have plunged together through the cool rapture of the sea, or drifted out under spread sails to picnic under the cliffs of St. Lunaire. They might have enjoyed any of a dozen trivial things which he had half planned in his imagination, secure in a communion of pagan understanding that made no demands and asked no promises. Instead of which . . .

He sighed. "You're getting old," he reproached himself solemnly. "At this very moment, you're trying to persuade yourself to work for an insurance company. Just because this gal has a body like an old man's dream, and you kissed her. An insurance company!"

He shuddered.

And then he turned his eyes to study a speck of movement on the borders of his field of vision. The speed tender was moving away from the side of the *Falkenberg*, heading towards the Bec de la Vallée. For a moment he watched it idly, calculating that its course would take it within a few yards of the *Corsair*: as it came nearer he recognized Kurt Vogel, and with him a stout grey-bearded man in a Norfolk jacket and a shapeless yellow Panama hat.

"Never mind about lunch," he told Orace. "I'm going on shore to take up ornithology."

A VEDETTE from St. Malo was coming in to the jetty and the *Falkenberg's* tender was maneuvering for a landing. Simon dropped into his dinghy and wound up the outboard. Fortunately the *Corsair* had swung round so that she screened his movements as he started off up-river. Not that it mattered much; but he wanted to avoid giving any immediate impression that he was deliber-

ately setting off in pursuit.

He cruised along, keeping his head down as the *Falkenberg's* tender squeezed in to the steps and Vogel and his companion went ashore. Then, as Vogel and the grey-bearded man started up the causeway towards the Grande Rue, the Saint opened up his engine and scooted after them. He shot in to the quay, hitched the painter deftly through a ring-bolt, and was up on land and away.

The other two were not walking quickly; and the gray-bearded man's shabby yellow Panama was as good as a beacon. Simon spaced himself as far behind them as he dared when they reached the Digue, and slackened the speed of his pursuit.

Presently the yellow Panama bobbed in the direction of the Casino terrace, and Simon Templar followed. The place was packed with a chattering throng of thirsty socialites, and the Saint was able to squeeze himself about among the tables in the manner of a lone man looking for a place—preferably with company. The hook-nosed man looked up from his table and caught his eye, Simon returned the recognition.

"I hope you didn't think I was too unceremonious about disturbing you last night," Vogel said.

"Not at all," said the Saint cheerfully, and his glance passed unostentatiously over the grey-bearded man. Something about the mild pink face struck him as dimly familiar.

"This is Professor Yule," said the other, "and my name is Vogel. Won't you join us, Mr.—er—"

"Tombs," said the Saint, and sat down.

Vogel extended a cigarette-case. "You are interested in gambling, Mr. Tombs?" he suggested.

His tone was courteous and detached. The Saint slid out a smoke and settled back.

"I don't mind an occasional flutter to pass the time."

"Ah, yes—an occasional flutter. You can't come to much harm that way. It's the people who play beyond their means who come to grief."

Simon Templar let a trickle of smoke drift down his nostrils. "There's not much chance of that," he said lightly, "with my overdraft in its present state."

They sat eye to eye like two duellists.

"Are you staying long?" Vogel asked.

"I haven't made any plans" said the Saint nebulously. "It just depends on how soon I get tired of this place."

"It doesn't agree with everybody," Vogel assented purringly. "In fact, I have heard that some people find it definitely unhealthy."

Simon nodded.

"A bit relaxing, perhaps," he admitted. "But I don't mind that. Up to the present, though, I've found it rather dull."

A waiter equilibrating under a dizzy tray of glasses swayed by and snatched their order as he passed. At the same time an adjoining table became vacant, and another party of thirst-quenchers took possession. The glance of one of them passed over the Saint and then became faintly fixed. For a brief second it stayed set; then he leaned sideways to whisper. His companions turned their heads furtively. The name "Yule" reached the Saint clearly, and then a resplendently peroxidized matron in the party said: "I'm sure it must be! . . . You know, my dear—the bathy-something man. . . ."

Simon Templar drew a deep breath. He knew now why the name and face of Professor Yule had seemed familiar; only a few months ago the *National Geographic Magazine* had brought out a special Yule Expedition number. For Wesley Yule had done something that no man on earth had ever done before. He had been down five thousand feet into the Pacific Ocean, beyond any depth ever seen before by human eyes—not in any sort of glorified diving bell, but in a fantastic bulbous armour built to withstand the terrific pressure that would have crushed an unprotected man like a midge on a window-pane, in which he was able to move and walk about on the ocean floor nearly a mile below the ship from which he was lowered. He was the man who had perfected and proved a deep-sea costume compared with which the "iron men" of previous diving experiments were mere amateurish makeshifts. . . . And now he was in Dinard, the guest of Kurt Vogel, arch hijacker of Davy Jones!

"Of course you've heard about Professor Yule?" Vogel was saying.

"Of course . . ." Simon looked at Yule

with a smile of open admiration. "It must have been an amazing experience, Professor."

YULE shrugged, with a pleasing diffidence.

"Naturally it was interesting," he replied frankly. "And rather frightening. Not to say uncomfortable. . . . Perhaps you know that at five thousand feet the water is only a few degrees above freezing point. I was damned cold!" He chuckled. "I'm putting an electrical heating arrangement in my improved bathystol, and I shan't suffer that way next time."

"You've decided to go down again, then?"

"Oh, yes. That first trip was only a trial. With my new bathystol I hope to get down much farther; we may even be able to have a look at the Tuscarora Trough, more than five miles down."

"What do you hope to find?"

"Possibly new forms of marine life. There may be some astounding monsters down there, who never see the light of day."

"There are some marvelous possibilities," said the Saint thoughtfully.

"And some expensive ones," confessed Yule, with attractive candor. "In fact, if it hadn't been for Mr. Vogel they might not have been possibilities at all—my first descent just about ruined me. But with his help I hope to go a lot further."

"I see," said the Saint.

A man with a large camera pushed his way to their table and presented a card with the inscription of the Agence Française Journalistique. "*Vous permettez, messieurs?*"

Yule grinned and submitted blushing to the ordeal. The photographer took two snapshots of the group, thanked them, and passed on. Kurt Vogel beckoned a waiter for his check.

"Won't you have another?" suggested the Saint.

"I'm afraid we have an engagement. Next time, perhaps." Vogel stood up. "If you're interested, you might like to come out with us on a trial trip. It won't be very sensational. Just a test for the new apparatus in moderately deep water."

"I should love to," said the Saint slowly.

Yule inclined his head pleasantly.

"It won't be just here," he said—"the water's too shallow. We thought of trying it in the Hurd Deep, north of Alderney. There are only about eighty fathoms there, but it'll be enough for our object. If you think it's worth changing your plans, we're leaving for St. Peter Port in the morning."

"Well—that sort of invitation doesn't come every day," said the Saint, with a certain well-timed embarrassment. "It's certainly worth thinking about—if you're sure I shouldn't be in the way. . . ."

"Then we may look forward to seeing you." Vogel held out his hand. He had a firm muscular grip, but there was a curious reptilian coldness in the touch of his skin that prickled the Saint's scalp. "I'll give you a shout in the morning as we go by, and see if you've made up your mind."

Simon shook hands with the Professor, and watched them until they turned the corner by the Petit Casino. He had got what he wanted. He had made actual contact with Kurt Vogel, talked with him, touched him physically and experienced the cold-blooded

fighting presence of the man. He had gained more than that. He had received a gratuitous invitation to call again. . . .

A man came filtering through the tables on the terrace with a sheaf of English and American newspapers fanned out in his hand. Simon bought an *Express*, and he had only turned the first page when a single-column headline caught his eye.

TO SALVAGE SUNKEN CHALFONTE CASTLE

Treasure Hunting Expedition Fits Out

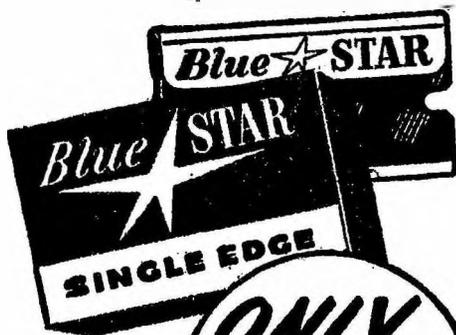
A SHIP will leave Falmouth early in August with a contract for the greatest treasure-hunt ever attempted in British waters.

She is the Restorer, crack steamer of the Liverpool & Glasgow Salvage Association. HER OBJECTIVE IS THE RECOVERY OF £5,000,000 IN BAR GOLD WHICH—

Simon skimmed through the story with narrowing eyes. So that was it! If Kurt Vo-

[Turn page]

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gel was cruising the vicinity of the Channel Islands on active business, and not merely on a holiday, the *Chalfont Castle* was his obvious target. And it seemed likely—otherwise why not take Professor Yule and his bathstol to some place like Madeira, where there was really deep water close at hand for any number of experiments?

The *Chalfont Castle* could not wait. An authorized expedition was being organized quickly, and there was not much time for a free-lance to step in and forestall it. But for a man of Vogel's nerve, there might still be a chance. . . .

SIMON TEMPLAR lunched at the Gallic and enjoyed his meal. The spice of certain danger laced his wine and sparkled through his veins. His brain was functioning like an awakened machine, turning over the urgencies of the moment with smooth and effortless ease. When he had finished, he collected a reception clerk.

"You have a telephone?"

"Oui, m'sieu. *A gauche—*"

"No, thanks," said the Saint. "This isn't local—I want to talk to London. Let me have a private room. I'll pay for it."

Ten minutes later he was making the first of two calls.

"Hullo, Peter. This is your Uncle Simon. Listen—didn't you tell me that you once had a respectable family?"

"It still is respectable," Peter Quentin's voice answered indignantly. "I'm the only one who's had anything to do with you."

Simon grinned gently and slid a cigarette out of the package in front of him.

"Do any of them know anything about Lloyds?"

"I've got a sort of cousin who works there," said Peter.

"That's great. Well, I want you to dig out this sort of cousin and find out something for me about the *Chalfont Castle*."

"Like a shot, old boy. But are you sure you don't want a real estate agent?"

"No, I don't want a real estate agent, you fathead. It's a wreck, not a ruin. She sank somewhere near Alderney about the beginning of March. I want you to find out exactly where she went down. They're sure to have a record at Lloyds. Get a chart from

Potter's, and get the exact spot marked. And send it to me at the Poste Restante, St. Peter Port, Guernsey—tonight. Name of Tombs. Or get a bearing and wire it. But get something. All clear?"

"Clear as mud." There was a suspicious hiatus at the other end of the line. "But if this means you're on the warpath again—"

"If I want you, I'll let you know, Peter," said the Saint contentedly, and hung up.

The Saint's next call was to another erstwhile companion in crime.

"Do you think you could buy me a nice diving suit, Roger?" he suggested. "One of the latest self-contained contraptions with oxygen tanks. Say you're representing a movie company and you want it for an undersea epic."

"What's the racket?" inquired Roger Conway firmly.

"No racket at all, Roger. I've just taken up submarine geology, and I want to have a look at some globigerina ooze. Now, if you bought that outfit this afternoon and shipped it off to me in a trunk—"

"Why not let me bring it?"

The Saint hesitated. After all, why not? It was the second time in a few minutes that the suggestion had been held out, and each time by a man whom he had tried and proved in more than one tight corner. They were old campaigners, men with his own cynical contempt of legal technicalities and his own cool disregard of danger. He liked working alone; but some aspects of Vogel's crew of modern pirates might turn out to be more than one man's meat.

"Okay." The Saint drew at his cigarette, and his slow smile floated over the wire in the undertones of his voice. "Get hold of Peter, and any other of the boys. But the other instructions stand. Ship that outfit to me personally—you might even make it two outfits—and Peter's to do his stuff exactly as I've already told him. You toughs can put up at the Royal; but you're not to recognize me unless I recognize you first. Check?"

"Check," said Roger happily.

Simon walked on air to the stairs. As he stepped down into the foyer he became aware of a pair of socks. The socks were of a pale brick-red hue, and intervened between blue trousers and yellow shoes. It was a combina-

tion of colors which, once seen, could not be easily forgotten; and the Saint's glance voyaged to the face of the man who wore it. The sock stylist was no stranger. He had sat at a table close to the Saint's at lunch-time.

The Saint paid for his calls and the use of the room, and sauntered out. He turned three or four corners, then paused at a shop window. In the plate glass he caught a reflection—of pale brick-red socks. The pink-hosed spy meant that Vogel was already on his guard, and the Saint's estimation of the hook-nosed man went up a grim notch. In that dispassionate efficiency, that methodical examination of every loophole, that ruthless elimination of every factor of chance or guesswork, he recognized some of the qualities that must have given Vogel his unique position in the hierarchy of racketeers—the qualities that must have been fatally underestimated by those three nameless scouts of Ingerbeck's, who had not come home.

And which might have been underestimated by the fourth. The thought checked him. He knew that Loretta Page was ready to be told that she was suspected, but was she prepared for such inquisitorial surveillance as this? To find out, he had to shake off his own shadow. He walked quickly to the corner of the Rue Levasseur where he swung on board a disengaged taxi.

"*A la gare,*" he said; and the taxi was off again.

Looking through the rear window, he saw the pink socks piling into another cab.

"*Un moment,*" he said in the driver's ear. "*Il faut que j'aille premièrement à la Banque Bretagne.*"

The driver muttered something uncomplimentary, trod on the brakes, and spun the wheel. They reeled dizzily round a corner, then made another right-hand hairpin turn. Simon looked back again, and saw no sign of the pursuit. They turned back into the Rue Levasseur; and to make absolutely certain the Saint changed his mind again and ordered another twist north to the post office. He paid off the driver and plunged into a telephone booth.

She was in.

"What's the number of your room?" the Saint demanded.

"Twenty-eight. But—"

"I'll walk up as if I owned it. Can you bear to wait?"

SHE was wearing a green silk robe with a great silver dragon crawling round it and bursting into fire-spitting life on her shoulders. Heaven knew what she wore under it, if anything; but the curve of her thigh sprang in a sheer sweep of breath-taking line to her knee as she turned. The physical spell of her wove a definite hiatus in between his entrance and his first line.

"I hope I intrude," he said.

The man who was with her scowled. He was a hard-faced individual, rather stout and rather bald.

"Loretta—how d'ya know this guy's on the up-and-up?"

"I don't," she said calmly. "But he has such a nice clean smile."

"Just a home girl's husband," murmured the Saint lightly. He tapped a cigarette on his thumb-nail, and slanted his brows side-long at the objector. "Who's the young heart's delight?"

"Name of Steve Murdoch."

"Of Ingerbeck's?"

"Yes."

"Simon to you," said the Saint, holding out his hand.

Murdoch accepted it sullenly. "Okay, Saint," Murdoch said dourly. "I know you're tough. But I don't like fresh guys."

"I hate them myself," said the Saint. He sat on the arm of a chair, making patterns in the atmosphere with cigarette smoke.

"Been here long?"

"Landed at Cherbourg this morning."

"Did you ask for Loretta downstairs?"

"Yeah."

"Notice anyone prick up his ears?"

Murdoch shook his head. "I didn't look."

"You should have," said the Saint reprovingly. "I didn't ask, but I looked. There was a fellow kicking his heels in a corner when I arrived, and he had watchdog written across his chest in letters a foot high. He didn't see me, because I walked through with my face buried inside a newspaper."

There was a short silence.

"Did you know Steve was here?" Loretta asked.

"No. He only makes it more difficult. But I discovered that a bird with the most beautiful line in gents' hose was sitting on my tail, and that made me think. I slipped him and came round to warn you." Simon looked at her steadily. "There's only a trace of suspicion attached to me at the moment, but Vogel's taking no chances. He wants to make sure. There's probably a hell of a lot of suspicion about you, so you weren't likely to be forgotten. And apparently you haven't been. Now Steve has branded himself by asking for you. He'll be a marked man from this moment."

"That's okay," said Murdoch. "I can look after myself without a nurse."

"I'm sure you can, dear old skunk," said the Saint amiably. "But that's not the point. Loretta, at least, isn't supposed to be looking after herself. She's the immaculate ingénue, with nothing to look after except her honor. Once she starts any Mata Hari business, that boat is sunk."

"Well?"

Simon flicked ash on the carpet.

"The only tune is the one I'm playing. Complete and childlike innocence. With a pan like yours, Steve, you'll have a job to get your mouth round the flute, but you've got to try it. And if you've got anything to connect you with Ingerbeck's, flush it down the lavatory. That goes for you too, Loretta, because sooner or later the ungodly are going to try and get a line on you from your luggage. And then, Steve, you blow."

"What?"

"Fade. Vanish. Pass out into the night. Loretta can go downstairs with you, and you can take a fond farewell in the foyer, with a few well-chosen lines of dialogue from which any listeners can gather that you're an old friend of her father's taking a holiday in Guernsey, and hearing she was in Dinard you came over for the day. And then you hurry to St. Malo, and shoot on to the return steamer to St. Peter Port. Vogel will be there tomorrow."

"How do you know that?" asked Loretta quickly.

"He told me. We got into conversation before lunch." Simon's gaze lifted to hers. "He was trying to draw me out, and I was just deviling him, but neither of us got very

far. I think he was telling me the truth, though. If I chase him to St. Peter Port he'll be able to put my innocence through some more tests. So when you're saying good-bye to Steve, he might ask you if you're likely to take a trip to Guernsey, and you can say that you don't think you'll be able to. That may make them think that you haven't heard anything from me."

Murdoch's eyes were dark again with distrust.

"It's a stall, Loretta," he said. "How d'ya know Vogel isn't capable of having an undercover man, the same as us? All he wants to do is get me out of the way, so he can take you alone. Well, I'm not running."

Loretta glanced from one man to the other. "Yes, you are, Steve," she said. "And that's an order."

Murdoch stared half incredulously. "An order?"

"That's right, Steve. Until Ingerbeck takes me off the assignment, you do what I tell you."

With a sudden burst of vicious energy Murdoch grabbed for his hat. "If you put it that way, I can't argue," he growled. "But you're going to wish I had!" He transferred his glare to the Saint. "As for you—if anything happens to Loretta through my not being here—"

"We'll be sure to let you know about it," said the Saint and opened the door for him.

ORACE was waiting anxiously when the Saint got back. "Yer bin a long time." "Thousands of years," said the Saint. He remembered how Loretta's fingers had touched his lips before he left, and how suddenly he had felt her lips crushed and melting against his, and her body pressed tormentingly against him.

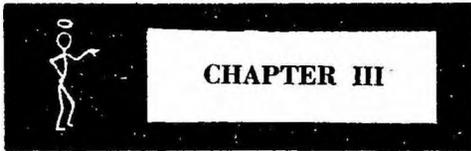
He sat out on deck after he had taken his last daylight swim, and sipped a glass of sherry, and dined on one of Orace's superlative meals. The speed tender had set out again from the *Falkenberg* and returned about half-past seven with Vogel, in evening dress, sitting beside Loretta. Through the binoculars, from one of the saloon portholes, he saw Vogel smiling and talking, his great nose profiled against the water.

Loretta was there; but Simon saw no need

for her to be alone.

The idea grew with him as the dark deepened and his imagination worked through it. In his own way he was afraid, impatient with his enforced helplessness. . . . Presently he went below to take off his clothes. He tested the working of his automatic, fastened the gun to the belt of his trunks. The dark water received him without a sound.

It was during that stealthy swim that he had a sudden electric remembrance of the news photographer at the Casino. He had a startlingly vivid picture of a camera aiming towards him—fully as much towards him as towards Professor Yule—and a sudden reckless smile moved his lips. If that news photographer was not a real news photographer, and the picture had been rushed to England by air, a correspondent could show it around in certain circles in London with the virtual certainty of having it identified within forty-eight hours. . . . And if the result of that investigation was cabled to Kurt Vogel at St. Peter Port, a good many interrogation marks might be wiped out with deadly speed.



A CEILING of cloud had formed over the sky, curtaining off the moon. It was practically pitch dark and the Saint, sliding through the water, was concentrating so much on silence that he nearly allowed himself to be run down by a canoe which came skimming by when he was only a stone's throw from the *Falkenberg*.

The boat leaped at him out of the darkness so unexpectedly that the prow brushed his hair, and he submerged himself a fraction of a second before the paddle speared down at him. When he came up again the canoe had vanished.

Then the hull of the *Falkenberg* loomed up for undivided attention. At the very edge of the circle of its lights he paused to draw a deep breath; and then even his head disappeared under the water, and his hands touched the side before he let himself float

gently up again and open his lungs.

He rose under the stern, and trod water while he listened for any sound that would betray the presence of a watcher on the deck. He heard nothing.

The Saint dipped a hand to his belt and brought it carefully out of the water with a mask of black rubber which he had tucked in there before he left the *Corsair*. When he pulled the mask on over his head it covered every inch of his face from the end of his nose upwards. Then he set off again to work himself round the boat. There were three lighted portholes aft, and he stopped by the first of them to find a finger-hold. When he had got it he hauled himself up till he could bend one modest eye over the rim.

He looked into a large cabin running the whole width of the vessel. A treble tier of bunks lined two of the three sides which he could see, and on two of them half-dressed men were stretched out, reading and smoking. At a table in the centre four others were playing cards, while a fifth was trying to write a letter. Simon absorbed their faces in a travelling glance, and mentally ranked them for as tough a harvest of hard-case sea stiffs as anyone could hope to glean from the scourings of the seven seas. Two thin fighting lines creased themselves into the corners of his mouth as he lowered himself back into the river.

The third porthole lighted a separate smaller cabin with only four bunks, and when he looked in he had to peer between the legs of a man who was reclining on the upper berth across the porthole. By the light brick-red hosiery he identified the sleuth who had trailed him that afternoon; and on the opposite side of the cabin the man he had seen in the foyer of the Hotel de la Mer.

He couldn't look into any of the principal rooms without actually climbing out on to the deck, but from the scraps of conversation that floated out through the windows he gathered that that was where the entertainment of Loretta Page was still proceeding. Professor Yule appeared to be relating some anecdote about his submarine experiences.

"... and when he squashed his nose against the glass, I never imagined a fish could get

so much indignation into its face," he concluded.

There was a general laugh, and Vogel said: "Wouldn't even that tempt you to go down, Otto?"

"Not me," affirmed a fruity voice which the Saint had not heard before. "I'd rather stay on top of the water. Wouldn't you, Miss Page?"

The Saint passed on, swimming slowly and leisurely up to the bows. He eeled himself round the stem and drifted down again. As he paddled under the saloon windows on the return journey Vogel was offering liqueurs; the man in the pink socks was snoring, and his companion had lighted a pipe. The card game in the crew's quarters finished with a burst of raucous chaff, the letter-writer licked his envelope, and the men who had been reading still read.

During the whole of that round tour of inspection Simon Templar hadn't collected one sight or sound that didn't stand for complete relaxation and goodwill towards men. As for any watch on deck, he was ready to swear that it simply didn't exist. Puzzled, the Saint gave it up. By every ordinary test, anyhow, he could find nothing in his way; and the only thing to do was to push on and search further.

He drew himself up until he could hitch one set of toes on to the deck. Only for an instant he might have been seen there, upright against the dark water; and then he had flitted noiselessly across the dangerous open space and merged himself into the deep shadow of the superstructure. Again he waited, but nothing happened.

At last he relaxed, and allowed himself to glance curiously at his surroundings. Over his head, an odd canvas-shrouded contrivance which he had observed from a distance reached out aft like an over-sized boom—but there was no mast at the near end to account for it. The *Falkenberg* carried no sail. He stretched up and wriggled his fingers through a gap in the lacing, and felt something like a square steel girder with wire cables stretched inside it. At the end up against the deckhouse he found wheels, and the wire cables turned over the wheels and ran down beside the bulkhead to vanish through plated eyes in the deck at his feet.

... He was exploring a well-olled, and up-to-date ten-ton grab!

"Well, well, well," murmured the Saint admiringly, to his guardian angel.

And that curiously low flattened stern. . . . It all fitted in. Divers could be dropped over that counter with the minimum of difficulty; and the grab could telescope out or swing round, and run its claw round to be steered on to whatever the divers offered it. While, forward of all those gadgets, there were a pair of high-speed engines and a super-streamlined hull to facilitate a lightning getaway if an emergency emerged. . . .

A slow smile tugged at the Saint's lips. Loretta Page hadn't been pulling his leg or giving him a song and dance. That preposterous, princely, pluperfect racket did exist; and Kurt Vogel was in it. In it right up to his neck.

If Simon had been wearing a hat, he would have raised it in solemn salute to the benign deities of outlawry that had poured him into such a truly splendiferous tureen of soup.

Then a door opened further up the deck, and footsteps began to move down towards him. Simon looked up speculatively, and his hands reached for the deckhouse roof. In another second he was up there, spread out flat on his stomach, peeping warily down over the edge.

ALL EVENING Kurt Vogel had been studiously affable. He had set himself out to play the polished cosmopolitan host, and he filled the part brilliantly. The other guest, whom he called Otto and who had been introduced to Loretta as Mr. Arnheim, a fat broad-faced man with small brown eyes and a moist red pursed-up mouth, fitted into the play with equal correctness. And yet the naive joviality of Professor Yule was the only thing that had eased the strain on her nerves.

She knew that from the moment when she set foot on board she was being watched like a mouse cornered by two patient cats. She knew it, even without one single article of fact which she could have pointed out in support of her belief. The menace was not in anything they said or did; it was in their silences. And all the time they were

smiling, talking flatteringly to her, respecting her with their words, so cunningly that an outside observer like Professor Yule could have seen nothing to give her the slightest offence.

She had clung to the Professor as the one infallible lodestar on the tricky course she had to steer, even while she had realized completely what Vogel's patronage of scientific exploration meant. Yule's spontaneous innocence was the one pattern which she had been able to hold to; and when he remained behind in the saloon she felt a cold emptiness that was not exactly fear.



Arnheim had engineered it, and with irreproachable tact, when Vogel suggested showing her over the ship.

"We'll stay and look after the port," he said.

She looked at staterooms, bathrooms, galleys, engines, and refrigerators, listening to his explanations and interjecting the right expressions of admiration and delight. She wondered whether he would kiss her in one of the rooms, and felt as if she had been let out of prison when they came out under the open sky.

His hand slid through her arm. "This open piece of deck is rather pleasant for sitting out. We rig an awning over that boom if the sun's too strong."

"It must be marvelous to own a boat like this," she said.

They stood at the rail, looking down the estuary. "To be able to have you here—this is pleasant," he said. "At other times it can be a very lonely ownership."

"That must be your own choice."

"It is. I am a rich man. If I told you how rich I was you might think I was exaggerating. I could fill this boat hundreds of times over with—delectable company. A generous millionaire is always attractive. But I've never done so. Do you know that you're the first woman who has set foot on this deck?"

"I'm sorry if you regret it," she said carelessly.

"I do." His black eyes sought her face with a burning intensity. "I regret it because when you give a woman even the small-

est corner of your mind, you give her the power to take more. You are no longer in supreme command of your destiny."

She smiled. "You sound as if you'd been disappointed in love."

"I have never been in love—" The last word was bitten off, as if it had not been intended to be the last; and suddenly his hands pinned her to the rail on either side, his great nose thrust down towards her face, his wide lipless mouth working under a torrent of quivering words.

"For years I shut all women out of my life, so that none of them could hurt me. I broke the rule of a lifetime to bring you here. Now I don't want you to go back."

"You'll change your mind again in the morning." Somehow she tore her gaze away, and broke through his arms. "Besides, you wouldn't forget a poor girl's honor—"

She was walking along the deck, swinging her wrap with an affectation of sophisticated composure. He walked beside her.

"Don't be conventional. That isn't worthy of you. It's my business to understand people. You are the kind of woman who can stand aside and look at facts, without being deluded by sentimentality. We speak the same language. That's why I talk to you like this." His hand gripped her shoulder. "You are the kind of woman with whom I could forget to be cold."

He drew her towards him, and she closed her eyes before he kissed her. His mouth was hard and chilling. After a long time he released her. His eyes burned like hot coals.

"You'll stay, Loretta?" he said hoarsely.

"No." She swayed away from him. "I don't know. You're too quick. . . . Ask me again tomorrow. Please."

"We're leaving tomorrow for St. Peter Port. I hoped you would come with us."

"Give me a cigarette."

He felt in his pockets. "I'm afraid I left my case inside. Shall we go in?"

He opened the door, and her hand rested on his arm for a moment as she passed him into the wheelhouse. He passed her a lacquer box and offered her a light.

"You didn't show me this," she said, glancing around the room.

Besides being the wheelhouse, it also contrived to be one of the most attractive living-rooms on the ship. At the after end there were shelves of books, and half a dozen deep armchairs invited idleness. A rich carpet covered the floor. There were concealed lights built into the ceiling.

"We were coming here," said Vogel, and then before he could say anything more there was a knock on the door. "What is it?" he demanded sharply.

"Excuse me, sir."

The steward who had served dinner stood at the door. Vogel turned to Loretta with an apologetic shrug.

"I'm so sorry—will you wait for me a moment?"

The door closed on the two men, and instantly she moved across the room. This was the first time she had been left alone since she came on board. She didn't know exactly what she was looking for; there was no definite thing to find. She could only search around with an almost frantic expectancy for any scrap of something that might be added

to the slowly mounting compilation of what was known about Kurt Vogel—for something that might perhaps miraculously prove to be the last pointer in the long paper-chase. She ran her eyes over the books in the cases. They didn't look like dummies. She pulled out a couple at random and flicked the pages. They were real—nothing in the books. The littered chart table, perhaps. . . .

She crossed the room quickly, stared down at the table, at a general chart of the Channel Islands and the adjacent coast of France, spread out on the polished teak. But what was there in a chart? A course had been ruled out from Dinard to St. Peter Port, with a dog's-leg bend in it to clear the western end of the Minquiers. There was a jotted note of bearings and distances by the angle of the thin penciled lines. Nothing in that. . . . Her glance wandered helplessly over the scattered smudges of red which stood for lighthouses and buoys.

And then she was looking at a red mark that wasn't quite the same as the other red marks. It was a distant circle drawn in red ink around a dot of black marked to the east of Sark. Beside it, also in red ink, neat tiny figures recorded the exact bearing.

The figures jumbled themselves before her eyes. She gripped on her bag, trying to stifle her excitement. So easy, so plain. Perhaps the last clue, the fabulous open sesame. There was a pencil lying on the table; and she had opened her bag before she remembered that she had nothing in it to write on. Lipstick on a handkerchief, then . . . but there were a dozen scraps of torn-up paper in an ashtray beside the pencil, and a square inch of paper would be enough.

Her hand moved out.

Suddenly she felt cold all over. There was a feeling of nightmare limpness in her knees, and when she breathed again it was in a queer little shuddering sigh. But she put her hand into her bag quite steadily and took out a powder box. Quite steadily she dabbed at her nose, and quite steadily she walked away to another table and stood there turning the pages of a magazine—with the thrum of a hundred demented dynamos pounding through her body and roaring sickeningly in her brain.

Those scraps of inviting paper. The pen-

cil ready to be picked up at the first dawn of an idea. The chart left out, with the red bearing marked on it. The excuse for Vogel to leave the room. The ordeal on the deck, before that, which had sabotaged her self-control to the point where the finest edge of her vigilance was dulled . . . to the point where her own aching nerves had tempted her on to the very brink of a trap from which only the shrieked protest of some indefinable sixth sense had held her back. . . .

She stood there shivering, but finally she fought back toward mastery of herself. She sat down and when Vogel came back, the smile with which she looked up to greet him was serene.

He nodded.

"Please excuse me."

He didn't even make the mistake of looking closely at her. He went straight to a bureau and pulled out a drawer.

"I don't want you to be alarmed," he said, "but I should like you to stay here a few minutes longer."

She said, "I'm quite comfortable."

"I think you'd better stay," he said, and turned, a big automatic in his hand. "The stewards have seen someone prowling about the ship again, just like that mysterious person I told you about who was here last night. But this time he isn't going to get away so easily."

LORETTA felt the blood draining down from her head.

"Not really?" she said.

Vogel's jet-black eyes fixed on her.

"You've nothing to worry about," he said, in a purr of caressing reassurance.

"But I'm thrilled." She met his gaze unflinchingly. "What is it that makes you so popular?"

He shrugged. "They're probably just harbor thieves who think the boat might have valuables on board. We shall find out."

"Let me come with you."

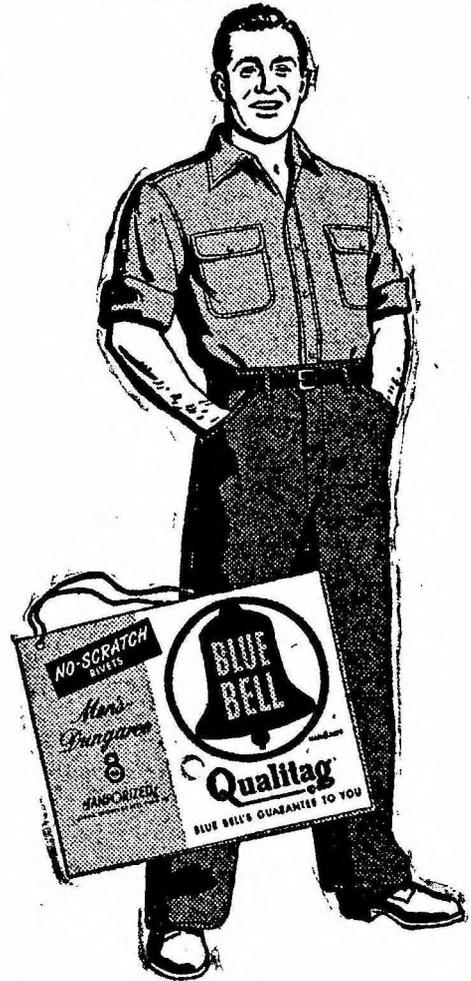
"My dear—"

"I'm not a bit frightened. Not while you've got that gun. And I'll be awfully quiet. But I couldn't bear to miss anything so exciting. Please—would you mind?"

He hesitated for a moment only, and then

[Turn page]

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opened the door on the starboard side.

"All right. Will you keep behind me?"

He switched out the lights, and she followed him out on to the deck. Vogel, almost invisible in his black evening clothes, tiptoed to the other side of the deck. She followed, and when he halted she could hardly have been a pace behind him. She actually touched him as she stopped.

"He's still there."

From where she stood she could look down the whole length of the deck, a grey pathway stencilled with the yellow windows of the saloon where Yule and Arnheim were still presumably discussing the port. The deckhouse profiled itself in black and slanted black shadows across the open space. Away aft there was another shadow merging into the rest, something that her eyes found and froze on.

Vogel lifted his automatic.

Her left hand gripped the weather rail. Vogel had got her. The story of a man prowling on the ship might be a lie; she might be imagining the shadow; or it might be a member of the crew put out to build up the deception—to be aimed at and perhaps shot at by Vogel with a blank cartridge. But she didn't know. There was no way for her to know. She had to choose between letting the Saint be shot down without warning, or—

A dozen crazy thoughts crashed through her head. She might throw a noisy fit of maidenly hysterics. She might sneeze, or cough, or faint on his shoulder. But she knew that that was just what he was waiting for her to do. The first hint of interference that she gave would brand her for all time. He would have no more doubts.

She stared at him in a kind of chilled hopeless agony. She could see his arm extended against the lighter grey of the deck, the dull gleam of the automatic held rigidly at the end of it, his black deep-set eyes lined unwinkingly along the sights. Something in the nerveless immobility of his position shouted at her that he was a man to whom the thought of missing had never occurred. She saw the great hungry crook of his nose, the ends of his mouth drawn back so that the thin lips rolled under and vanished into two parallel lines that were as vicious and pitiless as the smile of a cobra would have

been. Her own words thundered through her head in a strident mocking chorus: "When you join Ingerbeck's, you don't sign on for a cocktail party. . . . You take an oath . . . to do your job . . . keep your mouth shut . . . take the consequences . . ." She had to choose.

SO HAD the Saint.

Moving along the deckhouse roof as silently as a ghost, he had followed everything that happened outside; lying spread-eagled over the wheelhouse, he had leaned out at a perilous angle until he could peer down through one of the windows and see what was happening inside. He had bunched his muscles in a spasm of impotent exasperation when he saw Loretta's hand going out to touch the pencil and spring the trap, and had breathed again when she drew back. Everything that she had endured he had felt sympathetically within himself; and when Vogel came back and took out his automatic, Simon had heard what was said and had understood that also.

Now, gathering his limbs stealthily under him, so close above Loretta's head that he could almost have touched her, he understood much more. The first mention of a man prowling about the deck had prickled a row of nerve centers all along his spine; then he had disbelieved; then he had seen the shadow that Loretta was staring at, and had remembered the dark speeding canoe which had nearly run him down on his way there. But Loretta hadn't seen that; and he knew what she must be thinking. He could read what was in her mind; and there was a queer exaltation in his heart as he stepped off the wheelhouse roof, out into space over her head.

She saw him as if he had fallen miraculously out of the sky, which was more or less what he did—with one foot knocking down the automatic and the other striking the side of Vogel's head. The gun went off with a crash, and Vogel staggered against the rail and fell to his knees. Simon fell across the rail, caught it with his hands. Down at the after end of the deck, the shape that had been lurking there scurried across the narrow strip of light to clamber over the rail and drop hectically downwards.

Loretta Page stared across six feet of Breton twilight at the miracle—half incredulously, but with indescribable relief. She saw the flash of white teeth in a familiar smile, then, as Vogel began to drag himself up and around with the gun still in his hand, she saw the Saint launch himself into the sea.

He went down in a long shallow dive, and judged his timing so well that the canoe flashed past as he broke the surface. He put up one hand and caught the gunnel as it went by, nearly upsetting the craft until the man in it leaned out to the other side and balanced it.

"I thought I told you to say good-bye to France," said the Saint.

"I thought I told you I didn't take your orders," said the other grimly.

"They were Loretta's orders, Steve."

Murdoch dragged the canoe round the stern of another yacht. "She's crazy," he snarled. "I'm staying where I like."

"And getting shot where you like, I hope," murmured Simon. "I won't interfere in the next bonehead play you make. I only butted in this time to save Loretta. Next time, you can take your own curtain."

"I will," said Murdoch prophetically. "Let go this boat."

Simon let go slowly, wondering whether Murdoch's aggressiveness was founded on sheer ignorance of what might have been the result of his clumsy intrusion, or whether it was put up to bluff away the knowledge of having made an egregious mistake, and most of all he wondered what else would come of the man's insubordinations.

One of those questions was partly answered for him very quickly.

He sculled back with his hands, under the side of the yacht near which they had parted company, listening to the low sonorous purr of a powerful engine that had awoken in the darkness. There were no lights visible through any of the portholes, and he concluded that the crew were all on shore. He was on the side away from the *Falkenberg*, temporarily screened even from the most lynx-eyed searcher. The purr of the engine grew louder; and with a quick decision he grasped a stanchion, drew himself up, and rolled over into the tiny after cockpit.

He reached it only a second before the beam of a searchlight swept over the ship. The throb of the engine droned right up to him; and he hitched a very cautious eye over the edge of the cockpit, and saw the *Falkenberg's* speed tender churning around his refuge, so close that he could have touched it with a boathook. A seaman crouched up on the foredeck, swinging the powerful spotlight that was mounted there; two other men stood up beside the wheel, following the path of the beam. Its long finger danced on the water, then fastened suddenly on the canoe skimming towards the Plage du Prieuré. The canoe veered like a startled gull, but the beam clung to it like a magnetized bar of light.

The canoe turned once more, and headed south again, the man in it paddling with unhurried strokes again, as if he was trying to undo the first impression he had given of taking flight. The *Falkenberg's* tender turned and drifted up alongside him as the engine was shut off; and at that moment the spotlight was switched out.

Simon heard the voices clearly across the water.

"Have you seen anyone swimming around here?"

And Murdoch's sullen answer: "I did see someone—it was over that way."

"Thanks."

The voice of the tender's spokesman was the last one Simon heard. And then, after the very briefest pause, the engine was cut in again, and the tender began to slide smoothly back towards the *Falkenberg*, while the canoe went on its way to the shore. In that insignificant pause the only sound was a faint thud such as a man might have made in dumping a heavy weight on a hard floor.

But Simon Templar knew, with absolute certainty, that the man who paddled the canoe on towards the shore was not the man who had been caught by the spotlight, and that Murdoch was riding unconscious in the speedboat as it turned back.

THE tender slid in under the side of the *Falkenberg*, and the man on the foredeck who had been working the spotlight stood up and threw in the painter. Vogel himself

caught the rope and made it fast.

"Did you find anything?" he asked.

"No." The man at the wheel answered, standing up in the cockpit. He looked up at Vogel intently as he spoke, and his right hand fingered a rug that seemed to have been thrown down in a rather large bundle on the seat beside him. "We asked a man in a boat, but he had seen nobody."

"I see," answered Vogel quietly, and Professor Yule and Arnheim, on his right, turned away from the rail with him.

Vogel turned to Loretta. "I'm very sorry—you must have had rather a shock, and you're more important than catching a couple of harbor thieves."

"I'm perfectly all right," she said.

"I'm sorry all this should have happened to upset the evening," said Vogel.

She laid her hand on his arm. "Honestly, it hasn't upset me," she said. "I'm just rather tired. I'd like to go back to my hotel."

"Will you come with us tomorrow?"

She shook her head. "You don't give a girl a chance to think, do you?"

"But there is so little time. You will come?"

"I don't know. You take so much for granted—"

"You will come."

His hand on her shoulder was weighting into her flesh. The deep toneless hypnotic command of his voice reverberated into her ears. She would have to go.

"Oh yes. . . . I'll come." She broke away. "No, don't touch me again now."

He left her alone; and she sat in the far corner of the cockpit and stared out over the dark water while the tender came in alongside the quay. He walked up to her hotel with her in the same silence. When they reached the door, she held out her hand.

"Good-night."

"Will half past ten be too early? I could send a steward down before that to do your packing."

"No. I can be ready."

On the return journey he took the wheel himself. The man who had been in charge of the hunt a little while before was beside him.

"Where did you put him, Ivaloff?" Vogel asked.

"In No. 9 cabin," answered the man. "He is tied up and gagged; but I think he will sleep for a little while."

"Do you know who he is?"

"I have not seen him before. Perhaps one of the men who has been watching on shore will know him."

Vogel said nothing. Even if the captive was a stranger, it would be possible to find out who he was. It never occurred to him that the prisoner might be innocent. Ivaloff made no mistakes, and Vogel himself had seen the canoe's significant swerve and first instinctive attempt to dodge the searchlight. He threw the engine into neutral and then into reverse, bringing the tender neatly up to the companion, and went across the deck to the wheelhouse.

Professor Yule glanced up from a newspaper.

"I wish I knew what these gold mining shares were going to do," he remarked casually. "I could sell now and take a profit."

"You should ask Otto about it—he is an expert," said Vogel. "By the way, where is he?"

"He went out to look for part of a broken cuff-link. Didn't you see him on deck?"

Vogel shook his head.

"Probably he was on the other side of the ship. Do you hold very many of these shares?"

He selected a cigar from a cedarwood cabinet and pierced it carefully while Yule talked. So Arnheim hadn't been able to wait more than a few minutes before he tried to find out something about the man they had captured. Otto should have waited until Yule went to bed.

Vogel discussed the gold market for a quarter of an hour, until Yule picked himself up and decided to retire.

Vogel stood at the chart table and gave the Professor time to reach his stateroom. In front of him were the chart, the torn paper in the ashtray, the pencil . . . all untouched. Loretta Page had stood over those things for a full minute, but from where he was watching he could not see her face. When she turned away she had seemed unconcerned. And yet . . .

He shrugged and left the wheelhouse by the door at the after end. Between him and

the saloon a companion ran down to the lower deck. He went aft along the alleyway at the bottom.

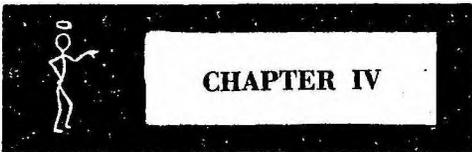
No. 9 cabin was the last door in the passenger section. Vogel stopped and turned the handle, and a faint frown creased in between his eyebrows when the door did not move.

He raised his hand to knock; and then he saw that the key was in the lock on the outside. At the same time he became conscious of a cool dampness on his hand. He opened it under the light, and saw a glisten of moisture in the palm.

For an instant he did not move. And then his hand went down slowly and touched the door-handle again. He felt the wetness of it under his finger-tips, and bent down to touch the carpet. That also was damp; so were the treads of the companion.

Without hesitation he turned the key silently in the lock, slipped an automatic out of his pocket, and thrust open the door. The cabin was in darkness, but his fingers found the switch instantaneously.

Otto Arnheim lay at his feet in the middle of the floor, with his face turned whitely up to the light and his round pink mouth hanging vacuously open. There were a couple of lengths of rope carelessly thrown down beside him—and that was all.



ORACE helped Simon haul his prize onto the deck of the *Corsair* as unconcernedly as he would have lent a hand with embarking a barrel of beer.

"How d'you like it?" asked the Saint, with a certain pardonable smugness.

He was breathing a little deeply from the effort of towing Steve Murdoch's unconscious body through the half-mile of intervening water. Murdoch, lying in a heap with the water oozing out of his sodden clothes, was conspicuously less vital.

"Wot is it?" Orace inquired disparagingly.

"A sort of detective," said the Saint. "I believe he's a good fellow at heart; but he's damned stubborn. He's tried to die once before tonight, and he didn't thank me when I stopped him."

"Is 'e dead now?"

"Not yet—at least, I don't think so. But he's got a lump on the back of his head the size of an apple, and I don't expect he'll feel too happy when he wakes up."

They undressed Murdoch out on the deck, and Simon wrung out his clothes as best he could and tied them in a rough bundle which he chucked into the galley oven when they took the still unconscious man below. He left Orace to apply the usual restoratives, and went back into the saloon to towel himself vigorously and brush his hair. He had just settled into a clean shirt and a pair of comfortable old flannel trousers when the communicating door opened and the fruit of Orace's labors shot blearily in.

It was quite obvious that the Saint's prophecy was correct. Mr. Murdoch was not feeling happy. A skilfully wielded blackjack was responsible.

"What the hell is this?" Murdoch demanded.

"Just another boat," smiled the Saint.

Murdoch glowered, then sank on to a bunk.

"I thought it would be you," he said morosely. "Well, here I am—and who the hell asked you to bring me here?"

"You didn't," Simon admitted.

"Well, what d'ya think I'm going to do—fall on your neck and kiss you? Well, I didn't ask you to pull me out, and I'm not going to thank you. If you thought I'd fall for you, you're wrong. Was that the idea, too? Did you think you might make the same sort of monkey outa me that you've made outa Loretta? Because you won't. I'm not so soft. You can slug me again and take me back to the *Falkenberg*, and we'll start again where we left off."

Simon sat down opposite Murdoch and put up his feet along the settee. "I've always heard that Ingerbeck's was about the ace firm in the business. Been with them long?"

"About ten years."

"Mmm. They can't be so hot if they've

kept you on the overhead for ten years."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah—as we used to say in the movies. Stay where you are, Steve. If you try to start any rough stuff with me I shall hit your face so hard that you'll have to be fed from behind."

"Go on."

Simon flicked open the cigarette-box and helped himself to a smoke.

"Now and for the last time," he said, "will you try to understand that I don't give a damn how soon you have your funeral? Your mother may miss you, and even Ingerbeck's may send a wreath; but personally I shall be as miserable as a dog with a new tree. The only reason I interfered on the *Falkenberg* was because Vogel wasn't half so interested in shooting you as in seeing how Loretta would like it. The only reason I pulled you out again—"

"Was what?"

"Because if you'd stayed there they'd have found out more about you. You're known. Thanks to your tearing into the Hotel de la Mer and shouting for Loretta at the top of your voice, the bloke who was sleuthing her knows your face. And if he'd seen you to-night—that would have been that. For Loretta, anyway. Which is all I'm interested in. Is that plain enough, or do you still think I've got a fatherly interest in your future?"

Murdoch's chin jutted out as if his fists were itching to follow it.

"I get it. But you feel like a father to Loretta—huh?"

"That's my business."

"I know you, Saint," Murdoch said raspily. "You're a crook. Maybe there aren't any warrants out for you at the moment. But you're still a crook—and you're in the racket for what you can get out of it."

Simon raised his eyebrows.

"Aren't you?"

"Yeah. I get one hundred bucks a week out of it. And that's the last cent I take."

"I gather that you think I wouldn't be content with one hundred bucks a week?"

"You?" Murdoch was derisive. "If I thought that, I'd buy you out right now."

"Where's your money?"

"What for?"

"To buy me out. One hundred dollars a week—and that's more than I thought I was going to get out of it."

The other stared. "Are you telling me you'll take a hundred a week to get out?"

"Oh, no. But I'll take a hundred a week to get in. You'll have the benefit of all my brains, which you obviously need pretty badly; and I shall get lots of quiet respectable fun and a beautiful glow of virtue. I'm trying to convince you that I'm a reformed character. From now on my only object will be to live down my evil past—"

"And I'm trying to convince you that I'm not so dumb that you can sell me a gold brick!" Murdoch snarled. "You came into this by accident, and you saw your chance. You greased around Loretta till she told you what it was about, and you've made her so crazy she's ready to eat outa your hand. Well, you're going to get out. I'm going to find a way to put you out—but it ain't going to be with a hundred dollars!"

The Saint sighed.

"I suppose you're entitled to your point of view, Steve," he conceded mildly. "But of course that makes quite a difference. Now we shall have to decide what we're going to do with you."

"Don't worry about me," retorted Murdoch. "Give me my clothes back, and I'll be on my way."

He stood up, but Simon did not move.

"The question is—will you?" said the Saint. "I'm not so thrilled with your promise to put me out. And I don't know that we can let you go on getting into trouble indefinitely. Steve, it looks as if we may have to shut you up where you won't be able to get into mischief for a while."

MMURDOCH couldn't believe his ears. "Say that again?"

"I said we may have to keep you where you won't get in the way," answered the Saint calmly. His right hand slid lazily into the shelf beside the settee, under the port-hole. It came out with his automatic. Murdoch shied at the gun like a startled horse.

"Do you mean you're trying to hold me up?" he barked.

"That is the rough idea, brother," said the Saint amiably.

But at the same time something quite different was thrusting itself towards the front of his consciousness. It had started like the hum of a far-away bee, but while they were talking it had grown steadily nearer, and now, in the silence while he and Murdoch watched each other, it suddenly roared up and stopped. Simon felt the settee dip gently under him, as the wash slapped against the side.

And then an almost imperceptible jar of contact ran through the boat, and a voice spoke outside.

"Ahoy, *Corsair!*"

Simon let go the automatic and unfolded himself from the settee. He came up like the backlash of a cracked whip, and his fist hit Murdoch under the jaw with a clean crisp smack. Murdoch's eyes glazed mutely over, and Simon caught him expertly.

"Ahoy, *Corsair!*"

"Ahoy to you," answered the Saint.

The door at the end of the saloon was opening, and Orace's globular eyes peered over his mustache through the gap. Simon heaved Murdoch's inanimate body towards him like a stuffed dummy. Then, without waiting to assure himself that Orace had grasped the situation to the full, he snatched up his gun and leaped for the companion, slipping the automatic into his hip pocket as he went.

He started with lightning speed, but he emerged into the after cockpit quite leisurely; there was no undue hiatus between the first hail and his appearance. He turned unhurriedly to the side; and Kurt Vogel, standing up in the speedboat, looked up at him.

"Hullo," said the Saint, genially.

"May I come aboard for a moment?"

"Surely."

Simon reached out an arm and helped him up.

"I'm afraid this is a most unseemly hour to pay a visit," said Vogel, in his suave flat voice. "But I happened to be coming by, and I hoped you hadn't gone to bed."

"I'm never very early," said the Saint cheerfully. "Come on below and have a drink."

He led the way down to the saloon, and pushed the cigarette-box across the table.

Vogel accepted a cigarette; and Simon raised his voice. "Orace!"

"As a matter of fact, I only came to see if you'd made up your mind about tomorrow," said Vogel, taking a light. "Perhaps you didn't take my invitation seriously, but I assure you we'll be glad to see you if you care to come."

"It's very good of you." Simon looked up as Orace came in. "Bring whisky and glasses, will you, Orace?"

Orace executed the errand and left again.

"Yes, I would rather like to come," said the Saint frankly, as he poured out the whisky.

"Then we'll expect you. Loretta is coming, too."

"Who's coming?"

"You know—Miss Page—"

Simon smiled.

"I'm afraid I don't," he murmured. "Who is the lady?"

"She was with us—I beg your pardon,"

[Turn page]

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

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Vogel said quickly. "My memory is playing me tricks—I had an idea she was with us when we met this morning. Perhaps you will meet her in Guernsey."

"If she's as pretty as her name, I hope I do," said the Saint lightly and passed the glass over and sat down again, feeling as if his stomach had been suddenly emptied with a vacuum pump.

"We shall be sailing about eleven," proceeded Vogel urbanely. "But we shan't take long on the trip—we marine motorists have rather an advantage in speed," he added deprecatingly. "I don't wonder you thorough-going yachtsmen despise us, but I'm afraid I'm too old to learn your art." He looked around. "This is a charming boat," he added idly. "What is her tonnage?"

"About twenty-five."

"Delightful. . . ." Vogel got up and began to wander around, studying the panelling, touching the fittings, investigating the ingenious economy of space with all the quiet pleasure of an enthusiast. "I envy you, really—to be able to have something like this all to yourself, without bothering about crews and formalities. Are all the other rooms as attractive as this one?"

So that was how it was coming. "They're pretty comfortable," the Saint said modestly; and Vogel caught him up without a second's hesitation.

"I wish I could see them. I had no idea a small boat could be so luxurious. You might even convert me!"

Simon brought the tip of his cigarette to a red glow, and feathered a fading cloud of smoke through his lips. He was in for it. There was no excuse, however plausible, no tactful way of changing the subject, however fluent, from which Vogel would not draw his own conclusions. Vogel had got him, exactly as he had got Loretta a few hours before. The fuse was lighted; and how soon the mine would go up depended only on Orace's perception of the secondary uses of keyholes.

"By all manner of means," Simon said amicably. "Let me show you the works."

HE STOOD up, lighting a second cigarette from the stub of the first. The movement gave a few seconds' grace in which

Orace, if he had been listening, might prepare for the emergency as best he could. But it could not be prolonged a moment beyond the requirements of the bare physical facts; and with an inaudible prayer to the hard-worked gods of all good buccaneers, the Saint flattened his discarded butt in the ash-tray and opened the communicating door.

The spectacle of Orace sitting curled up in the diminutive galley, alone, with a paper-covered detective story on his knee, was such a dizzy anticlimax that it made the Saint feel somewhat light-headed. He could have raised the protective curtain of Orace's mustache and kissed him. Fortunately the presence of Kurt Vogel precluded any such regrettable demonstration. Simon cleared his throat.

"This is the kitchen, where we heat the cans and open the bottles. On your right, the refrigerator, where we keep the beer warm. . . ."

He exhibited all the features of the galley with feverish pride; and Vogel, as flatteringly impressed as any proud owner could want a guest to be, admired them all in turn. But all the time Simon was casting hopeful glances at Orace, searching for a hint of what his staff had done to meet the situation; but the staff had returned phlegmatically to reading its volume of blood.

Eventually they had to move on. Beyond the galley there was a short alleyway, and Simon led the way briskly down it.

"That's the bathroom and toilet," he explained casually, indicating the first door on the left as he went by.

"A bathroom—really? That's even more remarkable on a boat this size. May I look at it?"

Of all the places where Orace might have been expected to dump his charge in a hurry, the bathroom seemed the most probable. Simon's gaze, overlapping his guest, sought frantically for inspiration.

But Orace was deep in his sanguinary literature.

"There's nothing much to see," began the Saint diffidently; but Vogel had already turned the handle.

Simon leaned against the bulkhead and very deliberately estimated the chances of a shot going unheard by the seaman whom

Vogel had left in charge of his speedboat. He also gave some consideration to the exact spot on Vogel's anatomy where a bullet could be made to do a regulated amount of damage without leaving any margin for an outcry. His left thumb was tucked loosely into his belt; his right hand was a little behind his hip, the fingers hovering on the opening of the pocket into which he had slipped his gun.

"But that's almost luxurious!" came Vogel's bland ingratiating accents. "And a shower, too . . . I certainly am learning a lesson—I almost wish I could find something that you've forgotten."

Simon let his right hand fall to his side in relief. He didn't take out a handkerchief and mop his brow, but he wished he could have indulged in that sedative gesture.

The tour went on. Vogel praised the small single cabin. He studied the berth, the lockers under it, and peeped inside the wardrobe.

The Saint began to wonder if he was simply undergoing one of Vogel's diabolically clever psychological third degrees. He felt an almost irresistible temptation to throw guile to the winds—to say: "Okay, brother. I have got Steve Murdoch here, and he is the bird who paid you a call earlier this evening; and so what?"

On the starboard side there was one double cabin. Vogel admired this also. There were two fitted wardrobes for him to peer into, and also a large recessed cupboard. As Vogel methodically opened each door in turn, the Saint felt himself growing so much older that it wouldn't have surprised him to look down and see a long white beard spreading over his shirt.

"This is the most perfect thing I've ever seen." Vogel was positively purring. "And that door at the end?"

Simon glanced up the alleyway.

"The fo'c'le! That's only Orace's quarters—"

And at the same time he knew that he might just as well save his breath. Vogel had already declared himself as a sightseer who intended to see every sight there was; and it would have been asking a miracle for him to have allowed himself to be headed off on the threshold of the last door of all.

The Saint shrugged.

At any rate, the gloves would be off. The issue would be joined in open battle. Behind that door lay the showdown. He knew it, as surely as if he could have seen through the partition, and he faced it without illusion.

He opened the door and stood aside, and Vogel went in.

The Saint's brain raced through a hectic sequence of results and possibilities. . . . And then he heard Vogel's voice again.

"Excellent . . . excellent . . . Why, I've seen a good many boats in which the owner's accommodation was not half so good. And this is all, is it?"

Vogel was coming out; and his cordial smile was unchanged. If he had just suffered the crowning disappointment of his unfortunate evening, there was no sign of it on his face. And behind him, quite plainly visible to every corner, Orace's modest cabin was naked of any other human occupancy.

The Saint steadied his reeling brain. "Yes, that's all," he answered mechanically. "You can't get much more into a fifty-footer."

"And that?" Vogel pointed upwards.

"Oh, just a hatchway on to the deck."

Forestalling any persuasion, he caught the ladder rungs screwed to the bulkhead, drew himself up, and opened it. After all he had been through already, his heart was too exhausted to turn any more somersaults; but the daze deepened round him as he hoisted himself out on to the deck and found no unconscious body laid neatly out in the lee of the coaming. They had been through the ship from stem to stern, and that hatchway was the last most desperate door through which Murdoch's not inconsiderable bulk could have been pushed away. If Orace hadn't dumped the man out there, he must have melted him and poured him down the sink.

He stretched down a hand and helped Vogel to follow him out. They stood together under the masthead light, and Vogel extended his cigarette case. There were only the ordinary shadows on the deck.

"I'm afraid my enthusiasm ran away with me," said Vogel. "I should never have asked you to show me round at this hour. But I assure you it's been worth it to me—in every way."

He laid the faintest and most innocent emphasis on the last three words.

"It's been no trouble at all," Simon murmured. "What about one for the road?"

"Many thanks. But I've kept you up too late already."

"You haven't."

"Then I'll leave before I do." Vogel waved a hand to his marine chauffeur. "Ivalloff!" He smiled, and held out his hand. "We'll look out for you, then, at St. Peter Port?"

"I'll be there by tea-time, if we have any wind."

The Saint sauntered aft beside his guest. Beyond all doubt, the stars in their courses fought for him. He thought about the magnificent rewards which might suitably be heaped on the inspired head of Orace, when that incomparable henchman could be made to reveal the secrets of his wizardry.

His right hand trailed idly along the boom. And suddenly his whole body prickled.

"Good night," said Vogel. "And many thanks."

"*Au 'voir*," responded the Saint dreamily.

He watched the other step down into the tender and touch the starter. The seaman cast off; and the speedboat drew away, swung round in a wide arc.

Simon stood there until the blaze of its spotlight had faded into a brilliant blur, and then he put his hands on the companion rail and slid down below. He grasped Orace firmly by the front of his shirt and drew him forward.

"You damned old son of a walrus," he said, his voice torn between wrath and laughter. "Men have been shot for less."

"I couldn't think of nothink else, sir, suding like," said Orace humbly.

"But it makes the ship look so untidy."

Orace scratched his head.

"Yessir. But it was a bit untidy ter start wiv. Jremember the mains'l started to tear comin' dahn from St. Helier? Well, when yer went orf tonight I thought I might swell do somefink abaht it. I sewed a patch on it while yer was awy, but I 'adn't 'ad time ter furl it agyne when yer came back. So when yer chucked that detective bloke at me—"

"You took him along to the hatch—"

"An' direckly I sore yer go below, I 'auled 'im aht an' laid 'im on the boom an' folded the mains'l over 'im. I couldn't think of nothink else, sir," said Orace.

Words failed the Saint for a while. And then, with a slow helpless grin dragging at his mouth, he brought up his fist and pushed Orace's chin back.

"Go up and fetch him in again, you old humbug," he said. "And don't play any more tricks like that on me, or I'll wring your blessed neck."

He threw himself down on the settee to think. Murdoch still remained to be dealt with; and there was also the question of whether Orace's maneuvers with the mainsail had passed unnoticed by the seaman who had stayed in the speedboat. The Saint's attention was busily divided between these two salient queries when he looked up and discovered that Orace had returned to the saloon and was gaping at him with a peculiarly fish-like expression in his eyes.

"'E's—'e's *gorn*, sir!" said Orace weakly.

SIMON got up slowly.

"He's gorn, has he?" he repeated.

"Yessir," said Orace hollowly.

Simon went up onto the deck. The disorderd mainsail offered its own pregnant testimony to the truth of Orace's conjecture. Simon strolled round it and prodded it with his toe. There was no deception. The lump that had been Steve Murdoch, which he had felt under his hand as he walked by with Vogel, hadn't simply slipped off its insecure perch and buried itself under the folds of canvas. Murdoch had taken it on the hoof.

"'E must've woke up while yer was talkin' to me an' 'opped overboard," said Orace gloomily.

The Saint scanned the surrounding circle of black shining water. There was no sight or sound to tell where Murdoch had gone.

"You have the most penetrating inspirations, Orace," he murmured admiringly. "I suppose that's what must have happened. But we shan't get him back. It's nearly low tide, and he's had time to reach the shore by now. I hope he catches his death of cold."

He smoked his cigarette down with re-

markable serenity, while Orace fidgeted uncomfortably round him. Certainly the problem of what to do with Steve Murdoch was effectively disposed of. The problem of what Steve Murdoch would now be doing with himself took its place, and the doubt of how much Kurt Vogel knew remained.

"Do you think anyone saw you parking our friend up here?" he asked.

Orace sucked his teeth.

"I dunno, sir. I brought 'im aht soon's I sore yer go in an' lugged 'im along on me stummick. It didn't take arf a tick to lay 'im aht on the boom an' chuck the sile over 'im, an' the other bloke was lightin' 'is pipe an' lookin' the other way." Orace frowned puzzledly. "Yer don't think they took 'im orf, do yer?"

"No, I don't think that. But if they saw you, they may come back later."

Simon's brow creased over the riddle.

"We'd better sleep on it," he said.

He left Orace slapping down the mainsail into a neat roll, and went below. As he got into his pajamas he realized that there was at least one certainty about Murdoch's future movements, which was that he would try to reach Loretta Page either that night or early in the morning with his story. He would be able to do it, too. There might be many places on the continent of Europe where anyone clothed only in a pair of trousers couldn't hope to get far without being arrested, but Dinard in the summer was not one of them; and presumably the man had parked his luggage somewhere before he set out on his pig-headed expedition.

THE Saint was awake at eight, a few moments before Orace brought in his orange juice; and by half-past nine he was dressed and breakfasted.

"Have everything ready to sail as soon as I get back," he called into the galley, where Orace was washing up.

He went out on deck, and as he stepped up into the brightening sunlight he glanced automatically up-river to where the *Falkenberg* lay at anchor. Something about the ship caught his eye; and after leisurely picking up a towel, as if that was all he had come out for, he went back to the saloon and searched for his field-glasses.

His eyesight had served him well. There was a man sitting in the shade aft of the deckhouse with a pair of binoculars on his knee, and even while the Saint studied him he raised the glasses and seemed to be peering straight through the porthole from which the Saint was looking out.

Simon drew back, lighted a cigarette and moved restlessly round the cabin. Something had to be done. Somehow he had to reach Loretta, tell her—what? That she was suspected? She knew that. That Murdoch was suspected? She might guess it. That she must not take that voyage with Vogel? She would go anyway. Simon's fist struck impatiently into the palm of his hand. It didn't matter. He had to reach her—even if the entire crew of the *Falkenberg* was lined up on the deck with binoculars trained on the *Corsair*, and even if the Hotel de la Mer was surrounded by a cordon of their watchers.

With a sudden decision he opened the door of the galley again.

"Never mind the washing up, Orace," he said. "We're sailing now."

It was a quarter to ten when the nose of the *Corsair* turned down the estuary and began to push up the ripples towards the sea.

"Let it hang," said the Saint, when Orace was still working at the anchor. "We'll want it again in a minute."

Orace looked at him for a moment, and then lowered himself into the cockpit.

"Get ready to drop the dinghy again, and swing her out as soon as we're round the point," said the Saint.

He turned and gazed back at the *Falkenberg*. There was a midget figure standing on her deck which might have been Kurt Vogel. Simon waved his arm, and the speck waved back. Then the Saint turned to the chart and concentrated on the tricky shoals on either side of the main channel. He brought the *Corsair* round the Point du Moulinet as close as he dared, and yelled to Orace to get up into the bows. Then he brought the control lever back into reverse.

"Let go!"

The anchor splashed down into the shallow water, and Simon left the wheel and sprang to the dinghy. With Orace helping him, it was lowered in a moment.

It was five past ten when he climbed up on to the pavement on shore, and there was an uneasy emptiness moving vaguely about under his lower ribs. That watcher on the *Falkenberg* had made a difference of half an hour—and moreover it dawned on him that he only had Vogel's word for it that the *Falkenberg* would not sail before eleven. Loretta might be already on board.

And then, straight in front of him, he saw the square dour visage of Steve Murdoch coming towards him. He checked his stride; but Murdoch came on without a pause.

"Not recognizing me today, Saint?" Murdoch's harsh voice grated a challenge.

Simon looked him up and down. "I've only got one thing to say to you," said the Saint coldly. "And I can't say it here."

"That cramps your style, I bet. You talk pretty well with your fists, Saint. But you can't have it your own way all the time. Where you goin' now?"

"That's my business."

"I bet it is. But it's my business too. Thought you'd get up early and pick up cards with Loretta again, did you? Well, you weren't early enough."

"No?"

"No. Take your eyes off of my chin, Saint—it's ready for you this morning. Look at that gendarme down the road instead. Gazing in a shop window an' not takin' any notice of us now, ain't he? But you try to get tough with me again and he'll look at us quick enough. And when he comes up here, I'll have something to tell him about what you tried to do last night." Bitter memory of another occasion gleamed out of Murdoch's small unblinking eyes. "You turn round and go back the way you came from, Saint, unless you want to sit in a French precinct house and wait till they fetch over your dossier from Scotland Yard. And don't go near St. Peter Port unless you want the same thing again. I said I was goin' to put you out, and you're out!"

For the second time in that young day Steve Murdoch felt the impact of the Saint's fist. And once again he never saw it coming. The blow only travelled about six inches—straight to Murdoch's solar plexus; and Murdoch's face went grey as he doubled up.

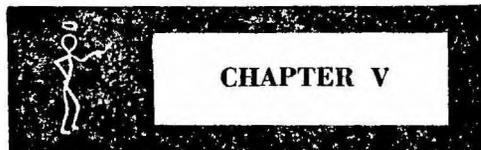
Simon caught him and lowered him tender-

ly to the ground. By the time the first interested spectator had formed the nucleus of a crowd, the Saint was fanning Murdoch with his handkerchief and feeling for his heart with every symptom of alarm. By the time the shop-gazing gendarme had joined the gathering, it was generally agreed among the spectators that the Breton sun must have been the cause of Murdoch's collapse. Somebody spoke about an ambulance. Somebody else thought he could improve on the system of first aid which was being practised; and Simon handed the case over to him and faded quietly through the swelling congregation.

He moved on towards the Hotel de la Mer, as quickly as he dared, but with anxiety tearing ahead of his footsteps. That chance encounter—if it was a chance encounter—had wasted more of his precious and dwindling margin of time.

And then he stopped again, and plunged down in a shop doorway to tie an imaginary shoelace. He had seen Kurt Vogel, smooth and immaculate in a white suit and cap, turning into the hotel. He was too late.

And something inside him turned cold as he realized that there was nothing more that he could do about it—nothing that would not risk making Loretta's danger ten times greater by linking her with him. Murdoch had won after all, and Loretta would have to make the voyage unwarned.



IT WAS half past four when the *Corsair* came skimming past St. Martin's Point. For five and a half hours Simon Templar had never taken his hands from the wheel. During those hours he almost surrendered his loyalty to the artistic grace of sail, and yearned for the drumming engines of the *Falkenberg*, which had overtaken them in the first hour and left a white trail of foam hissing away to the horizon.

He hardly knew himself what was in his mind. With all the gallant thrust of the *Cor-*

sair through the green seas under him, he was as helpless as if he had been marooned on an iceberg at the South Pole. Everything that might be meant to happen on the *Falkenberg* could still happen while he was out of reach. Vogel could say "She decided not to come," or "There was an accident"; with all the crew of the *Falkenberg* partnering in the racket, it would be almost impossible to prove different.

More than anything he wanted to see Loretta again, to see the untiring mischief in her grey eyes and hear the smiling huskiness of her voice, to feel the touch of her hand. More than any gold that might lie at the end of the adventure. . . . Why? Something had happened to him in the few hours that he had known her—something, he realized with a twist of devastating candor, that had happened more than once in his life before, and might well happen again.

The breeze slackened as they drew up the channel, and he started the auxiliary. As they chugged past the Castle Breakwater he had a glimpse of the *Falkenberg* already lying snug within the harbor, and felt an odd indefinable pressure inside his chest.

He sat side-saddle on the edge of the cockpit and lighted a cigarette while Orace finished the work of tidying up. The *Falkenberg* had probably been at her berth for three hours by then, and apart from a jerseyed seaman who was lethargically washing off the remains of salt spray from her varnish, there was nothing to be observed on board. Most likely Vogel and his party were on shore; but Loretta. . . .

"Wot nex, sir?"

Orace stood beside him, as stoical as a whiskered gargoye; and the Saint moved his cigarette in the faintest gesture of direction.

"You watch that boat. Don't let them know you're doing it. If a girl comes off it, or a box or a bundle or anything that might contain a girl, you get on your way and stick to her like a fly-paper. Otherwise—you stay watching that ship till I come back."

"Yessir."

The Saint went ashore with a spring in his step, and a gun in his pocket. It seemed a ridiculously melodramatic precaution in that peaceful port, with the blue afternoon

sky arching over the unrippled harbor and the gay color-splashes of idle holiday-makers promenading on the breakwaters; but before the end of the adventure he was to know how wise and necessary it was.

The cross-Channel steamer from Weymouth was standing out on the continuation of her voyage to Jersey, and Simon threaded his way to the New Jetty through the stream of disembarked passengers and spectators, and eventually secured a porter. Inquiries were made. Yes, the steamer had landed some cargo consigned to him. Simon gazed with grim satisfaction at the two new and innocent-looking trunks labelled with his name, and spread a ten-shilling note in the porter's hand.

"Will you get 'em to that boat over there? The *Corsair*. There's a man on board to take delivery."

He went back down the pier to the esplanade, fitting a fresh cigarette into his mouth as he went. Those two trunks which he had collected and sent on equipped him for any submarine emergencies, and the promptness of their arrival attested the fact that Roger Conway's long retirement in the bonds of respectable matrimony had dulled none of his old gifts as the perfect lieutenant. There remained the matter of Peter Quentin's contribution; and the Saint moved on to the post office and found it already waiting for him, in the shape of a telegram:

Latitude forty-nine forty-one fifty-six north. Longitude two twenty-three forty-five west. Roger and I will be at the Royal before you are. Others will catch first airplane when you give the word. Also Hoppy wants to know why he was left out. If you've already made the heroine, we are going home.

PETER

Simon tucked the sheet away in his pocket, and the first wholly spontaneous smile of that day relaxed the iron set of his mouth as he ranged out into the street again.

He found them in the bar of the Royal Hotel, entertaining a couple of damsels in beach pyjamas who could be seen at a glance to be endowed with that certain something which proved that Peter and Roger had kept

their speed and initiative unimpaired in more directions than one. Beyond the first casual inspection with which any newcomer would have been greeted, they took no notice of him; but as he approached the counter Roger Conway decided that another round of drinks was due, and came up beside him.

"Four sherries, please," he said; and as the barmaid set up the glasses, he added: "And by the way—before I forget—would you get a bottle of Scotch and a siphon sent up to my room sometime this evening. Number fifteen."

Simon took a pull at the beer with which he had been served, and compared his watch with the clock.

"Is that clock right?" he inquired, and the bartender looked up at it.

"Yes, I think so."

The Saint nodded, pretending to make an adjustment on his wrist.

"That's good—I've got an appointment at seven, and I thought I had half an hour to wait."

He opened a package of cigarettes while Roger teetered back to his party with the four glasses of sherry and soon afterwards asked for a lavatory. He went out, leaving a freshly ordered glass of beer untouched on the bar, and the man who had taken the place next to him, who had been specifically warned against the dangers of letting his attentions become too conspicuous, stood and gazed at that reassuring item of still life for a considerable time before being troubled with the first doubts of his own wisdom. And long before those qualms became really pressing, the Saint was reclining gracefully on Roger Conway's bed, blowing smoke-rings at the ceiling and waiting for the others to keep the appointment.

They came punctually at seven; and, having closed and locked the door, eyed him solemnly. "He looks debauched," Peter said at length.

"And sickly," agreed Roger.

"Too many hectic moments with the heroine," theorized Peter.

"It only means he's got into another mess and wants us to get him out of it," said Roger. "Or have you found a million and are you looking for some deserving orphans?"

Simon grinned at them affectionately. "Well, as a matter of fact there may be several millions in it," he answered.

"Tell us," said Roger.

Simon told them.

"SO THAT'S the story. Now . . ."

He sat up and looked at them through a haze of smoke. He saw their faces across the room, Peter's rugged young-pugilist vitality, Roger's lean and rather grim intentness.

"As I see it, if all the evidence that's been collected since Ingerbeck's took on the case was worked up, there might be enough of it to put Vogel in prison. But that's not good enough for the underwriters, and it isn't good enough for Ingerbeck's. The underwriters want to recover some of the money they've lost on claims since Vogel went into business. And Ingerbeck's want their commission on the same. And we want—"

"Both," said Peter Quentin bluntly.

The Saint gazed at him for a moment. Presently he said: "The argument's fairly simple, isn't it? A fortune of that kind isn't exactly ready money. You can't take a sack of uncut diamonds or half a ton of bar gold into the nearest pawnshop and ask 'em how much they'll give you on it. It takes time and organization to get rid of it. And it isn't so easy to cart around while your organization's functioning—particularly the gold. You have to park it somewhere."

Roger nodded.

"Meaning if we could find Vogel's parking-place—"

The Saint spread out his hands.

"Find it, or find out where it is. Join Vogel's crew and get the key. Follow him when he goes there to fetch some of the stuff out, or put some more in. Or something. . . ." He smiled, and reached for his glass. "You get the idea."

"Yes, it seems quite clear," Peter said. "Except for the beautiful heroine."

"She's only trying to get at Vogel from his soft side—if he has one. That's why she had to make that trip today. I . . . wasn't in time to stop it. If she hasn't arrived here safely. . . ." He left the thought in the air.

He stood up abruptly and prowled over



The Saint was poised and ready as the man passed underneath

to the window, almost unconsciously triangulating its exact position in the exterior geography of the hotel, in case he should ever wish to find it without using the ordinary entrances. Automatically his mind went working along the sternly practical lines for which he had convened the meeting.

"Now—communications. We can't have a lot of these reunions. I had to ditch a shadow to make this one; and yesterday I did the same in Dinard. Orace and I will get in touch with you here—one or the other of you must look in every hour, in case there's a message. If we can't send a message, we'll put a bucket on the deck of the *Corsair*, which means you look out for signals. Remember the old card code? We'll put the cards in one of the portholes."

"Anything more particular?"

"Only for myself, at present. Tomorrow they're going out to try Yule's new bathstol—and I've got an invitation."

Peter sat up with a jerk.

"You're not going?"

"Of course I am. Any normal and innocent man would jump at the chance, and until there's any evidence to the contrary I've got to work on the assumption that I'm still supposed to be normal and innocent. I've *got* to go. Besides, I might find out something."

Roger pulled himself off the bed.

"Okay, Horatius. Then for the time being we're off duty."

"Yes. Except for general communications. I just wanted to give you the lie of the land. And you've got it. So you can go back to your own heroines, if they haven't found something better by this time."

He shifted nimbly through the door before the other two could prepare a suitable retaliation, and found his way back to the bar. His glass of beer was still on the counter; and the sleuth who had been watching it appeared to suffer a violent heart attack which called for a large dose of whisky to restore his shattered nerves.

Simon lowered his drink at leisure. That brief interview with Peter and Roger had given a solid foundation to a courage which had been sustained until then by sheer nervous energy. And yet their presence had not altered the problem of Loretta, or made her safe.

To find her . . . if she was to be found. But he forced that fear ruthlessly out of his head. If Vogel had taken the risk of letting her sail on the *Falkenberg* at all, he must be interested; and if he was interested, there would be no point in murder until the interest had been satisfied. . . . Surely, the Saint told himself, Loretta would be found. The thing that troubled him most deeply was that he should be so afraid. . . .

And he found her. As he walked by the harbor looking over the paling blue of the water at the inscrutable curves of the *Falkenberg* he became aware of three figures walking towards him; and something made him turn. He saw the tall gaunt aquilinity of Kurt Vogel, the gross bulk of Arnheim, and another shape which was like neither of them, which suddenly melted the ice that had been creeping through his veins and turned the warmth in him to fire.

"Good evening," said Vogel.

SIMON TEMPLAR nodded with matter-of-fact cheeriness. And he wanted to shout and dance.

"I was just going to look you up," he said.

"And we were wondering where you were. You had a good crossing?"

"Perfect."

"We were thinking of dining on shore, for a change. By the way, I must introduce you." Vogel turned to the others. "This is my friend Mr. Tombs—Miss Page. . . ."

Simon took her hand. For the first time in that encounter he dared to look her full in the face, and smile.

". . . and Mr. Arnheim."

"How do you do?"

There was a dark swollen bruise under Arnheim's fleshy chin. "Of course—you helped us to try and catch our robber, didn't you, Mr. Tombs?"

"I don't think I did very much to help you," said the Saint deprecatingly.

"But you were very patient with our disturbing attempts," said Vogel genially. "We couldn't have met more fortunately—in every way. And now, naturally, you'll join us for dinner?"

"I'd like to," said the Saint easily. "What about the Professor?"

"He refuses to be tempted. He will be working on the bathstool for half the night—you couldn't drag him away from it on the eve of a descent."

They had dinner at the Old Government House. Afterwards, Simon Templar danced with Loretta. He had her hand in his, and his arm round her; and they were moving quietly in their own world, like one person, to music that neither of them heard.

There was a breath of cool night air on their faces; and as if there had been no voluntary movement they were outside. There must have been a window or a door, some steps perhaps. Their feet moved on a soft carpet of grass, and the music whispered behind them.

Presently she sat down, and he sat beside her. He still kept her hand.

"Well," he said.

She smiled slowly.

"Well?"

"Apparently it wasn't death," he said. "So I suppose it must have been dishonor."

"It might be both."

"You feel alive. You sound alive. Or are we both ghosts? We could go and haunt somebody."

"You knew something, Simon. When we met on the waterfront—"

"Was it as obvious as that?"

"No. I just felt it."

"So did I. My heart went pit-a-pat. Then it went pat-a-pit. Then it did a back somersault and broke its bloody neck. It still feels cracked."

Her other hand covered his mouth.

"Please. Simon. Every minute we stay here is dangerous. They may have missed us already. They may be talking. Tell me what you know. What happened last night?"

"They caught Steve—slugged him and hauled him out of his canoe. I went back to the *Falkenberg* and slugged Otto and brought home the blue-eyed boy. Vogel came over shortly afterwards and put on a great show of being shown over the *Corsair*. But he didn't find Steve. I'm still technically anonymous; Steve got away."

"Who from?"

"From me. In between Vogel going home and me congratulating Orace on the hiding-place, Steve saw the dawn and set a course for it. I saw him again in the morning, when I was trying to reach you before Vogel did and yarn you what might be waiting. Where Steve is now I don't know, but if you bet your shirt he'll bob up here tomorrow, you won't run much risk of being left uncovered." The Saint turned his face to her, and she saw the dim light shift on his eyes. "He saw you this morning, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Telling you I tried to kidnap him."

"Yes."

"And speaking as follows: 'This guy Templar is just a tough crook, and if you think he's turned Horatio Alger because you gave him a pretty smile, you're crazy.'"

"Were you listening?"

He shook his head.

"I'm a thought-reader. Besides, I did try to kidnap him after a fashion. He may be the hell of a good detective in some ways, but he doesn't fit into the game we're playing here. He'd done his best to break it up twice in one day, and I thought it'd be a good thing to keep him quiet for a bit. I still do."

"And the rest?" she said.

"What do you think?"

Her hand slipped down over his hair, came to rest on his shoulder. For once the dark mischievous eyes were quiet with a kind of surrendered sadness.

"I think Steve was right," she said.

"And yet you're here."

"Yes. I'm a fool, aren't I? But I didn't tell you I was weak-minded. They say I'll probably finish up in an asylum in another year or two."

"May I come and see you in the padded cell?" the Saint asked.

"If you want to. But you won't. When you've had all you want from me—"

He silenced her with his lips. He was a man, and human. He kissed her, touched her, held her face in his hands, and found forgetfulness in the soft sweetness of her body. He was aware of her with every sense; and of his own desire. There was no other answer he could give. Presently he lay back with his head in her lap, looking up at the stars.

"Tell me something," she said.

"I'm happy."

"So am I. I've no reason to be, but I am. It doesn't seem to matter. You do love me, don't you?"

He said: "Yes."

"Say it all."

"I love you."

"Dear liar. . . ."

She leaned over him. Her hair fell on his face. She kissed him.

"I don't care," she said. "Tomorrow I shall be wise—and sorry. You're going to hurt me, Saint. And I don't seem to mind. I'm happy. I've had tonight."

"What's your tomorrow?" he asked.

"The Professor's making his trial descent. I don't know what happens afterwards, but next week they're going down to Madeira. Vogel asked me to stay with them."

"And you said you would."

"Of course."

"Must you?"

"Yes." The word was quick, almost brutal in its curtness. And then, as if she had hurt herself also, she said: "You don't understand. This is my job. I took it on with my eyes open. I told you. I gave my word. Would you think the same of me if I broke it?"

Out of the sudden ache of madness in him he answered: "Yes. Just the same."

"You wouldn't. You think so now, because you want me; but you'd remember.

You'd always remember that I ran away once—so why shouldn't I run away again? I know I'm right." He knew it, too. "You must let me finish the job. Help me to finish it."

"It's as good as finished," he said, with a flash of the old reckless bravado.

"Kiss me."

The lights of the ballroom struck them like a physical blow. The orchestra was still playing. How long had they been away? Ten minutes? Ten years? She slipped into his arms and he went on dancing with her, as if they had never stopped.

They completed a circle of the floor, and rejoined the others. Vogel was just paying a waiter.

"We thought you would like another drink after your efforts, Mr. Tombs. It's quite a good floor, isn't it?"

SIMON forced himself back to reality. "Not at all bad," he murmured.

Vogel's colorless lips smiled back with cadaverous suavity. "Now, you'll be with us tomorrow, won't you? We are making a fairly early start, and the weather forecasts have promised us a fine day. Suppose you come on board about nine. . . ."

They discussed the projected trip while they finished their drinks, and on the walk back to the harbor. Vogel's affability was at its most effusive; his stony black eyes gleamed with a curious inward luster. In some subtle disturbing way he seemed more confident.

"Well—good night."

"Till tomorrow."

Simon shook hands; touched the moist warm paw of Otto Arnheim. He saluted Loretta with a vague flourish and the outline of a smile.

"Good night."

No more. And he was left with an odd feeling of emptiness and surprise, like a man who has dozed for a moment and roused up with a start to wonder how long he has slept or if he has slept at all. Loretta Page. She had come out of the fog over Dinard and disturbed his sleep. He had been fascinated by the humor of her eyes and the vitality of her brown body. On an impulse he had kissed her. How long had he known her? A few

hours. His last glimpse of her had been as she turned away, with Vogel tucking her hand into his arm; she had been gay and acquiescent. He had let her go. There was nothing else he could do.

Ssssssh. . . .

The Saint froze in the middle of a step, with his mind wiped clean like a slate and an eerie ballet of ice-cold pin-pricks skittering up into the roots of his hair.

He stopped exactly as he was, with one foot on the deck of the *Corsair* and the other reaching down into the cockpit, one hand on a stanchion and the other steadying himself against the roof of the miniature wheelhouse. All around him was the quiet dimness of the harbor, and the lights of the port spread up the slope from the waterfront in scintillating terraces of winking brilliance.

He knew that it was no ordinary sound such as Orace might have made in moving about his duties.

A few inches in front of his left foot, the open door of the saloon stencilled an elongated panel of light across the cockpit. The ache eased out of his cramped leg muscles as he gently completed his interrupted movement and finished the transfer of his weight down on to his extended toes. And as both his feet arrived on the same deck he heard a low gasping groan.

He touched the gun on his hip; but that might be too noisy. His left hand was still grasping the stanchion by which he had been letting himself down, and with a silent twist he slipped it out of its socket. Then he took a long breath and stepped out across the door of the saloon, squarely into the light.

He looked down the companion into a room through which a young cyclone seemed to have passed. The bunks had been opened and the bedding taken apart; lockers had been forced open and their contents scattered on the floor; books had been taken from their shelves and thrown down anywhere. The carpet had been ripped up and rolled back, and a section of panelling had been torn bodily away from the bulkhead.

The Saint saw all this at once, as he would have taken in the broad features of any background; but his gaze was fixed on the crumpled shape of a man who lay on the floor—who was trying, with set teeth, to drag him-

self up on to his hands and knees. The man whose hiss of convulsive breathing had shocked him out of his sleep-walking a minute ago.

Orace.

Simon put a hand on the rail of the companion and dropped into the saloon. He left his stanchion on the floor and hoisted Orace up on to one of the disordered couches.

"What's the matter?"

Orace's fierce eyes stared at him brightly, while he clutched his chest with one rough hand; and Simon saw that the breast of his shirt was red with blood. The man's voice came with a hoarse effort.

"Ain't nothink. Look out. . . ."

"Well, let's have a look at you, old son—"

The other pushed him away with sudden strength. Orace's head turned toward the half-closed door at the forward end of the saloon. And at the same moment, beyond the communicating door, Simon heard the faint click of a latch and the creak of a board under a stealthy foot. . . .

The Saint stooped in swift silence to recover his stanchion. Clubbed in his left hand, an eighteen-inch length of slender iron, it formed a weapon that was capable of impressing the toughest skull with a sense of painful inferiority.

"Steady, me lad," he said to Orace, as if no other thought were in his mind. "We must get this coat off to see what the trouble is. . . . I never thought you'd go and hit the bottle directly I was out of sight. And I suppose the cap blew off the ginger ale when you weren't looking. . . . There we are. Now if we just change this beautiful shirt of yours. . . ."

He burred on, as if he were still attending to the patient, while he picked his way soundlessly over the littered floor. His eyes were fixed on the door into the galley, and they were not smiling.

And then he stopped.

He stopped because the half-open door had suddenly jerked wide open. Beyond it, in the shadowy space between the light of the saloon and the darkness beyond, he could see the black configuration of a man, and the gun in the man's hand was held well forward so that the light of the saloon laid dull bluish gleams along the barrel.

"Don't come any closer," said the shadow.

The Saint relaxed slowly, rising from the slight crouch to which his cautious advance had unconsciously reduced him. The man facing him seemed to be of medium height, square and thickset; his voice had a throaty accent which was unfamiliar.

"Hullo, old cockroach." Simon greeted him in the gentlest of drawls, with the stanchion swinging loosely and rather speculatively in his hand. "Come in and make yourself at home. Oh, but you have. Never mind. There's still some of the bulkhead you haven't pulled to pieces—"

"I'll finish that in a minute. Turn round."

"You're sure you haven't any designs on me?"

"Turn round."

The Saint turned with a shrug.

"I suppose you know what'll happen if your hand shakes with that gun of yours, brother," he remarked. "You might have an accident and hit me. There's something about your voice which makes me think you've been practising in a place where little things like that don't matter, but over here they're a bit fussy. Have you ever seen a man hanged? It does the most comic things to his face. Although probably your face is comic enough—"

"You can forget that stuff," said the man behind him, coldly. "Now just drop that thing you've got in your hand."

"What, my little umbrella?"

"Yeah—whatever it is."

The Saint bent down slowly and laid the stanchion on the floor, choosing the place carefully.

"Now take two steps forward."

Simon measured the two paces, and stood still. His body was braced for the bullet which might conclude the interlude within the next three seconds, his desperate hope pinned to the temptation he had left two steps behind—the iron rod which he had put down so carefully, with one end on an upset ashtray from which it could not be moved without the slight grating sound for which his ears were straining. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Orace leaning rigidly forward on the couch, his scarecrow face set in a stare of indomitable wrath. . . .

It came—the faint gritting scrape of metal

which told him that the stanchion was being picked up. And the Saint flung himself back with an instantaneous release of his tensed muscles.

His right heel went kicking backward like a mule's, straight as a gunshot for the place where the head of the man behind him should have been if he was bending to pick up the stanchion.

The head of the intruder was exactly where Simon had computed. Simon felt the ecstatic squelch of the leather sogging home into something hard and only superficially yielding.

The Saint twisted round in time to see him rocking back on his haunches with one hand clapped to his face and the blood spurting through his fingers. His other hand still clutched the gun, weaving it round in a blind search for a target. Simon laughed softly and fell on him with his knees.

As he grabbed the man's gun wrist he saw Orace lurching forward to pick up the iron bar which had given him his chance, and the obvious justice of the team play appealed to him irresistibly. He rolled under his victim with a quick squirm and a heave, and the man's weight came dead on his hands as Orace struck.

The Saint wriggled out from underneath and sat up, feeling for a cigarette and leaning against the bunk.

"A shrewd swipe, Orace—very shrewd," he commented, eyeing the sleeping beauty with professional approval. "It must have made you feel a lot better. What's all the excitement been about?"

While the Saint explored the extent of his crew's injuries, Orace told him.

"'E came alongside abaht 'arf-parst nine, sir. Said 'e 'ad a messidge from yer. 'Ho, yus,' I ses, 'wot is this 'ere messidge?' 'Yer to go an' meet Mr. Tombs at the Queen's right awy,' 'e ses. 'Ho, yus,' I ses, 'well, Mr. Tombs's larst words to me was to sty 'ere till it snows,' I ses. So 'e ses: 'This is very urgent. Can I come aboard an' tell yer the rest of the messidge?'—and before I could say anythink 'e'd come aboard. 'Not aht 'ere,' 'e ses, 'where we can be seen. Let's go below.' So 'e goes below, wivout so much as a by-your-leave, an' I follers 'im to tell 'im where 'e gets orf. 'I gotter whisper it,' 'e

ses; an' then, bang, I got a biff on the 'ead that lide me right aht."

"What about this bullet?"

"That was afterwards. When I woke up 'e was still tearin' the saloon to pieces, an' 'e didn't notice me. I lay doggo fra bit, an' then I got 'old of one of the drawers wot 'e'd pulled out an' shied it at 'im. Must 've knocked 'im arf silly, becos I nearly got me 'ands on 'im, but I 'adn't got me legs back so much as I thought I 'ad, an' 'e pulled out 'is gun an' shot me."

"And damned nearly killed you," said the Saint thoughtfully.

The bullet had struck one of Orace's left ribs, glanced off, and torn an ugly gash in the muscle of his arm. So far as the Saint could tell, there were no bones broken; and he busied himself with expertly dressing and bandaging the wound, while his mind probed for the origins of that riotous visit.

It wasn't homicide alone—he was sure of that. From the story, the shot which had crippled Orace looked more like an accident of panic, the desperate impulse of any thug who had felt himself on the point of being cornered and captured. The torn up appearance of the saloon provided the real answer. Vogel was still searching for information.

There was another suggestion which he remembered as he put the last touches to Orace's bandages.

"Did a porter bring a couple of trunks along for me?" he asked.

"Yessir. They come abaht arf-parst seven. I put 'em in the starboard cabin."

Simon went forward as soon as he had finished, and found more or less what he had expected. The cords had been cut away from the trunks, and the locks had been ripped away by the scientific application of a jimmy. One of them was already open, and the lid of the other lifted at a touch. Clearly the visitor had just been completing his investigations when the Saint's arrival had disturbed him.

"Which is all very festive and neighborly," reflected the Saint, as he surveyed the wreckage.

He strolled back to the saloon in a meditative frame of mind. There remained the problem of the investigator himself, who seemed destined to wake up with a sore head

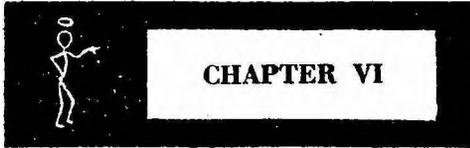
as well as a flattened face. The information which he had acquired during the visit must not be allowed to get back to Vogel; but on the other hand it was doubtless keeping company with some useful information from the Vogel camp which might form a basis of fair exchange.

Simon Templar found himself warming to that idea on his return journey. He closed the door of the galley behind him and folded a wet towel which he had collected on his way, grinning at Orace rather dreamily.

"We might see if your boy friend feels talkative," he said. "And if he doesn't, you may be able to think of some way to thaw him out."

He cleared a space on one of the settees and yanked the intruder up on to it. For a minute or so he applied the cold towel methodically. Then he felt the back of the man's head, looked closely into his face, and opened up his shirt. After which he moved away and finished his cigarette with contemplative deliberation.

For nothing was more certain than that the sleeping beauty had listened to the last lullaby of all.



DEFINITELY an uninvited complication, thought the Saint; although he admitted that it was the sort of accident that was always liable to happen when a man had an iron bar in his hand and good reason to be annoyed.

The Saint's attitude was sympathetic and broad-minded. He did not feel that Orace was to be blamed; but he did feel that that momentary lapse had altered the situation somewhat drastically. Considering the point again in the placid light of the morning after, he could find no encouragement to revise his opinion.

He folded his arms on the rail of the *Corsair* and frowned ruminatively at a flight of gulls wheeling over the blue water. Somewhere back under that same blue water, out

in the channel between Guernsey and Herm, the unfortunate visitor lay in his long sleep, moored down to the sea bed by a couple of pigs of ballast. The *Corsair* had been cleaned up and tidied, and every record of his intrusion effaced.

Simon Templar had done that alone, before he went to sleep; but his own plans had kept him awake for longer.

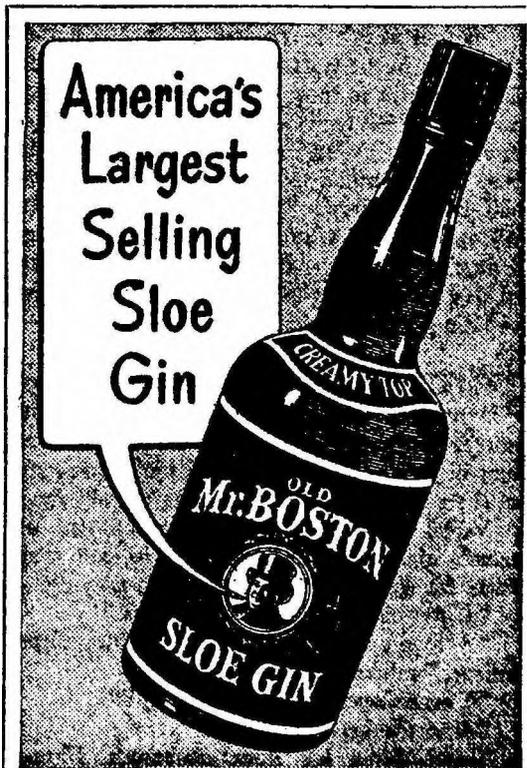
"The balloon's gone up, anyway," he had reasoned. "When the fellow doesn't come home, Vogel will start thinking. What'll he decide? That the fellow ratted? . . . One chance in fifty. . . . That he's had an accident, then? That's the forty-nine to one certainty."

He had thought round it from every angle that he could see, trying to put himself into Vogel's place, but there was no other conclusion he could come to. What would happen then?

Simon slept with his hand on his gun. Over breakfast he made his decision, and his crew glared at him incredulously.

"Yer must be barmy," was Orace's outspoken comment.

[Turn page]



60 Proof—Mr. Boston Distiller Inc., Boston, Massachusetts

"Maybe I am," admitted the Saint. "But I've got to keep that date this morning. An innocent man would keep it, even if he had caught a burglar during the night."

"It's that perishin' girl," said Orace morosely.

Simon paused in the act of fastening a strap around his leg just below the knee—a strap which supported the sheath of the slim razor-sharp knife, Belle, which in his hands was almost as deadly as any firearm.

"She's not perishing, Orace. Not while I'm still on my feet."

"Yer won't be on yer feet for long, any'ow," said Orace, "And wot the 'ell 'appens to my job when yer feedin' the shrimps like that bloke I 'it larst night?"

"I expect you could always go back to your old job as an artist's model," said the Saint.

He straightened his sock and stood up, smiling that curiously aimless and lazy smile which came to him only when he was shaking the dice to throw double or quits with death. His hand dropped on Orace's shoulder.

"But it won't be so bad as that. I'll put the cards in the porthole for Mr. Conway or Mr. Quentin to look you up during the day, and they'll see you don't starve. And I'll be having the time of my life. I'll bet Birdie is just hoping and praying that I'll plant myself by not showing up. Instead of which, it'll take all the wind out of their sails when I step on board, as if I hadn't one little egg of a wicked thought on my mind. It ought to be a great moment."

IN ITS way, it proved to be quite a great moment. Simon watched the play of light on the water, and recalled it for what it was worth. It was the first time he had found any of the signs of human strain on Vogel's face.

Vogel was as spotlessly turned out as usual, his handshake was just as cold and firm, his geniality no less smooth-flowing.

"A perfect morning, Mr. Tombs."

"A lovely morning after a gorgeous night before," murmured the Saint.

"You enjoyed our little evening?"

"And the bed-time story."

Vogel lifted his dark eyebrows. Simon smiled.

"There must be something catching about this harbor thief business," he explained, with the air of a man in the street who is simply bursting with his little adventure and is trying to appear blasé about it. "I had a caller myself last night."

"My dear Mr. Tombs! Did you lose anything valuable?"

"Nothing at all," said the Saint smugly. "We caught him."

"Then you were luckier than we were," said Arnheim, with his round flabby face full of admiration and interest. "Did he put up a fight?"

"He didn't have a chance—"

Simon looked up as Loretta came towards them along the deck. He had felt the beat of his heart when he saw her, had seemed to discover an absurd lightening of the perfect morning as if a screen had been taken away from before the sun. Vogel took her arm.

"My dear, Mr. Tombs has been telling us what happened after he left us last night. He had one of those harbor thieves on board his own boat—and caught him!"

"But how exciting!"

"What happened?" Vogel had asked the question, with his face as calm as stone; and the Saint had known that his answer would mark the sharp pinnacle of the moment which he had deliberately courted.

"Well, we were wrestling all over the saloon, trying to get his gun away from him, and Orace grabbed hold of a stanchion that he'd brought down to clean and hit him over the head. Then we tied him up and took him ashore and lugged him along to the police station. But when they tried to give him first aid, they found he was—sort of dead."

Simon had been waiting for a pregnant silence, and he was not disappointed.

"Dead?" Arnheim repeated at last.

The Saint nodded. "Orace must have underestimated his strength, or something. He'd bashed the poor devil's skull right in."

"But—but won't you be arrested?" faltered Loretta.

"Oh, no. They call it accidental death. Still, it's rather a gruesome sort of thing to have on your conscience."

Vogel stroked the side of his chin. His passionless eyes, hard and unwinking, were fastened on the Saint with a terrible bright-

ness of concentration.

"Of course it must be," he agreed. "But as you say, the man brought it on himself. You mustn't let it worry you too much."

"What's worrying him?"

The Professor came ambling along, and the story had to be started over again. While it was being repeated, a seaman came up and handed Vogel a telegram. Vogel read it; and during the conclusion of the second telling of the adventure, he seemed to regain complete command of himself with a mental struggle that showed only in the almost imperceptibly whitened pallor of his face.

He glanced along the deck as Yule added his hearty voice to the general vote of exoneration.

"We're ready to sail," he said. "Will you excuse me if I go and attend to it?"

THE Saint lighted a cigarette in the shield of his cupped hands, and stared thoughtfully over the sun-sprinkled ripple of the sea.

Roger, Peter, and Orace were back in St. Peter Port; and though they knew where he had gone, they could do nothing to help him. And there he was, with Loretta, racing through the broad waters of the Channel on the *Falkenberg* while Vogel and Arnheim thought him over. In addition to whom, there was a crew of at least ten more of Vogel's deep-water gangsters, whom he personally had inspected, also on board; and presumably none of them would be afflicted with any more scruples than their master.

The deep-voiced hum of the engines died away suddenly to a soft murmur. Simon turned to the Professor, who was puffing a stubby briar at his side.

"Is this where you take your dip?"

Yule nodded. Vogel was in the wheelhouse with Loretta, and Arnheim had moved out of the sun to spread his perspiring bulk in a deck chair.

"This should be it. We went over the chart last night, and the deepest sounding we could find was ninety-four fathoms. It isn't much, but it'll do for the preliminary test."

Simon gazed out to sea with his eyebrows drawn down against the glare. He realized suddenly that there was a third person in the same danger as himself, about whom he

had forgotten to worry very much before.

"Have you know Vogel long?" he asked casually.

"About six months now. He came to me after my first descent and offered to help. He's been a kind of fairy godmother to me. And all I've been able to do in return was to name a new deep-water fish after him—*Bathyphasma vogeli!*" The Professor chuckled in his refreshingly boyish way.

"You haven't started to think about the commercial possibilities of your invention yet?"

"No. No. I'm afraid it's just a scientific toy." Yule's eyes widened a little. "Are there any commercial possibilities?"

The Saint hesitated. In the face of that child-like unworldliness he didn't know where to begin.

"I was only thinking—" he began slowly; and then he heard footsteps behind him, and turned his head to see Vogel and Loretta coming out on to the deck. "For instance, Professor, could you take movies down there? They'd be something quite new in travelogues."

"I don't know," said Yule seriously. "What do you think, Mr. Vogel?"

"We must ask someone with more technical knowledge." Vogel's bland glance touched on the Saint for a moment with a puzzling dryness, and returned to his protégé. "Would you like to check over the gear before lunch?"

The Professor knocked out his pipe, and they moved aft. Arnheim stayed in his chair in the shade, while Simon fell in beside Loretta and followed the procession. It was the first time that day that he had had a chance to speak to her alone. He took her fingers and held her back.

"Is this safe?" she asked, hardly moving her lips.

"As safe as anything on this suicides' picnic. It'd be more suspicious if I didn't try to speak to you at all." He pointed towards the Casquet lighthouse rising to the south, as if he were making some remark about it, and said quietly: "There's one person who may be sitting on the same volcano as we are; but he doesn't know it."

"Profesor Yule?"

"Yes. Birdie isn't interested in toys. When

this new bathystol is passed okay, he'll 've had all he wants out of Yule. Then he'll get rid of him. But how? And how soon?"

Simon came to a lazy halt in front of the apparatus which three seamen were maneuvering out on to the deck—a creation like some sort of weird Martian robot. The upper part combined torso and head in one great sphere of metal, from the sides of which projected arms that looked like strings of huge beads socketing together and terminating in steel pincers. It balanced on two short bulbous legs of similar construction. The sperical trunk was studded with circular quartz windows, and tubes of flexible metal coiled round it and connected with a six-foot drum of insulated cable on the deck.

"Is this the new regulation swim suit?" asked the Saint interestedly. "But it doesn't look as if you could move about in it."

"It's fairly hard work," Yule admitted. "But it looks a great deal heavier than it is. Dr. Beebe went down more than three thousand feet in his bathysphere, but he was shut up in a steel ball that half a dozen men couldn't have lifted. I set out with the idea of achieving strength by internal bracing. You need something pretty strong for this job."

"I suppose you do," said the Saint mildly.

"At three thousand feet the pressure is more than half a ton to the square inch. If you lowered a man in an ordinary diving suit to that depth, he'd be crushed into a shapeless pulp." The Professor grinned cheerfully. "But in the bathystol I'm nearly as comfortable as I am now. You can go down in it yourself if you like, and prove it."

The Saint shook his head.

"Thanks very much," he murmured hastily. "But I'll take your word for it."

He stood aside and watched the preparations for a shallow test dive. The ten-ton grab on the after deck had been stripped of its tarpaulin and telescoped out over the stern, but the claw mechanism had been dismantled and stowed away somewhere out of sight. All that was visible now was a sort of steel derrick with an ordinary hook dangling from its cable.

The hook was hitched into a length of chain welded to what might have been the

shoulders of the bathystol. The nuts were tightened up on the circular door through which Yule would lower himself into the apparatus when he went down in it. One of the engineers touched the controls of the electric winch, and the cumbersome contrivance dragged along the deck and rose sluggishly towards the end of the boom.

For a moment or two it hung there, turning slowly, and then it went down with the cable whirring and vanished under the water. Again the engineer checked it, while Yule fussed round like an excited urchin, and the telescopic boom shortened on its runners like the horn of a snail until the wire cable came within the grasp of a man stationed at the stern. Three other men picked up the insulated electric cable and passed it along as it unreeled from the drum, and the man at the stern fastened it to the supporting cable at intervals with a deft twist of rope as the bathystol descended.

"That's enough."

At last the Professor was satisfied. He stepped back, his hair and beard awry and his eyes gleaming happily. The engineer reversed the winch, and the cable spooled back on to the drum with a deepening purr until the bathystol pushed its outlandish head above the surface and rose clear to swing again at the nose of the derrick.

"Five hundred feet," muttered Yule proudly. "And I'd hardly even call that a trial run." He watched anxiously while the bathystol was lowered on to the deck and two men stepped up to unfasten the door. As soon as it was open he climbed on a chair, and hauled out the humidity recorder. He frowned at it for a moment, and looked up grinning. "Not a sign of a leak, either. Now if I can walk about in it better than I could in the old one—"

"I take it there is no serious doubt of that?" said Vogel, with intent solicitude.

"Bless you, no. I'm not in the least worried. But this new jointing system has got to be tested in practice. It ought to make walking much easier; unless the packing won't stand up to the job. But it will."

"Then we shall have to try and find something special for lunch."

Vogel took the Professor's arm, and Yule allowed himself to be torn reluctantly away

from his toys. Simon caught Loretta's eye, and as they strolled on he spoke without shaping his mouth.

"A smile on the face of the tiger."

She glanced over the turquoise spread of the water, and said: "After we've been to Madeira."

"I suppose so."

The sunlight slanting across his face deepened the twin wrinkles of cold contemplation above his nose. After the *Falkenberg* had been to Madeira . . . presumably. There was deep water there. Enough water, at any rate, to establish the potentialities of the bathystol beyond any shadow of doubt. Which was unquestionably what Vogel wanted. . . . But long before then, if Vogel's intelligence service was anything like as efficient as his other departments, the Saint's own alibi of apologetically intruding innocence would have been blown sky-high, and there would be nothing to stop the joy-ride terminating.

THERE were two oxygen cylinders, of the same alloy as the bathystol, unpacked from their case and being passed out on to the deck as Yule wriggled into a moth-eaten grey sweater in preparation for his descent.

The door in the top of the bathystol was only just large enough to let him through; but presently he was inside, peering out of one of the portholes. Then the oxygen cylinders were passed in to him, and fitted into the clamps provided for them on the interior of the sphere. After which the door was lowered into place by two men, and the clang of hammer and wrench rattled over the sea as the bolts which secured it were tightened up.

Then it was finished, and the hammerers climbed down. The Professor fitted a pair of earphones over his head and adjusted the horn-shaped transmitter on his chest; and his voice, curiously shrill and metallic, clattered suddenly out of a small loud speaker standing on a table by the rail.

"Can you hear me?"

"Perfectly. Can you hear us?"

Vogel had settled the loop of a similar transmitter round his neck, and it was he who checked up the telephone communication.

"Fine!"

The Professor's hands moved over the racks of curious instruments with which he was surrounded, testing them one by one. Under one of the windows, on his right, there was a block of paper on a small flat shelf, for notes and sketches, with a pencil dangling over it on a length of string. On his left, mounted on a sort of lazy-tongs on which it could be pulled out from its bracket, was a small camera.

He touched a switch, and the interior of the globe was illuminated by a dim light over his notebook; at the touch of another switch, a dazzlingly powerful shaft of luminance beamed out from a quartz lens set in the upper part of the sphere like the headlight of a streamlined car. Then he slipped his arms into the sleeves of the apparatus, moved them about, and opened and closed the pincer hands. He bent his knees, and lifted first one leg and then the other in their ponderous harness. At last his voice came through the loud speaker again.

"Right! Let her go!"

"Good luck," said Vogel; and the bathystol lifted and swung out over the side.

After fifteen minutes which might have been an hour, the cable swayed with the first trace of slackness and the loud speaker suddenly squeaked: "Whoa!" The burring of the winch died away, and the man who was chalking the cable in ten-foot lengths as it slipped over the boom looked at his figures and called a guttural: "Five hundred seventy-five."

"Five hundred and seventy-five feet," Vogel relayed impassively over the phone.

"Splendid. I'm on the bottom." It was indescribably eerie to listen to Yule's matter-of-fact voice speaking from the eternal windless night of the sea bed. "Everything's working perfectly. The heating arrangement makes a lot of difference—I'm not a bit cold."

"Can you move about?"

"Yes, I think so. This bathystol is a lot lighter than the last one."

"Could you bend down to pick anything up in it?"

There was a brief pause. Glancing at Kurt Vogel in a moment's recollection of what this preliminary experiment stood for

besides its contribution to scientific knowledge, Simon saw that the man's face was taut and shining with the same curiously waxen glaze which he had noticed on that hair-raising search of the *Corsair*.

Then the Professor's voice came through again.

"Yes—I got hold of a bit of rock. Quite easy. . . . Now I'm going to try and walk a bit. Give me another twenty feet of cable."

The winch thrummed again for a few seconds; and then there was absolute silence on deck. Simon felt his pulses beating and the palms of his hands turning moist. He flashed another glance at Vogel. The pirate was standing stiff and immobile, his head thrust a little forward so that he looked more than ever like a pallid vulture. The Saint's gaze turned to catch Loretta's, and he saw an infinitesimal tremor brush her shoulders—twin brother to the ballet of ghostly spiders that were curveting up his own spinal ganglions.

"I can walk quite comfortably." The sharp stridency of the loud speaker crackled abruptly into the stillness. "I've taken about thirty steps in two directions. There is no sign of a leak, and the reading of the humidity recorder is still normal."

One of the seamen spat a cud of tobacco over the side, and the engineer pulled out his cotton waste and rubbed introspectively at an invisible speck on a chromium-plated cleat. Vogel's gaunt figure seemed to grow taller as he raised his head. His eyes swept round over Arnheim, Loretta, and the Saint, with a sudden blaze of triumph.

Then the loud speaker clattered again.

"Something seems to have gone wrong with the oxygen supply. One of the cylinders has just fizzled out. The valve must have been damaged in packing and started a slow leak. I'm turning on the other cylinder. I think you might bring me up now."

The slight fidgeting of the cluster of seamen stopped altogether. The engineer looked round.

"Up!" snapped Vogel.

Loretta was gripping the Saint's arm. Simon was only numbly aware of the clutch of her fingers; for a perceptible space of time his mind was half deadened with in-

credulity—until the rumble of the winch stopped again almost as soon as it had started, and left a frightful stillness to force its meaning back into his unbelieving ears.

Vogel was watching the engineer with a faint frown.

"What is the matter?"

"A fuse, I think."

The man left his controls and vanished down a companion, and Vogel spoke into the telephone mouthpiece in his clear flat voice.

"They're just fixing the winch, Professor. We'll have you up in a few minutes."

The Saint's eyes were freezing into chips of ultramarine. Every instinct he possessed was shrieking at him for action, and yet he was actually afraid to move. He had straightened up off the rail, and yet some twisted doubt within him still held him from taking the first step forward. So successfully had the cunning of Kurt Vogel insinuated itself into his mind.

The torturing question drummed sickeningly through his brain and rooted him to the deck: *Was this only another of Vogel's satanically deep-laid traps?*

Vogel had walked across to the companion down which the engineer had disappeared. He was standing there, looking down, tapping his fingers quietly on the rail. He hadn't even seemed to look at the Saint.

"Can't we do anything?" Loretta was pleading.

Vogel glanced at her with a shrug.

"I know nothing about machinery," he said; and then he stepped back to make way for the returning engineer.

The man's face was perfectly wooden. "I think one of the armature windings has burnt out. They're working on it."

Another hush fell after his words, in which Otto Arnheim emptied his lungs with a gusty sigh. Loretta was staring at the taut cable swaying slightly from the nose of the boom as the *Falkenberg* tilted in the swell, and her face had gone paler under the golden tan.

Simon's fists were clenched till the nails bit into his palms. The loud speaker clacked through the silence.

"The reserve cylinder seems to be worse than the first. I don't think it will last much longer. What is the matter?"

"We are trying to repair the winch," Vogel said.

Then he looked at the Saint. Was that intended to be tragic appeal, or was it derision? Simon felt his self-command snapping under the intolerable strain. He turned to the loud speaker and stared at it.

"The cylinder has just given out."

Yule's voice came through again unflinchingly, almost casually. The Saint saw that Loretta's eyes were also fixed on the loud speaker. Her chest was scarcely moving, as if her own breathing had stopped in sympathy with what those six words must have meant to the man helplessly imprisoned five hundred feet below.

"Can't you put the cable on to another winch?" asked the Saint.

"There's no other winch on the ship that would take the load."

"We can rig up a tackle if you've got a couple of large blocks."

"It takes more than twenty minutes to raise the bathystol from this depth," Vogel said flatly. "With a block and tackle it would take over an hour."

Simon knew that he was right. And his brain worked on, mechanically, with its grim computation. In that confined space it would take no more than a few minutes to consume all the oxygen left in the air. And then. . . .

"I'm getting very weak and giddy." The Professor's voice was fainter. "You will have to be very quick now, or it will be no use."

Something about the scene was trying to force itself into the Saint's attention. Was he involuntarily measuring his distances and marking down position, with the instinct of a seasoned fighter? The group of seamen at the stern. One of them by the drum of insulated cable, further up the deck. Vogel at the head of the companion. Arnheim. . . . Why had Arnheim moved across to stand in front of the winch controls, so that his broad squat bulk hid them completely?

There was another sound trying to break through the silence—a queer jerky gasping sound. The terrible throaty sound of a man battling for breath, relayed like every other sound from the bathystol by the impersonal instrument on the table. . . .

The Saint moved slowly forward—to-

wards the bulkhead where the winch controls were. Towards Arnheim. And Arnheim did not move.

"It isn't easy to wait, is it?" he said.

"It isn't," agreed the Saint; and the automatic ground its muzzle into the other's yielding bely. "So we'll stop waiting. Walk backwards a little way, Otto."

Arnheim's jowl drooped. He looked down at the gun in his stomach. "Really, Mr. Tombs—"

"Have you gone mad?"

Vogel's dry monotone lanced across the feeble protest with calculated contempt. The Saint grinned mirthlessly.

"Not yet. But I'm liable to if Otto doesn't get out of my way in the next two seconds. And then you're liable to lose Otto."

"I know this is a ghastly situation," Vogel was still speaking calmly. "But you won't help it by going into hysterics. Everything possible is being done."

"One thing isn't being done," answered the Saint. "And I'm going to do it. Get away from those controls, Otto, and watch me start that winch!"

"My dear Mr. Tombs—"

"Behind you!"

Loretta's desperate cry pealed in the Saint's ears with a frantic urgency that spun him round with his back to the deckhouse. He had a glimpse of a man springing at him with an upraised belaying-pin; and his finger was tightening on the trigger when Arnheim dragged down his wrist and struck him a terrific left-handed blow with a rubber truncheon.

There was an instant when his brain seemed to rock inside his skull. Then darkness.

"I TRUST you are feeling better," said Vogel.

"Much better," said the Saint. "And full of admiration. Oh, it was smooth, very smooth, Birdie—you don't mind if I call you Birdie, do you? It's so whimsical."

He sat in an armchair in the wheelhouse, with a brandy and soda in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Both of them had been provided by Kurt Vogel. He was not even tied up. But there the free hospitality ended, for Vogel kept one hand obtrusively

in his jacket pocket, and so did Arnheim.

"And the Professor?" he asked.

Vogel lifted his shoulders. "Unfortunately the trouble with the winch was traced too late, Mr. Templar."

"So you knew why I was here?" said the Saint softly.

The other's thin lips widened "Of course. When you were photographed in Dinard—you remember? I received the answer to my inquiry this morning. That was when I knew that there would have to be an accident."

Naturally. When once the Saint was known, a man like Vogel would not run the risk of letting the Professor be warned, or snatched out of his power.

"So where," he murmured, "do you think we go from here?"

"That depends on you," said Vogel.

He put a match to his cigar and sat on the arm of a chair, leaning forward. "You have given me a good deal of trouble, Templar. Not by your childish interference—that would hardly be worth talking about—but by an accident for which it was responsible."

"You mean the Professor?" Simon suggested.

Vogel snapped his fingers. "No. That's nothing. Your presence merely caused me to get rid of him a little earlier than I should otherwise have done. He would have come to the same end, anyway, within the next few weeks. The accident I am referring to is the one which happened last night."

"Your amateur burglar?"

"My burglar. I should hardly call him an amateur—as a matter of fact he was one of the best safe-breakers in Europe. An invaluable man. . . . And therefore I want him back."

The Saint sipped his brandy. "Birdie," he said gently, "you're calling the wrong number. What you want is a spiritualist."

"You killed him?"

"That's a crude way of putting it. If the Professor had an unfortunate accident this afternoon, so did your boy friend last night."

"And then you took him ashore?"

"No. That was the only part of my story where I wandered a little way from the truth. A man with my reputation can't afford to deliver dead bodies at police stations,

even if they died of old age. So we gave him a sailor's funeral. We rowed him out some way from the harbor and fed him to the fish."

The other's eyes bored into him like splinters of black marble, as if they were trying to split open his brain and impale the first fragment of a lie. At last Vogel drew back a little.

"I believe you. I suspected that there was some truth in your story when you first told it. That is why you are alive now."

"You're too generous, Birdie."

"But how long you will remain alive is another matter."

"I knew there was a catch in it somewhere," said the Saint.

Vogel got up and walked over to one of the broad windows; and Simon transferred his contemplative regard to Otto Arnheim, estimating how long it might take him to bridge the distance between them.

After about a minute Vogel turned round and came back.

"You are responsible for the loss of one of my best men," he said with peremptory directness. "It will be difficult to replace him, and it may take considerable time. Unfortunately, I cannot afford to wait. But fortunately, I have you here instead."

"So we can still play cut-throat," drawled the Saint.

Vogel stood looking down at him impassively. "Just now you wanted to know where we were going, Templar. The answer is to a point a little way southwest of the Casquet Lighthouse. When we stop again there, we shall be directly over the wreck of the *Chalfont Castle*—you will remember the ship that sank there in March. There are five million pounds' worth of bullion in her strong-room which I intend to remove before the official salvage operations are begun. The only difficulty is that your clumsiness has deprived me of the only member of my crew who could have been relied upon to open the strong-room. I'm hoping that that is where your interference will prove to have its compensations. I said that the man you killed was one of the best safe-breakers in Europe. But I have heard that the Saint is one of the greatest experts in the world."

So that was it. . . . Simon dropped his cigarette-end into his empty glass, and took out his case to replace it.

"You want me to go down and give a demonstration?" he said lightly, and Vogel nodded.

"That is what I intend you to do."

"In the bathystol?"

"That won't be necessary. The *Chalfont Castle* is lying in twenty fathoms, and an ordinary diving suit will be quite sufficient."

"Are you offering me a partnership?"

"I'm offering you a chance to help your partner."

Something inside the Saint turned cold. Perhaps it was not until he heard that last quiet fiat sentence that he realized how completely Vogel had mastered the situation.

"And what happens if I refuse?" he asked quietly.

Vogel shrugged.

"I don't need to make any melodramatic threats. I prefer to assume that you will agree. If you do what I tell you, Loretta will be put ashore as soon as it is convenient—alive."

"Is that all?"

"I don't need to offer any more."

The answer was calm, uncompromising; blood-chilling in its ruthless economy of detail.

Simon looked at him for a long time.

"You've got all these situations down to their lowest common denominator, haven't you?" he said, very slowly. "And what inducement have I got to take your word for anything?"

"None whatever," replied Vogel carelessly. "But you will take it, because if you refuse you will certainly be dead within the next half-hour. You have about fifteen minutes to make your choice."



CHAPTER VII

"NOTHING worries you very much, does it?" said Loretta gently. The Saint smiled.

"My dear, I gave that up after the seventh time I was told I had about ten minutes to live. And I'm still alive."—

He lay stretched out comfortably on the bunk, with his hands behind his head and the smoke spiralling up from his cigarette. It was the same cabin in which he had knocked out Otto Arnheim not so long ago—the same cabin from which he had so successfully rescued Steve Murdoch. With the essential difference that this time he was the one in need of rescuing, and there was no one outside who would be likely to do the job.

He recognized it as Kurt Vogel's inevitable crowning master-stroke to have sent him down there, with Loretta, while he made the choice that had been offered him. He looked at the steady humor in her grey eyes, the slim vital beauty of her, and knew by the breathless drag of his heart how accurately that master-stroke had been placed.

She sat on the end of the bunk, leaning against the bulkhead and looking down at him, with her hands clasped across her knees. He could see the passing of time on her wrist watch.

"How long do you think we shall live now?" she said.

"Oh, indefinitely—according to Birdie. Until I'm a toothless old gaffer dribbling down my beard, and you're a silver-haired duenna of the Women's League of Purity. If I do this job for him, he's ready to send us an affectionate greeting card on our golden wedding anniversary."

"If you believe him."

"And you don't."

"Do you?"

Simon twitched his shoulders. He thought of the bargain which he had really been offered, and kept his gaze steadfastly on the ceiling.

"Yes. In a way I think he'll keep his word."

"He murdered Yule."

"For the bathystol. So that nobody else should have it. But no clever crook murders without good reason. What would he gain by getting rid of us?"

"Silence," she said quietly.

He nodded. "But does he really need that any more? You told me that some people

had known for a long time that this racket existed. The fact that we're here tells him that we've linked him up with it. And that means we've got friends outside who know as much as we know."

"He knows who I am, then?"

"No. Only that you've been very inquisitive, and that you tried to warn me. Doubtless he thinks you're part of my gang—people always credit me with a gang."

"So he'd let you go, knowing who you are?"

"Knowing who I am, he'd know I wouldn't talk about him to the police."

"So he'd let you go to come back with some more of your gang and shoot him up again?"

Simon turned his head to cock an eye at her. She must not know. He must not be drawn further into argument. Already, with that cool courageous wit of hers, she had him blundering.

"I'm convinced, anyway," he said steadily. "I'm going to do the job."

She looked at him no less steadily.

"Why are you going to do the job?"

"Because it's certain death if I don't, and by no means certain if I do. Also because I'll go a long way for a new sensation, and this will be the first strong-room I've ever cracked in a diving suit."

Her hands unclasped from her knees, and she opened her bag to take out a cigarette.

"We have had one or two exciting days," she said.

"Probably we've had exciting lives."

"You have."

"And you. You're not a bit like a detective, Loretta."

"What should I be?"

He shrugged.

She glanced out of the porthole and turned back to him thoughtfully. "We'll probably both be down somewhere in the sea before the sun comes up again, Saint. . . . It's a funny sort of thought, isn't? I've always thought it must be so exasperating to die. You must always leave so much unfinished."

"You're not afraid."

"Neither are you."

"I've so much less to be afraid of."

She closed her eyes for a second. "You mean because I'm a woman?"

"Yes. Just suppose it had been a choice," he said conversationally "You know the old story-book formula. The heroine always votes for death. Do you think she really would?"

"I think I should like to live," she said slowly. "There are other things to live for, aren't there? You can keep your own honor. You can rebuild your pride. You don't burn your house down because a little mud has been tracked on the floor."

Simon looked over his shoulder. The sea had turned paler in the glassy calm of the late afternoon, and the sky was without a cloud.

"Meanwhile," he said soberly, "there are important things to tell you."

"Such as?"

"Why I should fall in love with you so quickly."

"Weren't you just taking advantage of the garden?" she said, with her grey eyes on his face.

"It may have been that. Or maybe it was the garden taking advantage of me. Or maybe it was you taking advantage of both. But it happened."

"How often has it happened before?"

He looked straight at her. "Many times."

"And how often could it happen again?"

His lips curved with the fraction of a sardonic grin. Vogel had never promised him life—had never even troubled to help him delude himself that his own life would be included in the bargain. Whether he opened the strong-room of the *Chalfont Castle* or not, Vogel had given his sentence.

Simon Templar had loved and romanced, dreamed and philandered; and he had come to believe that love shared the impermanence of all adventures.

"I don't think it'll happen again," he said.

But she was laughing quietly, with an infinite tenderness in her eyes.

"Unless a miracle happens," she said. "And who's going to provide one?"

"Steve Murdoch?" he suggested, and glanced round the bare white cabin. "This is the dungeon I fished him out of. He really ought to return the compliment."

"He'll be in St. Peter Port by now. . . . But this boat is the only address he's got for me, and he won't know where we've gone."

I don't suppose Vogel will be going back that way."

"Two friends of mine back there have some idea where we've gone. Peter Quentin and Roger Conway. They're staying at the Royal. But I forgot to bring my carrier pigeons."

"So we'll have to provide our own miracle?"

"Anyway," said the Saint, "I don't like crowds. And I shouldn't want a crowd now."

He flicked his cigarette-end backwards through the porthole and turned towards her. She nodded.

"Neither should I," she said.

She threw away her own cigarette and gave him both her hands. But she stayed up on her knees, as she had risen, listening to the sounds which had become audible outside. Then she looked out; and he pulled himself up beside her.

The *Falkenberg* was hove to, no more than a long stone's throw from the Casquet Rocks. The lighthouse, crowning the main islet like a medieval castle, was so close he could see one of the lighthouse-keepers leaning over the battlements and looking down at them.

For a moment Simon was puzzled to guess the reason for the stop; and then the sharp clatter of an outboard motor starting up made him glance down towards the water, and he understood. The *Falkenberg's* dinghy had been lowered, and it was even then stuttering away towards the landing stage, manned by Otto Arnheim and three of the crew. As it drew away from the side, the *Falkenberg* got under way again, sliding slowly towards the south.

Simon turned away from the porthole, and Loretta's eyes met him.

"I suppose the lighthouse overlooks the wreck," she said.

"I believe it does," he answered, and the thought in both their minds needed no elaborating. The staff on the lighthouse might see too much—and that must be prevented. The Saint wondered how drastically the prevention would be done.

Simon sat down again on the bunk. His lips were drawn hard and bitter with the knowledge of his helplessness.

"I guess it's nearly time for my burglary," he said. "It's a grand climax to my career as a detective."

She was leaning back, with her head on his shoulder. Her cheek was against his, and she held his hands against her.

"So you signed on the dotted line, Simon," she said softly.

"Didn't you always know I would?"

He kissed her. Her lips were soft and surrendering against his. He held her face in his hands, touched her hair and her eyes, as he had done in the garden.

"Will you always remember me like this?" she said.

"Always."

"I think they're coming."

A key turned in the lock, and he stood up. Vogel came in first, with his right hand still in his side pocket, and two of his crew framed themselves in the doorway behind him. He bowed faintly to the Saint.

"Have you made up your mind?" he asked.

Simon Templar nodded. "I'm ready when you are," he said.

THEY were settling the forty-pound lead weights over his shoulders, one on his back and one on his chest. He was already encased in the heavy rubber-lined twill overall; the weighted boots, each of them turning the scale at sixteen pounds, had been strapped on his feet. Another member of the crew, similarly clad, was explaining the working of the air outlet valve to him before the helmet was put on.

"If you screw up the valve you keep the air in the dress, and so you float. If you unscrew it you let out the air, and you sink. When you get to the bottom, you adjust the valve so that you are comfortable. You keep enough air to balance the weights without lifting you off your feet. You understand?"

"You have a gift for putting things plainly," said the Saint.

The man grunted and stepped back; and Kurt Vogel stood in front of him.

"Ivaloff will go down with you—in case you should be tempted to forget your position," he explained. "He will also lead you to the strong-room, which I have shown him on the plans of the ship. He will also carry the underwater hydro-oxygen torch, which

will cut through one and a half inches of solid steel—to be used as and when you direct him.”

Simon nodded, and fingered an instrument from the kit which he had been examining.

“Those are the tools of the man you killed,” said Vogel. “He worked well with them. If there is anything else you need, we will try to supply you.”

Simon dropped the implement back in the bag from which he had taken it. The brilliance of the afternoon had passed its height, and the sea was like oiled crystal under the lowering sun. The sun was still bright, but it had lost its heat.

It was the Saint's one regret that Vogel had brought Loretta out on to the deck with him. He would rather have been spared that last reminder.

“I shall be in communication with both of you by telephone all the time, and I shall expect you to keep me informed of your progress.” Vogel was completing his instructions. “As soon as you have opened the strong-room, you will help Ivaloff to bring out the gold and load it on to the tackle which will be sent down to you.”

The heavy casque was put over the Saint's head, settled and secured. Through the plate-glass window in the front Simon watched the same process being performed on Ivaloff, and saw two seamen take the handles of the reciprocating air pump which had been brought out on deck. His breathing became tainted with a faint odor of oil and rubber.

“Can you hear me?”

It was Vogel's voice, reverberating metallically through the telephone.

“Okay,” answered the Saint.

Ivaloff beckoned to him; and he stood up and walked clumsily to the stern. A section of the taff-rail had been removed, and a sort of flat grating had been slung from the end of the boom from which the bathstol had been lowered. They stepped on to it and grasped the ropes, and in another moment they were swinging clear of the deck and over the water.

Taking his last look round as they went down, Simon caught sight of the outboard coming back, and he watched it with an arctic stillness in his eyes. Then the water closed over his window, and in an instant

all the light and warmth of the world was blotted out, leaving nothing but dim emerald phosphorescence. Looking up, he could see the surface of the water like a ceiling of liquid glass rolling and wrinkling in long slow undulations. Up over his head he could see the keel of the *Falkenberg* glued in bizarre truncation to that fluid awning, the outlines growing vaguer and darker as it receded.

They were sinking through deeper and deeper shades of green into an olive-green semi-darkness. There was a singing in his ears, an impression of deafness. He swallowed, closing his nasal passages, exactly as he would have done in coming down in an airplane from a height, and his ear-drums plopped back to normal. A long spar rose out of the green gloom to meet them, and he realized suddenly that it was a mast. He looked down and saw the dim shapes of the funnels rising after it, slipping by . . . the white paintwork of the upper decks. . . .

The grating on which they stood jarred against the rail of the promenade deck, and their descent ceased. Ivaloff was clambering down over the rail, and Simon followed him.

“Unscrew your valve.”

Ivaloff's gruff voice crackled in his helmet, and he realized that the telephone wiring connected them together as well as kept them in communication with the *Falkenberg*. Simon obeyed the instruction, and felt the pressure of water creeping up his chest as the suit deflated, until Ivaloff tapped on his helmet and told him to stop.

The feeling of buoyancy disappeared with the reduction of the air. As they moved on, he found that the weights with which he was loaded just balanced the buoyancy of his body, so that he was not conscious of walking under a load. Overcoming the resistance of the water itself was the only labor of movement, and that was rather like wading through syrup.

In that ghostly and fatiguing slow-motion they went down through the ship to the strong-room. It was indescribably eerie, an unforgettable experience, to trudge down the carpeted main stairway in that dark green twilight, and see tiny fish flitting between the balusters and sea-urchins creeping over a chandelier; to pick his way over scattered

relics of tragedy on the floor, and see queer creatures of the sea scuttle and crawl and rocket away as his feet disturbed them; to stand in front of the strong-room door, presently, and see a limpet firmly planted beside the lock; to feel the traces of green scum on the door under his finger-tip.

The Saint knelt down and opened his kit of tools, and spoke into the telephone transmitter:

"I'm starting work."



OPEN AND SHUT CASE

In mystery tales, with gun or girder
A household servant does the murder.
I have no butler, cook, or maid,
No chauffeur, and—I'm unafraid.

—A. S. Flaumenhaft

Vogel was reclining in a deck chair beside the loud speaker, studying his fingernails. He gave no answer. Arnheim had returned, clambering up from the dinghy like an ungainly bloated frog. Vogel had looked up briefly at his lieutenant.

"You had no trouble?"

"None."

"Good."

And he had gone back to the idle study of his fingernails, breathing gently on them and rubbing them slowly on the palm of the opposite hand, while Arnheim rubbed a handkerchief round the inside of his collar and puffed away to a chair in the background.

Loretta stared down into the half-translucent water and felt as if she was watching the inexorable march of reality turn into the cold deliberateness of nightmare. Down there in the sunless liquid silence under her eyes, under the long measured roll of that great reach of water, was the Saint, working with the almost certain knowledge that his

claim to life would run out at the moment when his errand was completed.

She knew he would open the strong-room; knew that he had made his choice and that he would go through with it. He would never hesitate or make excuses.

A kind of numbness had settled on her brain, an insensibility that was a taut suspension of the act of living rather than a dull anesthesia. It was almost impossible to believe that only forty minutes went by before the Saint's voice came again through the loud speaker, ending the silence and the suspense with one cool steady sentence.

"The strong-room is open."

Arnheim jumped as if he had been prodded, and got up to come waddling over. Vogel only stopped polishing his nails, and turned a switch in the telephone connection box beside him. His calm check-up went back over the line.

"Everything all right, Ivaloff?"

"Yes. The door is open. The gold is here."

"What do you want us to send down?"

"It will take a long time to move—there is a great deal to carry. Wait. . . ."

The loud speaker was silent. One could imagine the man twenty fathoms down, leaning against the water in labored exploration. Then the guttural voice spoke again.

"The strong-room is close to the main stairway. Above the stairway there is a glass dome. We can go up on deck again and break through the glass, and you can send down the grab. That way, it will not be so long. But we cannot stay down here more than a few minutes. We have been here three quarters of an hour already, which is too long for this depth."

Vogel considered for a moment.

"Break down the glass first, and then we will bring you up," he directed, and turned to the men who were standing around by the winch. "Calvieri—Orbel—you will get ready to go down as soon as these two come up. Grondin, you will attend to the grab. . . ."

For some minutes he was issuing detailed orders, allotting duties in his cold curt voice with impersonal efficiency.

And as he finished, Ivaloff's voice came through again.

"We have made a large enough opening

in the dome. Now we should come up."

Vogel nodded, and a man stepped to the controls of the winch. And at last Vogel got up.

He got up, straightening his trousers and settling his jacket with the languid finickiness of a man who has nothing of importance on his mind. And as casually and expressionlessly as the same man might have wandered towards an ashtray to dispose of a cigarette-end, he strolled over the yard or two that separated him from the air-pump, and bent over one of the rubber tubes.

His approach was so placid and unemotional that Loretta, with her eyes riveted mutely on him, could not quite believe what she was seeing. Only for a moment she stared at him, wondering, unbelieving. And then, beyond any doubt, she knew. . . .

Her eyes widened in a kind of blind horror. She didn't know what she was doing, didn't think, made no conscious movement; and yet suddenly, somehow, she was beside Vogel, grasping his wrist and arm, tearing his hand away. She heard someone sobbing: "No! No!"—and realized in a dazed way that she was hearing her own voice.

"No! No!"

"My dear Loretta!"

He had straightened up, was looking down at her with his waxen face cold and contemptuously critical. She became aware that she was breathing as if she had just run to him from a great distance, that her heart was pounding against her ribs. And she realized at the same time that the winch had stopped again.

"Why have you done that?" she gasped.

"Done what?"

She was shaking his arm unconsciously.

"Stopped bringing them up."

"My dear girl!" His tone was bland and patronizing. "That is the normal process. When a man has been working for three quarters of an hour at the depth where they have been, his blood becomes saturated with nitrogen. If he was brought up quickly and the pressure was suddenly taken off, the gas would form bubbles in his blood like it does in champagne when the cork is drawn. He would get a painful attack of diver's paralysis. The pressure has to be relieved gradu-

ally—there is a regular time-table for it. Our divers have been stopped at thirty feet. They will rest there for five minutes; then for ten minutes at twenty feet; then for fifteen minutes—"

She knew that he was trying to make her feel foolish, but she was too sure of her knowledge to care.

"That's not all you were doing," she said.

"What else?"

"You were going to take one of those air-lines off the pump. You were going to kill him."

A faint flicker of expression, the gleam of passionless, calculating cruelty which she had seen before, passed over his face.

"And if I was? How deeply will his death hurt you?"

"I should be hurt in a way you couldn't understand."

He waited. She had an uncanny spine-chilling feeling that he was not sane—that he was giving rein to the solitary sadistic megalomania that was branded on all his actions, playing with her like a cat and savoring the lustful pleasure of watching her agony. She found herself speaking disjointedly, breathlessly again.

"I know why he went down. I know why he opened that strong-room for you. He wouldn't have done that to save his life—not his own life. He wouldn't have believed you. He knew you meant to kill him as soon as it was done. You offered him something that he could believe. You made him do it for me!"

"Really, my dear Loretta, this is so dramatic. I must have misunderstood our friend Templar. So he becomes the perfect gentle knight, dying to save a lady's honor—"

"That's the truth, isn't it? You made that bargain with him. My life against his—and a little work. Didn't you?"

He sighed. "It would have been such a pity not to give such classical chivalry its chance," he said.

The sneer brought the blood to her cheeks. "He never had any right to bargain for me," she said, and tried not to let her voice tremble. "I didn't ask him for any sacrifice—I wouldn't take any. I'm here, and I can make my own bargain. The Saint's done all you wanted him to. Why not let him go?"

"To come back after a while and interfere with me again?"

"You could make it a condition that he said nothing—that he forgot everything he knew. He'd keep his word."

"Of course—the perfect knight. . . . How ridiculous you are!"

"Did you always think that?"

He stopped short, with his head on one side. Then his cold hand went up and slowly touched her face.

"You know what I think of you, my dear. I told you, once. You were trying to deceive me. And yet for you I took risks—I placed myself in fantastic danger—I gambled everything—to keep you beside me and see how treacherous you could be. But!" His hand suddenly dropped on her arm in a grasp so brutal that she almost cried out. "I had my own idea about how treacherous I would allow you to be, and how you would make amends for it later."

He dragged her up against him and ravished her mouth, briefly, cold-bloodedly. She stood unresisting and still until he thrust her away.

"Now," he said, "you are not in a position to make bargains."

He stooped over the air-line again. She tore at his hand, and he stood up.

"If you are going to be a nuisance," he said in his supercilious voice, "I shall have you taken away."

"You can't do it!" she panted. "You haven't everything you want yet. If you kill him, you could never have it."

"I have you."

"Only as a prisoner. Yes, my body's here. You can do what you like with me, I suppose. What you want, you can take by force. If that's all you want—"

"It will be enough."

"But I could give . . ."

"What?"

He was staring at her, seized with a new stillness. There was a thread of moisture on his thin lips, and the high glaze on his cheekbones shone with a dull white luster. His soft clammy hands gripped her shoulders.

"What?" he repeated.

She could not look at him, or her courage would not be enough. Already she felt de-

filed, shuddering at the dank chill of his touch. She closed her eyes.

"If you let him go . . . I will stay with you willingly."

ALTOGETHER they took over forty minutes to come up—nearly as long as they had spent on the bottom. It was a wearisome business going through the gradual decompression, hanging suspended in the green void through the lengthening pauses, rising a little further and halting again. The Saint felt no ill effects from his long submersion other than a growing fatigue, and he realized at the same time that he was lucky to be able to experience discomfort. When he stood back from the open door of the strong-room and announced the completion of his work into the microphone beside his mouth, he had waited for the quick blotting out of all sensation. He did not know exactly how it would come, but he believed that it would be swift and certain. He had done all that Vogel required of him; and, beyond that, he survived only as a potential menace. When he still lived, he wondered what could have happened to bring him the reprieve.

Had Vogel changed his mind? That was more than the Saint could make himself believe. He was alive without knowing why—without knowing how long that delicious surprise could last, but believing that it could not possibly last for long. And yet the instinct of life is so strong that he was more occupied with wondering how he would turn the reprieve to the most profit. Even when he was working down there on the strong-room door, believing that he had no hope of seeing the light again, that same queer instinct of survival had made him prepare for the impossible chance.

Now, when he moved his arm, he could feel a wet discomfort in his sleeve that was more than compensated by the small steel instrument which slithered against his wrist—an instrument which he had not possessed when he left the deck of the *Falkenberg*, which might yet be worth more to him than all the gold of the *Chalfont Castle*. . . .

The water above his head thinned and lightened, became a mere film which broke against his helmet. The weight on his shoulders became real again, and the massive

boots dragged at his feet. Then expert hands unlocked the helmet and detached it from the breastplate, and he filled his lungs with the clean sea air and felt the breath of the sea on his face.

Vogel stood in front of him.

"Perhaps you were justified in calling my former assistant an amateur," he remarked urbanely. "Judged by your own exceptional standard, I fear he was not so efficient as I used to think."

"It's hardly fair to compare anyone with me," murmured the Saint modestly. "And so where do we go after the compliments, Birdie?"

"You will go to your cabin below while I consider what is to be done with you."

He left the Saint with a satirical bow, and went on to give further instructions to the two replacement divers who were waiting. Simon sat on a stool and loosened the cords and straps of his boots, while his own breastplate was taken off. As he wriggled out of the cumbersome twill and rubber suit he managed to get the instrument in his sleeve into his hand, and during the process of peeling off the heavy woolen sweater and pants with which he had been provided to protect him against the cold of the water he managed to transfer it undetected into an inside pocket of his clothes. He was not dead yet—not by a million light-years. . . .

He fished out a crumpled packet of cigarettes and lighted one while he sought a sign from Loretta. The smoke caressed the hungry tissue of his lungs and sent its narcotic balm stealing gratefully along his nerves; and over by the rail he saw her, slim and quiet and desirable in her scanty white dress, so that it was all he could do not to go over and take her quietly into his arms.

Even to see her and to desire her in helpless silence was a part of that supreme ecstasy of the return to life, a delight of sensual survival that had its place with the smell of the sea and the reddening retreat of the sun, a crystallization of the voluptuous rapture of living; but she only looked at him for a moment, and then turned away again. And then he was seized by the arms and hurried down the companion.

Loretta heard him go, without looking round. She heard the feet of men on the

deck, and the whine of the winch as the second pair of divers were lowered. Presently she heard Arnheim's fat voice:

"How much longer will this take?"

And Vogel's reply:

"I don't know. Probably we shall have to send Ivaloff down again, with someone else, when Orbel and Calvieri are tired. I expect it will be dusk before we can reach St. Martin."

"Are they expecting us?"

"I shall have to tell them. Will you attend to the telephone?"

Loretta rested her elbows on the rail and her chin on her hands. A touch on her shoulder roused her. She shivered and straightened.

Vogel stood beside her, with his hands in his pockets.

"You are tired?" he said, in his cold grating voice.

She shook her head.

"Oh, no. It's just—rather dull, waiting. Isn't it? I suppose you're interested in the work, but—I wish they'd be quick. We've been here for hours. . . ."

"Would you like a drink?"

"Yes."

He touched her arm. "Come."

HE LED her into the wheelhouse and pressed the bell for a steward. As the man entered silently, he said: "A highball?"

She nodded, and he confirmed the order with a glance. He held out an inlaid cigarette-box and struck a match. She inhaled the smoke and stood up to him without recoiling. Her heart was beating in quick leaden strokes, but her hand was steady.

Was it to be so soon? She wished it could be over before she was weakened by her fear. What did it amount to after all, this physical sacrifice, this brief humiliation? "You don't burn your house down because a little mud has been tracked on the floor." What a lot of exaggerated nonsense was talked about that one crude gesture. . . . And yet her heart throbbled with that leaden pulse before the imminent reality.

"Excuse me a moment."

Either he had observed nothing, or he was insensible to her emotions. Without touching her, he turned away and moved

over to the bookcases at the after end of the room.

She had her respite. The steward returned, and put down a tray on the table beside her; he poured out a drink and went out again without speaking. Loretta took up the glass and tasted it. After she had sipped, it occurred to her that it might be drugged, and she almost put it down. And then her lips moved in the ghost of a wry grimace. What did it matter?

She looked to see what Vogel was doing. He had taken a chair over to the bookcase and sat down in front of it. The upper shelves had opened like a door, carrying the books with them, and in the aperture behind was the compact instrument panel of a medium-powered radio transmitter. Vogel had clipped a pair of earphones over his head, and his long white fingers were flitting delicately over the dials. Somewhere in the stillness she could hear the faint whirr of a generator. . . . And then she heard a clearer, sharper, intermittent tapping. Vogel had found his correspondent, and he was sending a message.

The staccato rhythm of the transmitter key pattered into her brain and translated itself almost automatically into letters and words. Like everyone else in Ingerbeck's, she had studied the Morse code as part of her general training; it was second nature to interpret the rattle of dots and dashes.

Dot-dot-dash-dot . . . dot-dot-dash . . . dash-dot-dash-dot . . . She searched through her memory. Wasn't that the call signal of the radio station at Cherbourg? Then he was giving his own call signal. Then, with the swift efficiency of a professional operator, he was tapping out his message. A telegraph. "*Baudier, Herqueville . . . Arrive ce soir vers 9 heures demi. Faites préparer phares. . .*"

The names meant nothing to her; the message was unimportant—obviously Vogel must have a headquarters somewhere, which he would head for at such a time as this. But the fact that was thundering through her head was the radio itself. It wasn't merely in touch with a similar station at his headquarters. It could communicate openly with Cherbourg, and therefore presumably with any other wireless telegraph receiving station

that it could reach.

The Niton station in the Isle of Wight, for instance, might easily be within range, from which a telegram might be relayed by cable to St. Peter Port. . . . There seemed to be no question about the acceptance of the message. Obviously the *Falkenberg* was on the list of registered transmitters, like any Atlantic liner.

Vogel had finished. He took off the headphones, swung over the main switch in the middle of the panel, and closed the bookshelf door. He came towards her again.

"I didn't know you were so well equipped," she said, and he shrugged.

"It is useful sometimes," he said. "I have just sent a message to announce that we shall soon be on our way."

"Where?"

"To Herqueville—below Cap de la Hague. It is not a fashionable place, but I have found it convenient for that reason. I have a château there where you can be as comfortable as you wish—after tomorrow."

"Is that where you'll put the Saint ashore?"

"Perhaps. But that will take time. You understand—I shall have to protect myself."

"If he gives you his word—"

"Of course, that word of a gentleman!" Vogel smiled sarcastically. "But you must not let yourself forget the other knightly virtue: Chivalry. . . . He might be unwilling to leave you."

Loretta had put down her glass. She passed a hand over her forehead, pushing back her hair, and said hazily: "But he mustn't know."

"Naturally. But he will want to know why you are staying with us, and we shall have to find a way to satisfy him. Besides, I have too much to risk. . . ."

She half turned her head towards a window, so that she need not look at his smooth gloating face. Her head was throbbing with disjointed thoughts. Radio. Radio. Peter Quentin. Roger Conway. Orace. Steve Murdoch. The *Corsair*. At St. Peter Port. The Royal Hotel. If only a message could get through to them. . . . And Vogel was still talking, with leisured condescension.

"You understand that I cannot go about with such a cargo as we shall have on board.

And there have been other similar cargoes. The banks are no use to me. Therefore I have my own bank. Down at the bottom of the sea off Herqueville, under thirty feet of water, where no one could find it who did not know the exact bearing, where no one could reach it who did not possess equipment which would be beyond the understanding of ordinary thieves, I have such a treasure as you have never dreamed of. When I have added today's plunder to it there will be nearly twelve millions; and I shall think that it may be time to take it away somewhere where I can enjoy it. It is for you to share—there is nothing in the world that you cannot have. Tonight we shall drop anchor above it, and the gold of the *Chalfont Castle* will be lowered to the same place. I think that perhaps that will be enough. You shall go with me wherever you like, and queens will envy you. But I must see that Templar cannot jeopardize this treasure."

He was looking at her sidelong; and she knew with a horrible despair that all his excuses were lies. Perhaps she had always known it. There was only one way in which the Saint could cease to be a danger, by Vogel's standards. But for a while he would let the Saint live—so long as in that way she might be made easier to enjoy.

"I suppose you must," she said; and she was too weary to argue.

"You will not be sorry."

He was coming closer to her. His hands touched her shoulders, slipped round behind her back. He was drawing her up to him, and she half closed her eyes. It was a nightmare not to struggle, not to hit madly out at him and feel the clean shock of her young hands striking into his face; but it would have been like hitting a corpse. And what was the use? She must submit, she must be acquiescent, just as a man obeys the command of a gun even though he knows that it is only taking him to his death—because until the last dreadful instant there is always the delusion of life.

His lips were an inch from hers; his black stony eyes burned into her. She could see the waxen blaze of his skin, tight-drawn as if it had been stretched over a skull. Something seemed to break inside her head—it

might have been the grip of the fever—and for a moment her mind ran clear as a mountain stream. And then her head fell back, and she went limp in his arms.

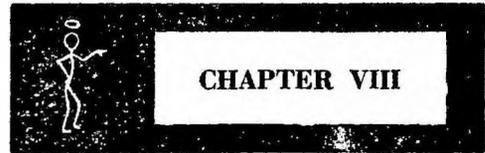
Vogel held her for a second, staring at her; and then he put her down in a chair. She lay there with her head lolling sideways and her red lips open, all the warm golden life of her tempting and unconscious; and he gazed at her in hungry triumph for a moment longer before he rang the bell again for the steward.

"We will dine at eight," he said; and the man nodded woodenly. "There will be smoked salmon, *langoustine Grand Duc*, *Suprême de volaille Bergerette*, *fraises Mimosas*."

"Yes, sir."

"And let us have some of that *Château Lafitte 1906*."

He dismissed the man with a wave of his hand, and carefully pierced the end of a cigar. On his way out on to the deck he stopped by Loretta's chair and stroked her cheek. . . .



THE lock surrendered after only five minutes of the Saint's silent and scientific attack. Not that it had ever had much chance. It had never been constructed to resist an expert probing with the sort of tool which Simon Templar was using.

Simon kissed the shining steel implement ecstatically before he put it away again in his pocket. It was much more than a scrap of cunningly fashioned metal. At that moment it represented the consummation of Vogel's first and only and most staggering mistake. By sending him down to open the strong-room, Vogel had given him the chance to select the instrument from the burglar's kit with which he had been provided, and to slip it under the rubber wrist-bands into the sleeve of his diving dress. By letting him come up alive, Vogel had given him the chance to use it. By giving him the chance to use it, Vogel had violated the first canon of

the jungle in which they both lived—that the only enemy from whom you have nothing to fear is a dead enemy. . . .

A mood of grim exhilaration settled on him as he grasped the handle of the door and turned it slowly. Within the next hour or so, his duel with Kurt Vogel would be settled one way or the other, and with it all the questions that were involved. Against him he had all Vogel's generalship, the unknown intellectual quality of Otto Arnheim, and a crew of at least ten of the toughest twentieth-century pirates who ever sailed the sea.

The latch turned back to its limit, and he drew the door stealthily towards him. He put his head cautiously out and looked left and right. Nothing. The crew must have been eating, or recuperating from the day's work in their own quarters. The alleyway was an empty shaft of white paint gleaming in the dim lights which studded it at intervals. And in another second the Saint had closed the door of his prison silently behind him and flitted up the after companion on to the deck.

The cool air struck refreshingly on his face. Overhead, the sky was practically dark, and the first pale stars were coming out. Down towards the western horizon, where the greyness of the sky merged indistinguishably into the greyness of the sea, he saw the mast-head lights of some small ship running up from the southwest, many miles astern. The creamy wake stretched away into the darkness.

He stood there for a little while in the shadow of the deckhouse and absorbed the scene. The only sounds he could hear there were the churning rush of the water and the dull drone of the engines driving them to the west. Above him, the long boom of the grab jutted out at a slight angle, with the claw gear dangling loosely lashed to the taffrail; and all around him the wet wooden cases of bullion from the *Chalfont Castle* were stacked up against the bulkheads.

He screwed an eye round the corner and inspected the port deck. It was deserted; but the air-pump and telephone apparatus were still out there, and he saw four diving suits on their stretchers laid out in a row. Further forward he could see the lights of the wheelhouse windows cutting the deck into strips

of light and darkness. He could have walked calmly along to them, but the risk of being prematurely discovered by some member of the crew was more than he cared to take. Remembering the former occasion on which he had prowled over the ship, he climbed up over the conveniently arranged cases of bullion to the deckhouse roof, and went forward on all fours.

A minute or so later he was lying flat on the streamlined wheelhouse, with the full wind of their thirty knots blowing through his hair, wondering if he could risk a cigarette.

Straight ahead, the scattered lights of the French coast were creeping up out of the dark. He judged it to be somewhere south of Cap de la Hague. . . .

"Some more coffee, Loretta?"

Vogel's bland voice suddenly came to him through one of the open windows; and the Saint drew a deep breath and lowered his head over the edge of the roof to peep in.

They were all there—Vogel, Arnheim, Loretta. She had put on a backless white satin dress, perfectly plain, and yet cut with that exquisite art which can make ornament seem garish and vulgar. It set off the golden curve of her arms and shoulders with an intoxicating suggestion of the other curves which it concealed. Beside her, the squat paunchy bulk of Otto Arnheim looked like some obscene and bloated toad. But for the set cold pallor of her face she might have been a princess graciously receiving two favored ministers. The smooth hawk-like Kurt Vogel, pouring out coffee on a pewter tray at a side table, fitted in completely with the illusion. The man standing at the wheel, gazing straight ahead, motionless except for the occasional slight movements of his hands, intruded no more than a waiting footman would have done.

Simon rolled over on his back, listening with half an ear to the spasmodic mutter of absurdly banal conversation, and considered the problem. Almost certainly they were heading for Vogel's local, if not his chief, headquarters. The stacks of bullion left openly on the after deck, and the derrick not yet lashed down and covered with its tarpaulin, ruled out the idea that they were putting into any ordinary port. Presumably Vogel had a

house or something close to the sea. He might unload the latest addition to his loot and go ashore himself that night, or he might wait until morning.

The Saint realized that he could plan nothing until he knew. To attempt to burst into the wheelhouse and capture the brains of the organization there without an alarm of any sort being raised was a forlorn hope. To think of corraling the crew, one by one or in batches as he found them, armed only with his knife, without anyone in the wheelhouse hearing an outcry, was out of the question.

"The lights, sir."

A new voice jarred into his divided attention, and he realized that it must be the helmsman speaking. He turned over and looked out over the bows. The lights of the shore were very close now; and he saw that two new pairs of lights had appeared on the coast ahead, red and very bright, one pair on the port beam and one pair on the starboard. He guessed that they had been set by Vogel's accomplices on shore to guide the *Falkenberg* between the tricky reefs and shoals to its anchorage.

"Very well." Vogel was answering; and then he was addressing Loreta: "You will forgive me if I send you below, my dear? I fear you might be tempted to try and swim ashore, and you gave us a lot of trouble the last time you did that."

"Not with the Saint?"

There was a sudden pleading tremor of fear in her voice which the Saint had never heard there before, and Simon hung over the edge again to see her as Vogel replied.

"Of course, that would be difficult for you. Suppose you go to your own cabin? I will see that you are not locked in any longer than is necessary."

She nodded without speaking, and walked past the steward who had appeared in the doorway. The Saint half rose, with the thought of following and finding her. She at least must be free, whatever he did with his own liberty. . . . And then he realized the madness of the idea. He had no knowledge of where her cabin was, and while he was searching for it he was just as likely to open a cabin occupied by some member of the crew. Somehow he must still find the

strength to wait until he had a chance to take not one trick alone but the whole grand slam.

"Will you unload the gold tonight?"

It was Arnheim's voice; Simon waited breathlessly for the reply.

"Yes—it will be safer. The devil knows what information this man Templar has given to his friends. It will be a pity to sink the *Falkenberg*, but I think it will be wise. We can easily fit out a trawler to recover the gold. . . . As for disposing of it, my dear Otto, that will be your business."

"I made the final arrangements before we left Dinard."

"Then we have very little cause for anxiety."

Vogel's voice came from a different quarter; and the Saint treated himself to another cautious glimpse of the interior set. Vogel had taken over the wheel and was standing up to the open glass panel in the forward bay, a fresh cigar clipped between his teeth. He pushed forward the throttle levers, and the note of the engines faded with the rush of the water.

Simon glanced forward and saw that they were very near the shore. The lights of a village were dotted up the slope beyond, and to left and right the pairs of red lights were now nearly in line. Closer still, another light danced on the water.

So unexpectedly that it made the Saint flatten himself on the roof, a searchlight mounted close to his head sprang into life, flooding the foredeck and the sea ahead. As they glided on over the black water, the dancing light which he had observed proved to be a lantern standing on one of the thwarts of a dinghy in which a solitary man was leaning over the gunnel fishing for a cork buoy. The helmsman came forward into the drench of light and took the mooring from him with a boathook, making it fast on one of the forward bollards; and the dinghy bumped along the side until the boatman caught the short gangway and hauled himself dextrously on board, while the *Falkenberg's* engines roared for a moment in reverse. Then the engines stopped, and the searchlight went out again.

"Ah, mon cher Baudier!" Vogel greeted his visitor at the door of the wheelhouse. "*Ca va bien? Entrez, entrez—*"

He turned to the helmsman.

"Tell Ivaloff to be ready to go down in a quarter of an hour. And tell Calvieri to have a diving dress ready for me. I shall be along in a few minutes."

"Sofort."

The seaman moved aft along the deck, and Vogel rejoined Baudier and Arnheim in the wheelhouse. And the Saint drew himself up on his toes and finger-tips and shot after the helmsman like a great ghostly crab.

Without knowing very clearly why, the Saint found himself poised and ready on the roof again in front of the unsuspectingly ambulating seaman; and as the man passed underneath him Simon's arm shot out and grasped him by the throat. . . .

Before the cry which the man might have uttered could gain outlet it was choked back into his gullet, the Saint's weight dropped silently on his shoulders and bore him to the deck. Staring up with shocked and dilated eyes, the man saw the cold flash of a knife-blade in the dim light; and then the point of the knife pricked him under the chin.

The Saint's fierce whisper sizzled in his ear. "*Wenn du einen Laut von dir gibst, schneide ich dir den Kopf ab.*"

The man made no sound, having no wish to feel the hot bite of that vicious blade. He lay still; and the Saint slowly released the grip on his throat and used his freed hand to take the automatic from the man's hip pocket.

"Get up."

The man worked himself slowly to his feet, with the muzzle of the gun grinding into his breastbone and the knife still under his eyes.

"Do you want to live to a ripe old age, Fritz?" asked the Saint gently. "If so, then you'd better listen carefully to what I'm saying. You're not going to take all of that message to Ivaloff. You're going to take me along, and tell him that Vogel says *I'm* to go down. That's all. You won't see this gun any more, because it'll be in my pocket; but it'll be quite close enough to hit you. And if you make the slightest attempt to give me away, I'll blow the front out of your stomach. Do you get my drift or shall I say it again?"

SIMON replaced his knife in its sheath and put it inside his shirt.

And now he could fill in the steps of rea-

soning which the wild leap of his inspiration had ignored. The sight of those cases of bul- lion stacked around the after deck had started it; the grab, not yet dismantled and lashed down, had helped. Vogel's talk about unloading the gold had fitted in. And then, when he had heard Vogel speak about "going down" again, he gathered that Vogel himself was going. As they came to the companion, Simon was ripping off his tie and threading it through the trigger-guard of his automatic.

He steadied the helmsman as they reached the lower deck.

"Hold my arm."

The man looked at him and obeyed. The Saint's blue eyes held him with a wintry dominance.

"And don't forget," added that smouldering undertone, which left no room for doubt in its audience that every threat it made would be unhesitatingly fulfilled. "If they even begin to suspect anything, you'll never live to see them make up their minds. Move on."

They moved on. The helmsman stopped at a door a little further up the alleyway and on the opposite side from the cabin in which Simon had been locked up, and opened it. Ivaloff and the two men who had dressed the Saint before were there, and they looked up in dour interrogation.

Simon held his breath. His forefinger took up the first pressure on the trigger. The second which he waited for the helmsman to speak was the longest he could remember.

"The Chief says Templar is to go down again. . . ."

Simon heard the words through a haze of relief. The breath seeped slowly back out of his thawing lungs. His spokesman's voice was practically normal—at least there was not enough shakiness in it to alarm listeners who had no reason to be suspicious. The Saint had been sent down once already: why not again?

Without a question, the two dressers got to their feet and stumped out into the alleyway, as the helmsman completed the order.

"He says you, Calvieri, see that there is a dress ready for him. He goes down himself also. He will be along in a few minutes—you are to be quick."

"Okay."

The two dressers went on, and Ivaloff was coming out to follow them when the helmsman stopped him.

"You are to stay here. You change into your shore clothes at once, and then you stay below here to see that none of the others come out on deck. No one except the engineer and his assistant must come out for any reason, he says, until this work is finished. Then you will go ashore with him."

"*Boje moy,*" grumbled the other. "What is this?"

The helmsman shrugged.

"How should I know? They are his orders."

Ivaloff grunted and turned back, unbuckling his belt; and the helmsman closed the door on him.

It had worked.

The stage was set, and all the cues given. With that last order, the remainder of the crew were immobilized as effectively as they could have been by violence; while the one man—Ivaloff—whose unexpected appearance on deck would have blown everything apart was detailed to look after them.

As he drew the helmsman, now white and trembling, further along the alleyway, Simon flashed a lightning glance over the details of his organization, and found no flaw. There remained only the helmsman himself.

Simon halted the man opposite the cabin where he had been imprisoned, and grinned at him amiably. And then his fist smoked up in an uppercut.

It was a blow that carried with it every atom of speed and strength and science which the Saint had at his disposal. It impacted with surgical accuracy on the most sensitive spot of the helmsman's jaw, and the man's head snapped back as if it had collided with an express train. Beyond that single sharp crack of collision it caused no sound at all. Certainly the recipient was incapable of making any, and the Saint felt reasonably sure that he would not become audible again for a full hour. He caught the man as he fell, lowered him to the ground inside the cabin which he should have been occupying himself, and silently shut the door.

As he hurried up the companion, Simon was rapidly knotting his tie behind his neck

and stuffing it under his shirt. The automatic, already threaded on it, hung at his collar-bone, where he could reach it in full diving kit so long as the helmet was off.

Calvieri and his assistant had been out of sight when the Saint struck that one vital blow, and they showed no surprise when he appeared on deck alone.

He sat down on the stool and unlaced his shoes. His experience that afternoon had made him familiar with the processes of dressing for the dip. As quickly as he could, he tucked the legs of his trousers inside his socks, pulled on the heavy woollen pants, and wriggled into the woollen sweater. They helped him on with the long coarse woollen over-stockings and steered his feet into the legs of the diving suit. Calvieri rubbed soft soap on his wrists, and he gripped the sleeve of the dress between his knees and forced his hands through the vulcanized rubber cuffs with the adroitness of a seasoned professional. They slipped on the strong rubber bands to tighten the fit of the wrists; and then, while Calvieri laced and strapped on the heavy boots, the other man was putting the cushion collar over his head and wrestling the rim of the suit on to the bolts of the breastplate.

While they were tightening down the wing-nuts around the straps, he slipped a cigarette out of the packet which he had put down beside him. All the time he was listening tensely for the first warning of Vogel's approach; but Calvieri had stepped back from the job before he heard footsteps and voices on the deck behind him.

"*Alors . . . à demain.*"

"*A demain, m'sieu.*"

Simon stood up. He heard the wooden clumping of Baudier climbing down into his dinghy, and then the double steps of Vogel and Arnheim coming along the deck. The hazards were not yet past.

The Saint walked laboriously to the taffrail and leaned on it, smoking and watching the man in the dinghy pull slowly away, so that his own face was not visible. Behind him he heard the vague sounds of Vogel being encased in his suit, but there was no conversation.

On his dip that afternoon, Simon had noticed that Vogel encouraged no unnecessary

speech from his crew, and he had been hoping that the rule would still hold good. And once again the bet had come off. The Saint had been sent down before—why should the dressers comment on his being sent down again?

At last he heard the *chuff-chuff* of the air pump, and the slow thudding tramp of heavy boots behind him; and Calvieri appeared beside him with the helmet. He stooped for it to be put on, without turning his head, and waited for the front window to be screwed on before he looked round.

Then, safely hidden behind the small panel of reflecting plate glass, he turned round to the ladder which had been fitted into sockets on the counter, and saw Vogel following cumbrously after him. And at the same moment a three-hundred-watt submarine lamp suspended from the boom was switched on, deluging the after deck and the sea over the stern with light.

They sank down in the center of its cone of brilliance. There was the sudden shock of air pressure thumping into the eardrums, the sudden lifting of the load of the heavy gear, and then the eerie silence and loneliness of the deep. The lamp, lowered into the water after them, came to rest at the same time as they reached the bottom, and hung six feet over their heads, isolating them in its little zone of light.

The effect of that night descent was stranger even than the twenty-fathom plunge which the Saint had taken in daylight. The lamp gave more light within its circumscribed radius than he had had in the *Chalfont Castle*; the water was so clear that they might have been in a tank. The contours of the rocky bottom within the narrow area in which vision was possible were as plain as if they had been laid out under the sun. The Saint could see scattered weeds standing erect and writhing in the stir of imperceptible currents, and a few small surprised pollock darted under the light and hung poised in fishy puzzlement at the unceremonious invasion of their sleep.

Vogel was already ploughing away towards a huge rounded boulder and Simon adjusted his escape valve and waded after him. Again he had to adapt himself to the tedious struggle which the water forced up-

on every movement. It seemed to take several minutes to cover the few yards which he had to go; and as he got nearer he noticed that Vogel seemed to be trying to wave him away. He turned clumsily aside and swayed up towards the other side of the rock.

He saw that Vogel was looking upwards, his helmet tilted back like the face of some weird dumb monster of the sea. Simon looked up also, and saw that the grab was coming down to them. Vogel began to work himself out to meet it, and the Saint did the same. Following what he could divine of Vogel's intention, he helped to drag the great claw over and settle it around the rock by which they had been standing. Then they moved back; and he heard Vogel's voice reverberating in his helmet.

"All ready. Lift!"

The wire cables straightened, became taut and rigid. A little cloud of disturbed sediment filtered out like smoke from the base of the rock. It was going up, rolling over to follow the diagonal drag. . . .

"Stop!"

The boulder lurched once, and settled; the hawsers became slack again. Looking down breathlessly through the wispy grey fog that curled sluggishly up around his legs, the Saint saw that where the stone had once rested was now an irregular black oval crater in the uneven floor. At first he could make out no more than the hazy outlines of it, but even then he knew that the shifting of that rock had laid open the last of Kurt Vogel's secrets, the most amazing Aladdin's cave that the hoards of piracy had ever known.

VOGEL was floundering to the edge of the hole in awkward slow-motion, his arms waving sprawlingly like the feelers of an octopus in an attempt to help himself along. He sank down on his knees and lowered his legs into the pit. There seemed to be a ladder fixed to the rock inside, for presently his feet found the rungs and he began to descend step by step.

Simon started to follow him, but again Vogel waved him back. He heard the muffled clatter of the telephone.

"Stay there and guide the cases down to me."

The Saint hesitated. Down there in that narrow cavern at his feet, beyond any doubt, was Vogel's outlandish strong-room; and down there must lie the stupendous booty for which so much had been risked and suffered—for which three men had already set out on a quest from which they never returned, for which Wesley Yule had gone down into the silence and died without knowing why, for which Loretta and himself had stood under the sentence of death and more than death. Having fought his way to it so far, at such a cost, it was almost as much as he could do to hold himself back from that last step.

And then he realized that the step could wait. The murky smokiness under his feet was settling down, and he could see Vogel's helmet gleaming below him. The boulder which had just been lifted away was protection enough for the treasure. There would be no more doors to open. . . .

A vague bulk swaying into the margins of his vision made him turn with a start. The grab had released the boulder and gone up, and now it was descending again with a stack of bullion cases clutched in its giant grip.

"Steady!" snapped the Saint into his telephone.

The descent stopped; and he got his hands to the load and pushed it towards the hole. It was hard work and he needed all his strength. At last it was in position, and he ventured to give the order for it to go on.

"Lower slowly."

The grab descended again, while he strained against it—the *Falkenberg* was not quite vertically overhead, and the five or six feet which the load had to be held out seemed like a hundred yards. He kept his weight thrusting against it till it was below the lip of the hole, and presently Vogel gave the order to stop.

Simon recovered his balance with an effort. He could feel a prickle of sweat breaking out over his body, and his vision seemed to have become obscured. He realized that a film of steam had condensed inside the glass panel of his helmet; and he opened the air cock on the left of his helmet and sucked in a mouthful of water, blowing it out over the glass as Ivaloff has told him to do that

afternoon. It ran down into the collar of the dress, and he could see better.

The claw opened when Vogel gave the word, and presently came up again empty. Simon helped it over the edge of the hole and let it go by. He tried to estimate how much had gone down on its first voyage. Half a million? A million? It was difficult to calculate, but even the roughest guess staggered the imagination.

But he could judge time better than he could judge the value of bar gold. About four minutes, he concluded, was all that went by between the time when the grab vanished empty out of the light and the time when it came sinking down again with the second load. Therefore it would be wise to prepare the setting for the last scene at once.

Again he toiled and struggled to steer the laden grab over the hole. But this time, as soon as it had gone below his reach, he groped round for Vogel's life-line and drew down a fathom of slack from the hands that held it up on the deck.

Then he took the keen heavy-bladed diver's knife out of its sheath on his belt.

He knew exactly what he was doing; but he was without pity. He thought of Professor Yule, Loretta—and began to cut through the fibres of Vogel's life.

Load after load of gold came down, and he had to put his knife away while he fought it over to the hole and held it clear while it went down to Vogel; but in the four-minute intervals between those spasms of back-breaking labor he sawed away at the tough manila with his heart cold and passionless. He cut through Vogel's life-line until only the telephone wires were left intact. Then he cut through his own line till it only hung together by the same slender link. When he had finished, either line could be severed completely with one powerful slash of the knife-blade. It had to be done that way; because while the loud speaker would not tell which line a voice came over, and the telephonic distortion combined with the reverberation inside the helmet would make it practically impossible to identify the voice, the man who held the other ends of the lines would still know which was which when the time came to haul them up.

Altogether six loads came down, and the

Saint's nerves were strained to the uttermost pitch of endurance while he waited for the last two of those loads. Even then, he could still lose everything; he could still die down there and leave Loretta helpless, with only the satisfaction of knowing that Kurt Vogel at least would never gloat over his defeat or her surrender. If the helmsman recovered too soon from that volcanic punch under the jaw. . . . He rubbed his cold right fist in the palm of his left hand, wondering. He wondered what sort of a bargain he could strike, with Vogel at his mercy down there. . . .

"That's all."

It must have been Arnheim's voice. The Saint saw the empty grab coming up out of the pit for the last time. It bumped over the rocky floor, swung clear, and rose up under the steadily blazing lamp. The gold was all down, and only the account remained for settlement.

The thudding beat of the Saint's pulses, which had crept up imperceptibly to a pounding crescendo during those last minutes, suddenly died down. Only then did he become aware, from the void left by its cessation, that it had ever reached such a height. But his blood ran as cool and smooth as a river of liquid ice as he folded Vogel's telephone wires over his knife-blade and snapped them through with one powerful jerk of his arm.

Quietly and steadily he brought the end of Vogel's life-line round his own waist and knotted it in a careful bowline. He spoke into the telephone in a sufficient imitation of the flat rhythm of Vogel's accent.

"Wait a moment."

He drew down some more of his own life-line and hitched it round a jagged spur of granite above the cut he had made in it, so that it would still be anchored there after he broke the telephone wires.

The top of Vogel's helmet was coming to the surface as he climbed up the ladder.

Simon went down on one knee at the edge of the hole. His right hand found a large loose stone, twice the size of his fist. He picked it up.

"No," he said, still speaking with Vogel's intonation. "You stay here. I have something else for you to do. I shall come down again in a few minutes."

Vogel's hand came over the top of the hole and clutched for a hold. His head rose above the surface, and he waved the Saint impatiently back to make room for him to clamber out.

Simon did not move. The broken end of Vogel's life-line trailed away from its lashing on his helmet, but he did not seem to have noticed it. His lips moved in some words which no one would ever hear.

The Saint stayed where he was.

PERHAPS it was the fact that he received no answer to whatever he had said that started the first wild and ghastly doubt in Vogel's mind. Perhaps it was the absolute immobility of the grotesque shape crouching over him. Whatever it may have been, he stopped. And then he brought his helmet slowly nearer to the Saint's, until barely six inches separated their front windows.

The Saint let him look.

And Vogel recognized him. His black burning eyes widened into pools of horror, and the thin lips drew back from his teeth in a kind of snarl. For the first time the smooth waxen mask was smashed away from his face, and only the snarl of the wolf remained. Then he began to speak. His mouth twisted in the shape of soundless words that no human ears would ever hear. Until he found that there was no answer and no obedience; and one of his hands groped round and found the loose trailing end of his severed line. . . .

He must have known even then that the death which he had meted out to others had found him in his turn, but he would never know it had come about. He had left Simon Templar a prisoner, outwitted and disarmed and beaten, locked up to await the moment when he chose to remove him forever from the power of interference. And yet the Saint was there, smiling at him with set lips and bleak steel-blue eyes, where Ivaloff should have been. The Saint had come back, not beaten, but free and inescapable. The crew had dressed him and sent him down without a word. That was the last bitter dreg of realization he had to accept.

He fought. As if the shock had wiped away the last fragments of that more than human self-control, his hand shot out and

clawed at the Saint's shoulder. His fingers slipped on the coarse twill, and the Saint grasped his wrist and twisted it away.

From the distance of a foot, which might have been the breadth of the Atlantic, Simon Templar looked at him through the wall of water which cut them off, and his blue eyes smiled. And he brought down the stone he was holding in a fearful blow on the fingers of Vogel's right hand where they clung to the rock.

A spasm of agony crawled across Vogel's features. And as the crushed hand released its hold, Simon slashed his knife clean through Vogel's air pipe and pushed him away.

Vogel fell, absurdly slowly, toppling backwards from the ladder very gradually and deliberately, with his arms waving and his hands clutching spasmodically at the yielding water. He went down, and the darkness of his own treasure-cave closed on his gleaming helmet. A slender trickle of bubbles curled up out of the gloom. . . .

The Saint climbed lumberingly to his feet.

"Otto," he said curtly, still imitating Vogel's voice; and in a moment Arnheim answered.

"Yes?"

"Bring me up, alone."

Vogel's life-line, knotted around his waist, tightened against his body. And at once he slashed through the telephone wires which were his last link with his own line.

His feet dragged off the ground, and rose up through the light, past the lamp, up through the deep green shadowiness beyond. The circle of illuminated sea floor dwindled below him. Down in the darkness of the crypt into which Vogel had fallen he seemed to catch a glimpse of a moving sheen of metal, as if Vogel was trying to fight his way up again. But all that was very far away.

He went up alone, up through the shadows and the silence.

HANDS helped him up on to the deck, tapped on his helmet and pointed, guiding him to the stool that was placed behind him. He sat down, facing the sea, and they unscrewed the porthole in the front of his helmet. He felt the sweet freshness of the natural air again.

The round opening where the porthole had been slid sideways across his vision as the helmet was released. He bent his head for it to be lifted off, and at the same time he slipped his knife out of its sheath into his left hand. As the helmet came off, he kept his head bowed and felt for the automatic inside his collar. He found it; and the knife flashed momentarily as he cut through the tie on which he had slung the gun. Then he turned round and faced the deck.

"I think this is the end, boys," he said quietly.

At the sound of his voice, those who had not been looking at him turned round. Calvieri, who was putting down the helmet, dropped it the last six inches. It fell with a deep hollow thud. And then there was utter stillness.

Arnheim had got up out of his chair and had been advancing towards him. He stopped, and a glassy film spread over his small pig eyes, turning them into frozen buttons; his soft mouth drooped open in a red O of fluttering unbelief. The Saint spoke principally to him.

"Kurt Vogel is dead. Or he soon will be. I believe there's enough air in a diving suit to last a man about five minutes after his air line is cut. That is my justice. . . ." The Saint paused for a moment. "As for the rest of you," he said, "some of you may get away with a nice long rest in prison—if you live long enough to stand your trial. But to do that you will have to put your hands high up above your heads and take great care not to annoy me, because if any of you give me a scare—"

The automatic in his hand cracked once, a sudden sharp splash of sound in the persuasive flow of his words; and Otto Arnheim, with his hand halfway to his pocket, lurched like a drunken man. He went down limply on to the deck, rolled over, and lay still.

—"this gun is liable to go off," said the Saint.

None of the men moved. They looked down at the motionless body of Otto Arnheim, kept their hands stretched well above their heads. The Saint smiled with his lips.

"I think we shall have to put you away for a while," he said. "Calvieri, you take

some of that life-line and tie your playmates together. Lash 'em by the waists about a yard apart, and then add yourself to the string. Then we'll all go below, with you leading the way and me holding the other end of the line, and see about rounding up the rest of the herd."

"That's already been done, old boy," murmured Roger Conway, stepping out on to the deck from the after companion, with a gun in each hand and Steve Murdoch following him.

"IT WAS quite easy, really," said Roger Conway patronizingly. "When we got Loretta's radiogram we set off at once, straight for here. We nearly piled your boat up on several rocks on the way, but Orace managed to see us through. Took us about three hours. The *Falkenberg* passed us about halfway, somewhere in the distance, and we just managed to keep her in sight. Luckily it was getting dark, so we turned out our lights after a while and crept up as close as we dared.

"We dropped our hook about a quarter of a mile away, and as soon as we'd given the *Falkenberg* time to get well settled, we manned the dinghy and paddled over to reconnoiter. Everybody on deck seemed to be pretty busy with the diving business, so we came aboard on the other side and went below. We collected seven specimens altogether on the round-up, including a bloke who seems to have got a broken jaw. Anyway he's still asleep. The rest of 'em we gagged and tied up and left for inspection. We made a pretty thorough job of it, if I may say so."

With which modest summary of his activities, Roger helped himself to one of Vogel's cigars, firew another to Peter Quentin, and subsided exhausted into the most comfortable armchair.

Simon Templar regarded them disparagingly. "You always were efficient at clearing up the battlefield after all the troops had gone home," he remarked appreciatively. "And where did you collect the American Tragedy?"

"Oh, him? He crashed on to the *Corsair* while we were having a drink with Orace, earlier in the afternoon," Peter explained.

"Seemed to be all steamed up about something, and flashed a lot of badges and things at us, so we brought him along. He seemed to be very excited about Loretta batting off on this party, so I suppose he's her husband. Are you the co-respondent?"

Steve Murdoch glowered. His rugged hard-boiled face made the luxurious furnishings of the wheelhouse seem effeminate.

"Yeah, I'm here," he stated truculently. "And this time I'm stayin'. I guess I owe you something for helpin' me clean up this job, Saint; an' maybe it's good enough to account for those two punches you hung on me. But that's as far as it goes. I'll see that Ingerbeck's hear about what you've done, and probably they'll offer you a share of the reward. If they do, you can go up an' claim it honest. But for the time being I'll look after things myself."

Simon looked at the ceiling.

"What a lot of modest violets there are around here," he sighed. "Of course I wouldn't dream of trying to steal your curtain, Steve, after all the brilliant work you've put in. But what are you going to do?"

"I'm goin' to ask one of you boys to go ashore an' see if you can round up the gendarmerie. If you can find a telegraph office, you can send one or two cables for me as well. The gendarmes can grab this guy Baudier before he skips, an' come on down to post a guard on board here. That'll do till I can start things movin' from the top. But until I've got that guard posted I'm going to sit over the diving gear myself, in case one of you thought he might go down an' see what he could pick up. I guess you've done enough diving for one day, Saint, an' you're not goin' down again while I can stop you. An' just in case you're thinkin' you can put me to sleep again like you did before, let me tell you that if you did get away with anything like that you'd have to shoot me to stop me puttin' every police organization in the world on your trail as soon as I woke up. Do you get it?"

"Oh, I get you, Steve," said the Saint thoughtfully. "And I did tell Loretta I was tempted to come in for a share of the commission. Although it does sort of go against the grain to earn money honestly. It's such an anti-climax. . . ."

He slid off the edge of the table and stood up, stroking his chin meditatively for a moment. And then, with a rueful shrug, he turned and grinned at the detective.

"Still, it's always a new experience; and I suppose you've got to earn your living the same as I have," he drawled. "We'll let you have your fun. Peter, be a good boy and do what Mr. Murdoch asks you to."

"Right-ho," said Peter doubtfully.

"Roger, you can keep Steve company on his vigil. You'll have lots of fun telling each other how clever you are, but I'd much rather not listen to you."

The suspicion darkened again in Murdoch's eyes.

"If you think you're goin' to talk Loretta round again," he began growlingly, "let me tell you—"

"Write it all down and mail it to me in the morning, dear old bird," said the Saint affably, and opened the door for them.

They filed out.

Then he turned round and came towards Loretta. With a sudden soft breath of laughter, she came up into his arms.

"So you don't like your dotted line?"

"Maybe it grows on one."

She shook her head. "Not on you."

He thought for a moment. Between them he had lived so much, a lie had no place.

"This job is finished," he said. "Steve Murdoch's mounting guard over the diving gear, and I promise I won't touch him. We can start again. Wash out the dotted line."

"And then?"

"For the future?" he said carelessly. "I shall still have the fun of being chased by every policeman in the world. I shall steal and fight, win and lose, go on—didn't you say it?—wanting so much that I can never have, fighting against life. But I shall live. I shall get into more trouble. I may even fall in love again. I shall end up by being hanged, or shot, or stabbed in the back, or something—if I don't find a safe berth in prison first. But that's my life. If I tried to live any other way, I'd feel like a caged eagle."

"But tomorrow?"

"I suppose I'll have to dump Peter and Roger somewhere. But the *Corsair's* still ready to go anywhere. She's not so luxuri-

ous as this, but she's pretty comfortable. And about a hundred years ago I was in the middle of a vacation."

His hands were on her shoulders; and she smiled into his eyes.

"What do either of us know about the day after tomorrow?" she said.

NEARLY an hour later he came out on deck, as half a dozen palpitating gendarmes were scrambling up the gangway. Murdoch had met the leader of them and was struggling to converse with him in a microscopical vocabulary of French delivered in a threatening voice with an atrocious accent. Simon left him to perspire alone, and drew Peter and Roger to one side.

"We're going back to the *Corsair*."

"Without the heroine?" protested Peter. "Why, I was only just getting to know her."

The Saint took him by the arm.

"You'll be able to improve the acquaintance tomorrow," he said kindly. "For as long as it takes us to sail back to St. Peter Port and get rid of you."

They dropped into the dinghy; and Simon settled himself lazily in the stern, leaving the others to take the oars. He lighted a cigarette and gazed up at the sky.

The lights of the *Falkenberg* drifted away behind them, and the cool quietness of the night took them in. The voices died away, and there was only the creak of the rowlocks, and the gentle splash of the water. The Saint watched his smoke floating in gossamer veils across the stars, and let his mind stray through the lanes of memory. There was the only real knowledge, and all other doubt and disbelief could steal nothing from it. What did either of them know about the day after tomorrow? . . .

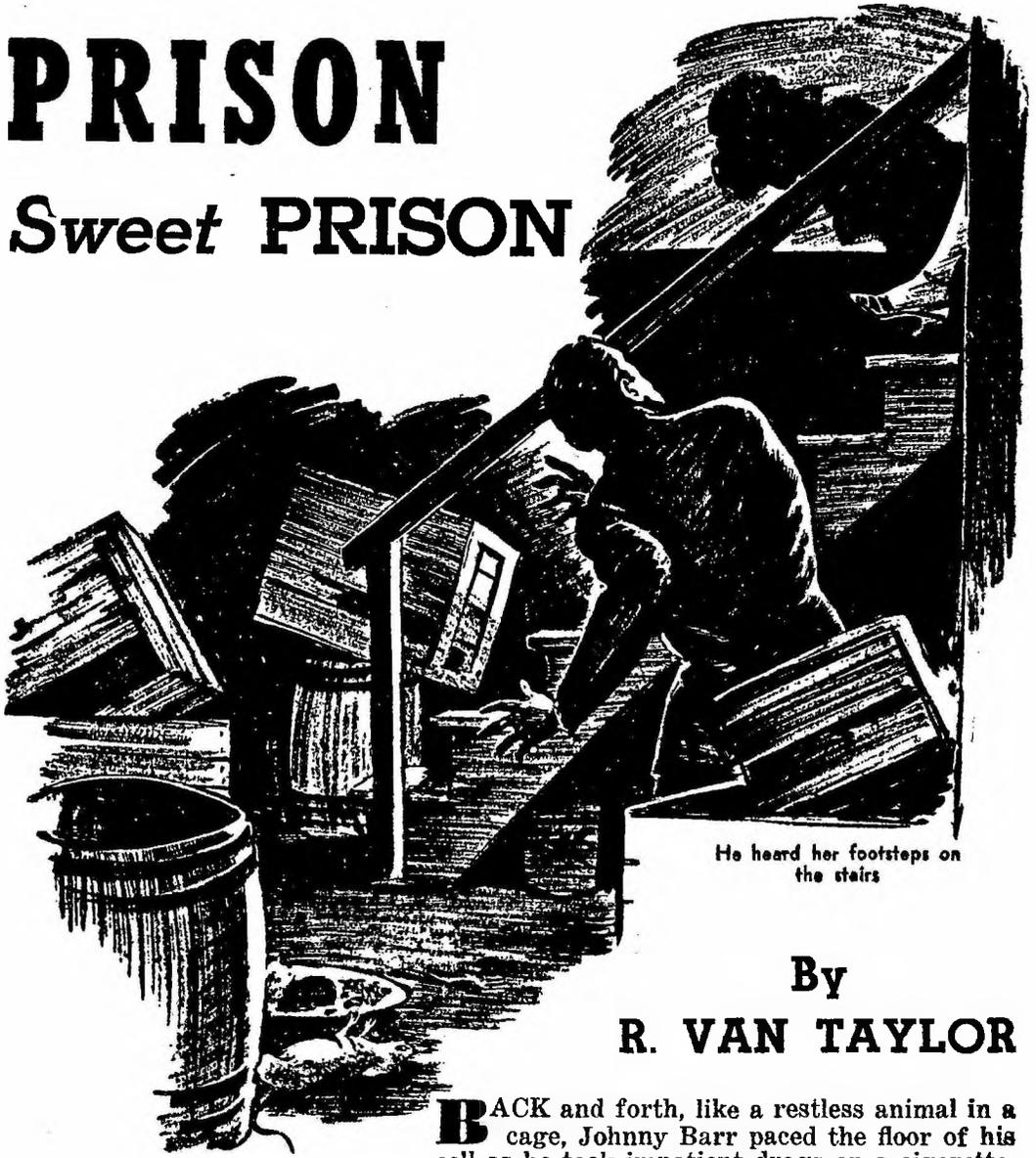
Roger's voice broke into his thoughts.

"Well, that's good-bye to those millions you promised us," he remarked glumly.

"Who said good-bye? My dear Roger, we're not going to bed yet! We're going to bring the *Corsair* up closer and unpack those nice new diving suits we've got on board. Steve and his gendarmes don't know how much loot is stowed away down there, and what they don't know about they'll never miss. We're going to make sure of our share of the reward tonight," said the Saint.

PRISON

Sweet PRISON



He heard her footsteps on
the stairs

By
R. VAN TAYLOR

*Johnny Barr was
thankful for
the locks on his
cell which
kept outsiders out!*

BACK and forth, like a restless animal in a cage, Johnny Barr paced the floor of his cell as he took impatient drags on a cigarette. From the lower bunk a pair of aged blue eyes watched him with both pity and contempt.

"Take it easy," Old Charlie Ragman said. "You're driving yourself stir crazy!"

A nervous twitch in Johnny's cheek turned his face into a jerky sneer. Look who was telling him to take it easy, he thought bitterly. Look at the withered, white-headed old codger! What did he want him to do? Give up? Give up and let prison sap his life as it had done Ragman's? Nuts to that noise!

Johnny's face twisted with disgust as he

hurled his cigarette at the washbasin. "Thanks for the two-bit advice," he snapped.

He went to the window, grabbing the bars with both hands and staring beyond the high, gray walls of the state prison.

"You're breaking my heart," Old Charlie said mockingly. "Boy, you've really got it tough—tougher than anyone else in the whole world. Go ahead, feel sorry for yourself."

Johnny whirled around. "Shut up!" he cried.

Their eyes met, Johnny's blazing with pent-up emotion but Old Charlie's still a cool blue which never seemed to change. Sometimes, Johnny thought, the old guy looked like he was actually contented, lying there in his bunk with his hands behind his head as if he didn't have a care in the world. It burned him up. It made him hate Old Charlie. How could any man be happy or contented in prison?

AS JOHNNY stood there, Old Charlie's eyes grew brighter and softly he started to hum a tune. Johnny grimaced and turned away. "Oh-h-h," he moaned. "Why did they have to give me a stirry old wheezer like you for a cellmate?"

"If you'd been keeping your eyes and ears open instead of gazing at the blue," Old Charlie said, "you'd have found out a few things by now. Things like, the cons really run the show. I saw to it that you were my cellmate."

"Yeah? Why?"

"I had you pegged from the start. Young and full of steam, a guy that doesn't know when he's well off, a fella that might get crazy ideas like busting out of here and messing up his life—that's the way I've got you figured."

"You've got it figured right, then, pop, because that's sure as hell what I'm going to do," Johnny said.

Old Charlie sighed, then said thoughtfully, "Listen, Johnny, get that chip off your shoulder and learn to relax. I can help you do that, kid."

"Help me, help me—you're always shaking that in my face. Why do you want to take me to raise?"

"Look, I'm a lifer. I've made two breaks in my lifetime and had to be brought back the hard way each time.

I know all about that kind of stuff. Well, if I can grab hold of a kid like you who's just ripe for a dumb trick like a break, and keep him straight so that he doesn't get messed up, and see him get out of here okay, it gives me a sense of accomplishment. See?"

"You're getting feeble-minded," Johnny said. "Do you think I want to spend my life in here?"

"Life?" Old Charlie's eyebrows climbed up on his forehead. "You've only got five years to serve."

Johnny felt resentment swelling up inside of him. "That's a lifetime to me," he said sullenly. "They can't keep me here that long."

"You think you're pretty tough, don't you?" The mocking tone was coming back into Old Charlie's voice.

"Aw, leave me alone."

"Tough! Why you didn't even have enough guts to shoot the watchman who caught you cracking the safe. Why didn't you do it? Why did you stand there like a dope and let him get the drop on you?"

Pure misery tortured Johnny everytime he remembered that. "He might have had a family," he said, his voice dropping low. "I didn't want that hanging over my head."

Old Charlie grunted. "Real tough, ain't you? A born badman! Take my advice, Johnny. Do your time, and when you get out find a job and get married and don't try to get ahead the easy or smart way. Do it like the Joes on the outside do it—hard but honest."

Johnny went back to the window and grabbed the bars again, a feeling of confusion and discontentment causing him to clench his jaws grimly. Discontentment—that's the thing that had always given him hell. It was the thing that had caused him to plan the safe job; it was the thing that was causing his mind to whirl around and around like a merry-go-round gone crazy.

Five nights later he made the big break. It was a clean job.

Tensely he gripped the wheel of the prison doctor's sedan as he looked into the blackness, beyond the range of the headlights, trying to anticipate the next curve or dip. Occasionally he would glance into the rear-view mirror, then snap his eyes forward again. He didn't

take time to look at the speedometer. The only indication of his speed was the high-pitched scream of the engine and the squealing of tires.

He'd come sixty-three miles in the last fifty minutes. It wouldn't be long until the show would be over and the men went back to their cells. Soon they'd be finding out that he was gone. That is, if they hadn't already.

The escape had come off smoothly enough, and he was plenty thankful for that. After the movies had started that night, he had faked a severe stomach-ache and gotten permission to go to the dispensary. Outside the doctor's office, he slugged the unsuspecting orderly and then went into the office and gave the doctor the same treatment.

He changed clothes with the doctor, then bound and gagged him—the orderly, too—with adhesive tape.

All of this had been co-ordinated with bits of information that he had picked up from the prison grapevine. He knew that the doctor sometimes came back after dinner, especially near the end of the month as it was now, to catch up on some paper work, and when he did he usually left around this time.

With the doctor's car keys now in his possession, it had been relatively simple for Johnny to go to the car and drive to the gate. The guard on the gate tower let him through without a question, never realizing that it was another face beneath the doctor's hat and another body beneath those clothes.

FOR a fleeting moment, Johnny forgot the churning inside him now and allowed himself a brief, satisfied smile. He wished that he could see Old Charlie's face when he found out about what a slick operation his cellmate had pulled. Boy, that'd be good for a laugh!

Or, would it?

"Satisfied now, Johnny?" he imagined Old Charlie saying. "Is everything okay, now that you're on the outside? Have you gotten rid of that discontent that was driving you crazy?"

The smile left Johnny's face and a doubtful frown replaced it. Mentally he told the old wheezer to shut up, that of course he wasn't contented. How could anyone be that way just after they'd broke from prison and expected some-

one to be on their tail any minute? Was he kidding?

But give him time to cover himself and then he'd find contentment, Johnny promised himself. That's what he wanted—a nice contented life. And he'd find it or he'd die trying!

Suddenly Johnny snapped out of his thoughts as a pair of headlights popped up over a slight rise just ahead. The lights blinded him and he took his foot from the accelerator and put it on the brake. Pleadingly he switched his dimmer on and off, but the car ahead ignored the signal and kept coming on in its blinding charge.

Automatically Johnny eased over farther on his side as the car passed in an explosion of light. He felt his wheels slip off onto the soft shoulder and he cut back for the pavement, but the back end of the car started to swing into the ditch and he had to turn that way to keep from rolling.

The sound of ripping, groaning metal screeched into his ears and then he got a terrific jolt that slapped his left knee hard against the steering column. The wheel spun in his hands.

He grabbed at it to bring it under control. He cut it toward the road and the sedan lurched onto the pavement, vibrating and the front right wheel wobbling crazily.

He cursed his rotten luck. That kind of idiot driver who wouldn't dim his lights ought to be put in jail!

Johnny knew one thing was for sure: This car was no good to him, now that the front end was haywire. But he just couldn't abandon it here on the highway, because it would be a dead give-away as to his route of escape. He'd have to figure something, fast.

Funny, but when he'd grabbed this car things seemed fairly rosy. Now—it wasn't a pleasant thought, him being on foot while the cops would be in cars. Again a vision of Old Charlie began to come to him. Quickly he forced it out of his mind and glanced anxiously into the rear-view mirror as a slight tremor rose up in him.

Slowly he guided the wobbly car down the highway until he found a narrow side road that didn't look like it was used much. He turned into it and drove until he was in a grove of trees. Leaving

this trail, he drove into some underbrush, left the car there, then fought his way out on foot. He knew it was far from perfect, but it was the best he could do.

Johnny's left knee began to hurt and he couldn't put his full weight on it. That worried him because he knew it would make traveling really tough. But he gritted his teeth and hobbled away from there. He didn't have any idea at all where he was, but he knew that he had to keep moving.

He went back to the highway, keeping an eye peeled for approaching cars and taking to the ditch whenever one zoomed past. This way, he made progress slowly, painfully, until he thought his knee would let him go no farther. It was then that he discovered the house.

DESPERATION drove him to take the chance. It was a rather nice-looking house and set back from the highway almost two hundred yards. Although there were no lights showing, he figured that someone must be there. He'd tell them that he was hitchhiking and had fallen and hurt himself, and would ask if he could get first-aid for his knee.

He couldn't arouse anyone by knocking on the door, and after a few minutes he went around the side and tried to look into a window. Maybe the people were away. If they were, that would be a good deal. He could break in, find what he needed and then get away without being observed.

His eyes were well adjusted to the darkness, and when he looked through the dusty window he saw that the room was vacant. At first he was disappointed and annoyed that no one lived there, then his hopes began to rise as he realized that in a way it was much, much better. He could hole up here, get some rest and keep off that bad knee until it got better.

The way the house was situated, he'd have a good view of the highway and would be able to see anyone coming in time to get out the back. Yeah, it was pretty good—all except for one thing. Food.

Maybe there were some wild berries around here he could eat. He'd figure something. Right now he had to get into

this house before that knee got so bad he couldn't move it at all. Maybe he could find an unlocked window. If not, he could always break out the glass with a rock.

The window was not locked.

Johnny hauled himself into the room, then made his way to the front of the musty, deserted house. He knew he should have been feeling pretty good about finding a place like this, but he wasn't. Every nerve in his body was raw from the fear of being caught and doubt as to whether he'd blown his top and stuck his feet into boiling oil.

The thought of his nice bunk back in the cell hit him hard as he sat down on the dusty floor by the front windows. Funny that he'd think about that, and he didn't know whether to laugh or what. They'd be after him by now. Everyone in prison would know. He wondered what Old Charlie was thinking and how he was taking it.

Johnny didn't feel very good down deep inside.

THE NEXT morning Johnny didn't recognize the sound at first when it shocked him from his sleep. It was the high, mechanical whine of gears. He jerked up and peered over the edge of the window. The bright morning sun stabbed into his eyes and he closed them quickly. Then opening them to a squint, he made out the form of a large moving van coming slowly toward the house, preceded by a black limousine.

Terrified, he dropped low and dragged himself across the floor toward the center of the room. He got to his feet and tried to run for the back, but sprawled to the floor again as his bum knee went out from under him. His knee throbbed, his head throbbed, his whole body throbbed. The vehicles were coming closer. Gritting his teeth, he pushed to his feet.

He couldn't use the window; they'd see him for sure. His only chance was out the back. If they saw him he'd never get away. He wouldn't be able to move fast enough.

He hobbled into the kitchen and grabbed the latch of the back door. It was locked and no key was in it. The sound of the engines had stopped now and someone was opening the front door.

Johnny's breath grew shorter and his vision blurred as he glanced around, looking for some way to get out of there. There was another door a few feet away. He jerked it open, saw steps leading down into a cellar. Down he went, dank air filling his nostrils and cobwebs clinging to his face and clothes.

A little light came into the cellar from a high window at the rear and sent his hopes up a little higher. He zigzagged and limped through old boxes and junk, feeling dirt and grime beneath his hands whenever he touched anything. The window looked rather small, but maybe he could get through it. He had to get through it.

If he got cornered down here and they discovered him, they might shoot first and ask questions later. Especially if people had been warned to be on the lookout for an escaped convict.

He had to get the hell out of here! Despair, bordering on the edge of terror, filled him when he discovered that the window was too small to climb through. There was just one other slim chance. Get back upstairs and—

The sound of footsteps in the kitchen sent Johnny dodging behind a box. Motionless, he watched the door of the cellar, while the sound of his pulse throbbed in his ears. A rat scampered across the floor, stopped suddenly and looked toward him curiously, then disappeared behind some boxes.

It was nearly an hour and a half later when he saw the legs of the two men. Until that time all he'd heard were the sounds of stuff being moved in upstairs. But now, through the small window, he saw them standing outside. Then he heard voices.

"Isolated place, ain't it?" one man said.

"Yeah," the second one agreed. "Ain't no one around here to pry."

"McKinney's pretty sensitive about it, ain't he? Guess anyone would be, though—having something like that in their family. But I ain't kicking. It's a break for me. It's the best paying job I ever had for doing practically nothing."

"Yeah. Looks like an institution would have been cheaper. But I guess to a man like the boss money's no object."

"We might be able to get in a little target practice around here," the first

man said. "It might be fun."

"That's right," the second one agreed. "But let's keep careful track of these rods. We don't want any love-making going on around here."

"You can say that again! You know, I get the creeps when I think about it. Come on, let's check on her."

The two men moved away and Johnny frowned. He wondered what it was they had been talking about. They'd sounded like guards of some sort. Well, that was just dandy. How much tougher could things get?

Dimly, through his whirling thoughts, Old Charlie's voice started to come to him again. Johnny clenched his fists and said in a low, hoarse voice, "Shut up, you old devil!"

Heat flashed over him as he heard the door to the cellar creak open. He dodged down, held his breath. Cautiously he looked around one corner of the box and saw a pair of woman's legs coming slowly down the stairs. He jerked back again, confused, heart pounding.

The girl came the rest of the way, snooped around for a moment and then became still. Finally, just above a whisper, she said, "I know you're behind that box. Why are you hiding?"

Johnny tensed, but didn't move.

"Don't be afraid," the girl said. "You can trust me. I won't give you away."

Johnny's frown wrinkled. Slowly he rose.

SHE WAS a pretty brunette, and by her young, ripe figure he judged her to be around seventeen or eighteen. Her dark eyes were sharp and alert, almost calculating.

Johnny couldn't make it add up. By all rules of the book she should have been scared of him, but she wasn't. It was almost as if she were glad to see him.

Quickly he made up a story in his mind that he was a bum and had taken refuge here after hurting his knee, and had gotten scared when he saw people moving in. He started to tell her about it, but she placed a finger over her lips and motioned him to be quiet.

"Mrs. Adams, the housekeeper, might hear you," she whispered. "She's an awful snoop." Then she asked, "No one knows you're here? You don't have any

friends nearby, do you?"

"No," Johnny whispered back, his hopes rising. He didn't know what was the matter with this dame, or why she wasn't screaming her head off right now, but if she wanted to play games he'd play with her, hoping that he could get her to help him escape.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

"Last time I saw her she was putting out some rat poison."

"Who are those two men?"

Hate flashed in the girl's eyes. "My father hired them to keep me from running away. My father doesn't like me. He's mean to me."

"Oh-h-h, I see," Johnny said, nodding his head sympathetically.

Yeah, he was beginning to understand a lot of things now. This girl was the psycho daughter of some rich guy, and rather than put her in an institution, he'd bought a house in the country for her.

What was her trouble? Simple-minded, maybe. Yeah, that checked. Anybody would have to be simple-minded to take the chance she was taking.

"You look awfully hungry," the girl said, the hate leaving her face and her eyes brightening gaily. "Would you like me to get you some food?"

The suggestion was music to him. "Yeah," he agreed eagerly. Food would give him strength. He could operate better.

"I'll see what I can do," she said. "You know, I like you, but I'll love you after you eat."

What a dizzy character, Johnny thought, as he watched her leave the cellar. He wondered just what the specific nature of her trouble was. After thinking about it for a few moments, a chill clamped down on him and he shrugged it off.

It was a long time before she showed up again, and Johnny had begun to get restless. For a moment he had feared that she had tricked him—just put on an act for his sake and then phoned for the cops. But when he saw the plate of food in her hands as she tiptoed down the steps, that doubt left him.

"I tried to get here sooner, but I couldn't" she explained. "They've been watching me."

Johnny's mouth watered as she placed the food before him on a box. "Thanks," he said.

She backed away with a strange smile on her face. "I'd better get back before Mrs. Adams comes back into the kitchen. You eat the food. All of it. I'll—I'll be back later."

Smiling, she turned and went back up to the kitchen.

Johnny had a feeling that something wasn't just right, and when he looked at the food suspicion filled his eyes. This might be some kind of a trick. Things had gone too smoothly. She could have gone back upstairs the first time and told them that he was here. Then, they might have decided that the best way to handle him would be to send doped food down to him.

He'd be a lot easier to handle if he were unconscious.

And something else: why had she come down to the cellar? He admitted to himself that it was natural enough for a person to prowl around a house they had just moved into. But why was it just the girl.

After he thought about this for a moment or so, he kicked out the idea that they had discovered some clue to his presence and had sent her down here to discover if anyone was hiding. No, one of the men could have done that. The only sensible thing that he could figure was that the girl had just been prowling, and that the others hadn't come down because they had no reason.

He wished that he knew the trouble this girl was having, what was the matter with her mind. Several months ago he had checked out a book on psychology from the prison library, hoping to find some clue to his own trouble, to uncover the reason why discontent tortured him. He'd had no luck, but now he tried to remember that book to see if he couldn't find some clue as to the girl's trouble. It was no go.

Suddenly an idea came to him. There were rats in this cellar. He could put the food on the floor and let a rat eat some of it. If the rat lived, the stuff would be okay.

Immediately he put the plate of food on the cellar floor.

A moment later, to his horror, he watched a rat die.

A SICKENING sensation filled his empty stomach and cold perspiration popped out on his gaunt face. Regardless of his bum knee or the tight spot he was in, he had to get out of there. He didn't know exactly what was up, but he knew that it was all bad.

He moved towards the stairs, pleading with his knee to hold him. His heart knocked against his ribs as he heard the cellar door creak open slowly. Quickly he dropped to the floor, doubled up and closed his eyes.

He had acted as if by reflex, but it had come from an instantaneous plan. If it were the girl, she would expect him to be dead. He'd play dead and keep her off guard.

He heard her footsteps on the stairs. They were hesitantly descending.

Why wasn't she calling for help, he wondered? What in Heaven's name was the matter with this dame? He remembered her saying, "You know, I like you, but I'll love you after you eat."

Cautiously he opened one eye enough to make out her form at the bottom of the stairs. On she came, slowly. He knew it would be a miracle if she couldn't hear his heart pounding.

"Let's keep careful track of these rods. We don't want any love-making going on around here," he remembered one of the men saying.

He stopped breathing as she dropped to her knees beside him. She bent over and kissed him.

The word *necrophile* exploded into his memory from the psychology book. *Those who love the dead!*

Pure terror jerked him to his feet, knocking the girl back, and took him up those stairs as if his bum knee didn't exist at all.

He burst into the kitchen, saw a startled woman appear in a doorway. He whirled and went out the back. In the back yard the two men were setting up a target. As soon as they saw him they tensed and drew their guns.

"Don't shoot!" Johnny yelled, almost happily.

* * * * *

Johnny stood at the cell window, gripping the bars with both hands and staring beyond the high gray walls of the prison. From the lower bunk a pair of aged blue eyes watched him.

"Take it easy," Old Charlie said. "You gave yourself up and that'll make it go a lot easier with you. If you behave yourself you probably won't have to spend many more years here than you would have normally. Learn to relax. Be contented with what you've got."

Johnny gripped the bars harder. "You've got it all wrong, pop," he said. "I am contented now. Found it behind these walls. On the inside you know what to expect from men and what they are. On the outside you don't know whether a guy in a car is going to kill you or what kind of a crazy jam you're going to get into. In here you're sure of everything, out there you're sure of nothing. I'm contented, pop."

"Then why are you gripping those bars like that?"

Turning around, Johnny said, "I'm thankful for them. I'm thankful that these bars keep all those characters on the outside the hell out of here!"

Old Charlie grinned. "You've got it, boy," he told Johnny. "You're going to be all right, now. . . . Here, want another smoke?"

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

An hilarious new novel about a New York detective who gets mixed up with a bunch of wacky movie people who want to make a picture of his life. . . .

I CALL EVERYBODY DARLING

by C. P. Donnel, Jr.

Plus many other stories and features

DETECTIVE MOVIE NEWS

HOW will you have your crime movies this month? Hollywood is feeling generous in the chiller department these days—just name your preference and buy your ticket. You can have murder, slow torture, cops and robbers or escaped convicts. You can take your pick among some of the top stars in filmland for your villains and heroes.

Would you like your excitement swathed in London fog? Okay, then go and see *Calling Bulldog Drummond*, in which Walter Pidgeon gives a new and dashing portrayal of the famous adventurer-detective, first made famous on the screen by Ronald Colman. It's an unusual role for Pidgeon, whose movies don't usually include any tangles with the law. Bulldog Drummond, of course, is strictly on the side of Scotland Yard, so he doesn't have any personal tangles with the law, although for most of the movie he poses as a crook in order to worm his way into a syndicate of modern, military trained criminals.

This gang is so modern that its members use radar to make their getaways through the fog. The equipment used in the movie is the real thing, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer claims it's also the latest thing. The fog, too, is the real genuine London variety (the film was made there), but no claims can be made about its newness. It's the same thick, murky stuff that has been plaguing Englishmen for centuries.

Next Stop—Albuquerque

But maybe you'd prefer your crime baked in New Mexico sunshine. In that case your best bet is Paramount's *Ace in the Hole*. This one stars one of the newest and bright-

Calling Bulldog Drummond

Ace In the Hole

Secret of Convict Lake

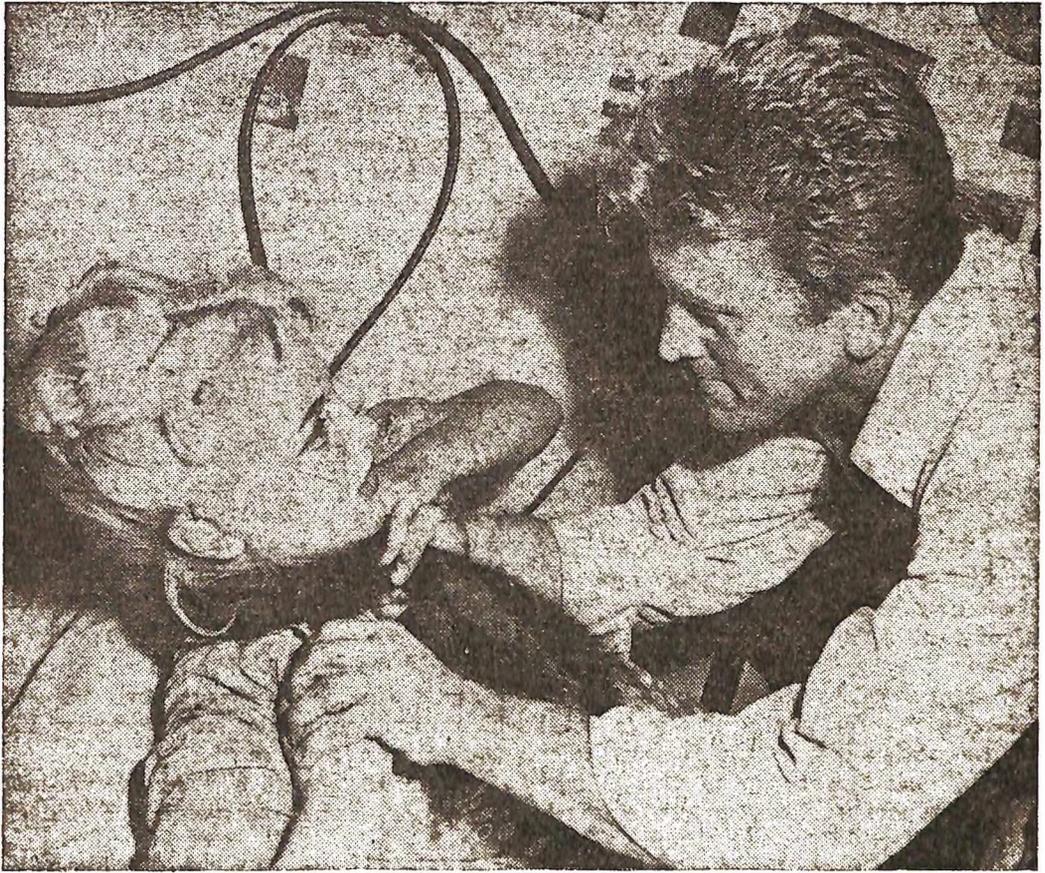
Never Trust A Gambler

est lights in Hollywood, Kirk Douglas, and it's a suspense drama with a new twist. Kirk plays Charles Tatum, a newspaperman, whose motive for crime is publicity. When the movie opens he's down and out, fired from a big New York daily, and dead broke in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Tatum promises to reform and gets a job on the local paper. For a year he stays sober and covers everything from rattlesnake hunts to church socials, but all the time he's looking for that big story, which will provide the springboard for his comeback on a big newspaper. That big story never comes, so the newspaperman makes it happen. He finds a man trapped in an Indian ruin, and though the victim could be easily released, Tatum persuades the rescuers with bribes and



Walter Pidgeon and two gangster "pals" in MGM's "Calling Bulldog Drummond"



Kirk Douglas means no good to pretty Jan Sterling in this scene from Paramount's "Ace In the Hole"

threats to drag out their work as long as possible.

Tatum is thinking only of his story and exclusive coverage all over the country, not of the man imprisoned in the dark, damp cave.

The story turns out to be even bigger than Tatum suspected. Tourists by the hundreds arrive at the Indian cliff dwelling; radio and TV networks move in; a carnival sets up tents and sells peanuts, popcorn and merry-go-round rides. And once the hoax has started, not even Tatum can stop it, not even when he has a real scoop, the story of a lifetime which nobody will believe.

Everybody's in the Act

Paramount made this movie outside Gal-

lup, New Mexico, pop. 8,500, which made for a manpower shortage on the days the studio needed 1,600 extras. The problem was solved by shooting the crowd scenes on Sunday, when stores and schools were closed and a large slice of the local people were free to be movie actors.

For the rescue scenes Paramount hired the entire fire department of Gallup, but that didn't mean that fires could get out of hand in town, for all the trucks were radio equipped, and in case of a genuine emergency, all movie-making would have stopped.

About the only things that weren't real products of New Mexico were the carnival show (imported from California) and, believe it or not, the Indian cliff dwellings. Studio craftsmen built that from scratch, and it's such an exact duplicate that tourists by

the hundreds stop and ogle, doubtless commenting, "Just think that's been there for thousands of years!"

Warner Brothers' nominee for the crime story of the month also has a Western background, but the resemblance between *Ace in the Hole* and *The Secret of Convict Lake* stops right there. The latter has an historical background, instead of being as modern as tomorrow's newspaper; and it's packed with adventure and excitement, instead of slow-burning suspense.

Six Bad Men

The Secret of Convict Lake is as star-studded a movie as you could want—Glenn Ford, Ethel Barrymore, Zachary Scott, Gene Tierney. It's the story of six escaped convicts—one a man on a relentless mission of revenge, the others following to get themselves a cut of the fortune they think he has hidden. The trail brings them to a small settlement of cabins huddled on the edge of a lake, a tiny community of women only! To the convicts it looks like "a paradise of women," and they ruthlessly plan to take over. The women, however, are no meek little weaklings. Even old Granny (Ethel Barrymore) is pretty handy with her shot-

gun and she tells the men to stay away, "or we'll blast your heads off!"

It makes a fine setting for action, and through it all runs the thread of one man's efforts to prove he was framed.

But if your special preference in crime is a cops-and-robbers chase through a modern American city, Hollywood is happy to please you, too. Columbia has just what you ordered in *Never Trust a Gambler*, with Dane Clark, Tom Drake and Cathy O'Donnell. This one was made in California, but not much of it inside the studio. All the exteriors are actual locations in Los Angeles and San Francisco. This local color should appeal to movie goers with wanderlust.

Hollywood's famous bungalow courts and supermarkets were used for some of the backgrounds, and the thrilling final man-hunt was made at the Bethlehem Steel Yard outside San Francisco. In the story, Dane and Cathy are pursued by Tom, the detective, and the chase leads them all over the gigantic yard, up towering cranes 120 feet high, and along massive arms stretching 100 feet out over the ocean.

All in all, there's a wide selection for crime fans—name your poison, and you can have it.

—Ann Kennedy.

GOLD IN YOUR SHOE

Stealing gold directly from the mine, or "high-grading," as it is called by professionals, is one of the oldest and most worrisome forms of theft in the west. All an operator has to do is get himself a job in someone else's mine and take all that he possibly can for himself.

Some of the ingenious places in which it can be hidden consists of the mouth (where whole chunks can be placed as easily and nonchalantly as chewing tobacco), in the whiskers (if the metal is powdered and the miner is working near a compressed-air line), and under the fingernails. Since several hundred dollars' worth can be easily concealed in an ordinary thermos bottle, every mine

owner makes it common practice to inspect all lunch boxes carefully before a worker is allowed to leave.

Another favorite place for concealing precious metal is in the cuffs of trousers or in shoes. That's why a number of plants have successfully put a stop to this practice by making it a rule that the workers remove all their clothing in one room, before entering the mine. They take a shower in another, then put on special work clothes in a third. These garments are carefully inspected before the men wear them the following day. Of course guards are employed at the entrances and exits of most gold mines, and in some Nevada places the ore is so rich that it has to be watched incessantly from the time that it is removed from the earth till it reaches the mill.

Yet despite all this care, it has been estimated that over \$500,000 is carried away annually in one state alone by "innocent" means, and no successful way of curbing the thieving has yet been invented.

—Bess Ritter



USELESS INFORMATION

Odd Facts About Crime and Crooks, Reported by THE SNOOPER

IT IS POSSIBLE to have a sensation of smell without the presence of any actual odor . . . Criminal attacks are sometimes committed by persons walking in their sleep. Actually, this somnolent state is half-way between sleeping and waking . . . If a wanted man is an alien, information about him may be obtained from the Immigration Bureau of the Department of Labor.

Hot stuff. In centuries past, criminals were branded as a means of identification. Prior to 1860, lifers sent to Siberia were branded on the forehead and each cheek. In China, they branded as late as 1905 . . . The



human skeleton does not increase in height after the twentieth year. The thigh-bones may lengthen slightly, but the spine bows to compensate . . . Fingerprints are not inherited . . . Bodies that have been mummified as a

result of burial in dry places may be restored by soaking in a 3 per cent solution of potassium hydroxide.

Cheers! If a man has 2.5 per cent alcohol in his blood, he is drunk. He may, of course, be drunk on less than that . . . Sing Sing is an Indian name meaning "a place of stones." . . . In 38 states a coroner need have no medical or legal knowledge to hold office. But it helps to know the right politicians . . . After blood has been heated, it can't be typed. It's even difficult to determine if it's animal or human . . . The dismemberment of a body doesn't necessarily mean that a murder has been committed. The first page of every telephone book in the country lists the nearest office of the FBI. Republic 5226 is the Washington number . . . The normal foot angle is 30 to 32 degrees. More than that, you're an old slewfoot.

Alias the author. Detective scrivener



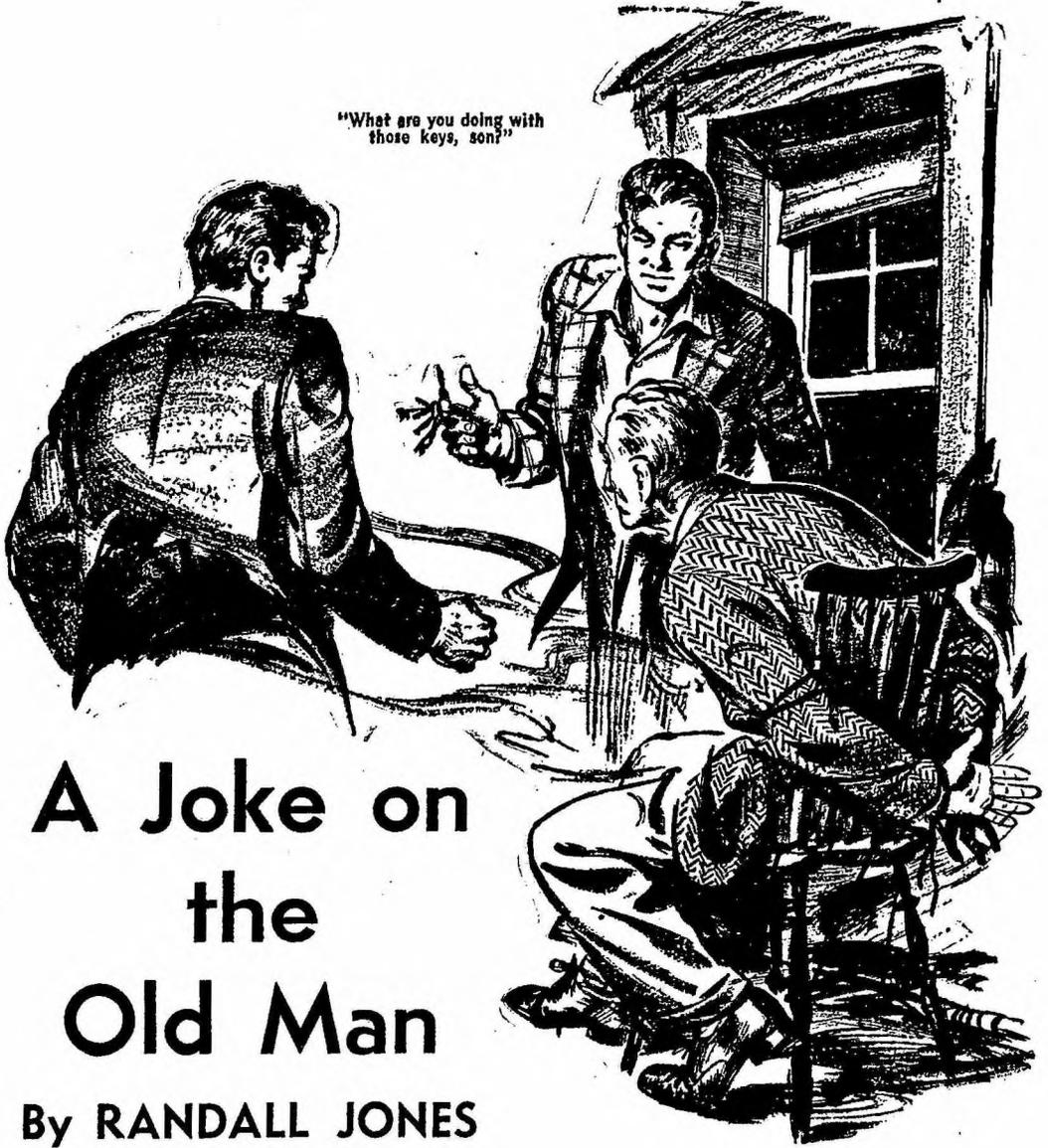
Cornell Woolrich is better known by his pseudonym, William Irish, though he writes under his own name too . . . George Bernard Shaw once wrote a detective story, but the manuscript was lost at the printer's. It was never found . . . You may be charged with picking a pocket, even though the pocket you pick has nothing in it . . . Fu-hi (2852-2738 B.C.) is credited with having introduced the first known Chinese law. It related to marriage . . . You cannot commit hara-kiri unless you are commanded to do so by a higher-up. If you honorably kill yourself on your own, it's called seppuku.

Dopey doings. Morphine and cocaine are really poisons. A fatal dose is about half a gram, though dope addicts have been known to take as much as five grams in twenty-four hours without lethal effects. Strychnine, another poison, is the antidote . . . And, switching to poison-pen letters, it's legal to write threatening or abusive letters—as long as you don't mail them . . . Erased lead-pencil writing may be made visible by the use of iodine fumes. If there are any traces of the writing on the back side of the paper, photography in oblique light will reveal it.

Pass the green ink. Counterfeiters have been known to raise genuine one dollar bills to ten dollars, and tens to twenties . . . Professional hotel thieves usually register as guests in the hotel where they plan to operate. Adding insult to injury, they usually pack their loot in their victim's own bag or suitcase! . . . No one may use your photo for advertising purposes or private gain without your permission . . . Smart snoops who wish to open other person's mail without leaving traces loosen the lower flap of an envelope rather than the top one. Opens easier.



"What are you doing with those keys, son?"



A Joke on the Old Man

By RANDALL JONES

IT WAS after midnight when they left the bar, and the bartender watched them go with a look of relief. In spite of the difference in build and features, there was a curious sameness about them. They wore their felt hats at the same angle, the brims pulled low over their eyes, they spoke in the same low grating voices, and as they left

they walked with the same artificial swagger.

Outside they stopped to light cigarettes and glance up and down the deserted street.

"Pretty dull," Freddy Mason remarked. The taller of the two, he was also the lighter, with a narrow pointed face.

"Yeah." Joe Norris was stockily built, with thick powerful arms. Both were nine-

A Pair of Playful Gangsters Turn "Gagsters"

teen, but they had practiced looking ten years older for so long that they had finally succeeded.

"We could use a little dough, too," Joe added. "You got any ideas?"

"Let's get the car and ride around—maybe we'll spot something."

Joe laughed harshly. "Ride around? On what?" He pulled a few coins from his pocket, glanced at them, and shoved them back. "Not enough to get a gallon of gas."

He turned and looked along the sidewalk again. "Wish a drunk'd show up."

Freddy shook his head. "Uh-uh, not around here we don't. The cops got their eye on this street now."

They moved slowly away, the swagger fading out of their walk since there was no one to see them. Across the street the heavy bulk of a department store warehouse was dark and quiet, except for a single light on the ground floor.

"Wish we had the key to that place," Freddy said idly. "We'd really be set then."

Joe stopped. "Is that same old guy still the night-watchman there?"

Freddy nodded. "Sure. Old Pop—remember how the gang of us used to hang around there when we were kids?"

"He must be pretty old," Joe said softly. "I'll bet I could handle him easy, if I could get in there."

FREDDY'S eyes widened. He stared at Joe in incredulous amazement.

"You crazy? He'd recognize us the minute we went in. Besides, he's a pretty nice old guy. Remember how we used to play bank robbers with him? He'd always holler 'Don't shoot! Don't shoot!' and then we'd tie him to his chair and make him tell us where the money was."

"Sure, sure, I remember," Joe said. "He used to run us out at nine o'clock—said no kids ought to be out after that. Crazy old goat. But it's been four, five years since he's seen us, and we look different. I know where I can borrow a gun tonight."

"Be a dope if you want to. What you going to do if he says 'Hello, Joe Norris? Plug him?'"

Joe hesitated. He was used to being in

trouble, but that was deeper than he wanted to be.

"Okay," he said finally. "You're so smart, suppose you—Wait a minute. You wouldn't mind lifting a few of those watches and fur coats they got over there, if old Pop helped you, I guess?"

Freddy stared at him, and then flipped his cigarette into the gutter with a gesture of disgust. "He don't need your help. He's had every night for twenty years to try it if he wanted."

"Listen. Hardly anybody lives around here now—it's all stores and stuff. He probably gets lonesome for us kids."

Freddy laughed. "I guess now you want us to go play games with him."

"Sure. Use your head, will you? We give him a line about the old times, make him feel good, and then get him to let us tie him up, like we used to."

"Think he'd do it?"

Joe shrugged. "It's a chance. You want everything on a platter? If it works, we're set."

"Set? He'd have the cops on us before we could turn around."

"How can he? They catch us, they find out the truth—that he let us in himself, he even let us tie him up. Think anybody'd ever believe he wasn't in it with us? Especially if we drop a few hints."

He tossed his cigarette away. "How about it? You gonna spend all night arguing?"

"Okay," Freddy said. "Let's give it a try."

"Leave your hat and tie in the car," Joe directed. "And pull your collar open—make him think we're still just a couple of kids."

The old man recognized them and unlocked the door.

"Come on in, boys. Haven't seen you for a long time."

They followed him into the tiny, familiar room where he stayed between rounds. Pop had been a tall man once, but now he walked with a permanent stoop to his shoulders, as though he had bent over to punch the time clocks in the big building too often to ever straighten up again.

They sat down on the worn chairs.

"You're looking great, Pop," Joe said.

"Younger than ever."

The old man chuckled. "Can't look no older, I guess. You boys been away?"

"Yeah, we been away—at college." He winked behind Pop's back at Freddy.

"College, eh?" Pop looked impressed.

"Sure, we been up at State College," Freddy said. "That's why we haven't been around."

"Not many boys from this part of town ever gets to college," the old man said. "You're mighty lucky. Like it up there?"

"Oh, it's all right," Joe said. "They're pretty strict, though." Freddy coughed to cover a laugh.

"Boys your age need somebody to be strict with them," Pop said. "'Nine o'clock—home in bed,' that's what I always used to say, didn't I?"

"You sure did, Pop. You really kept us in line. Seems like old times, sitting around here. Remember how we used to be robbers and tie you up?"

"Do I? Got so I couldn't turn around without some kid sticking me in the back

with a water-pistol and hollering 'Gimme your money or I'll shoot!' " The old man laughed reminiscently.

"Wonder if we could still tie you up like that," Freddy said. "We've probably forgotten how to do it."

"Oh, I expect you could," Pop said. "Kids don't forget that soon."

JOE stood up. "Let's try it and see," he said. "There's some rope over on the shelf."

Pop glanced at the clock. "Well, now, you'd have to wait awhile, boys. Got to make the rounds now. Of course, maybe you'll want to be getting home—it's pretty late."

"Oh, no," Joe said quickly. "We'll wait."

"We're on vacation," Freddy added. "We can sleep late."

Pop's footsteps faded away down the hall.

"Think he'll do it?" Freddy whispered.

"Sure. Didn't I tell you? The guy's lonesome—he'd do anything for somebody that'll come in and bat the breeze with him."

When Pop came back Freddy was standing behind the door.

"Get 'em up," he snapped, jabbing his finger into Pop's back. "Tell us where you hid that gold you stole."

Pop's eyes rolled in mock terror. "Don't shoot! I hid the gold, but I ain't saying where."

"Guess we'll have to torture him some," Joe said, reaching for the coil of rope. "Shoot off his ears, maybe."

They tied the old man to his chair, and Joe carefully ran a few extra turns of rope around a water-pipe so there'd be no chance for him to move the chair.

"I guess you boys haven't forgotten how," Pop said. He tugged at the rope. "That's some tighter than you used to do it. Better take it off now, before it cuts off the circulation in my arms."

"We got something to do first," Joe said, crossing the room.

"Hey," Pop said, frowning, "what you doing with those keys, son?"

"Just going to do a little bargain-hunting upstairs. Hear you got some nice watches up there—cheap."



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DETECTIVE

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"Upstairs? Son, you don't mean you'd—"

Joe's smile disappeared. "Get this straight, Pop. Forget the kid stuff—you're in a tough spot, and you got to use your head. You must be about ready for a pension from this outfit, aren't you?"

"Another year," Pop muttered.

"Okay. When the cops ask you what happened, you tell 'em some guys you never saw before pulled a gun on you. See? Because if you turn us in, we'll tell the truth—and what happens to that pension? If they don't give you a sentence for helping us, they'll figure you're weak in the head and get rid of you quick."

"Listen, son," Pop began, "you oughtn't to do this. You're making a—"

"Shut up!" Joe snapped. "You hear what I was telling you?"

Pop nodded.

"Okay. Just keep it in mind."

As they left the room the old man started to say something, and then seemed to think better of it.

"We got a whole hour, at least," Joe said. "He just finished a round. We'll take our pick, and make it good."

"Think he'll do like you said?"

Joe shrugged. "If he's got any sense he will, but we're not playing sucker for him. I know where we can get rid of this stuff tonight, and we'll be out of the state before morning. Then we'll take it easy and see what he does."

It was over half an hour later that they came down the stairs again, each carrying a suitcase fresh from stock that was heavily loaded. The light from the watchman's room shone into the dark hall. It was very quiet.

"Think he's all right?" Freddy asked.

"Who cares? We got no time to—"

THE hall lights flashed on, brilliant, making them blink their eyes. From what had been a dark corner a blue-uniformed figure walked slowly towards them, the gun in his hand steady and unwavering. Joe swung his head desperately around, in time to see another officer coming from behind the stairs, in back of them. It happened so quickly that they were still gripping the suitcases.

Pop came through the door of his tiny room.

"I tried to warn you boys," he said. "I guess I was too late—several years too late." He shook his head. "Didn't think any of the kids I used to know would do a thing like this."

"Never mind the sermon," Joe sneered, trying to throw off his shock. "You were just lucky. These cops just happened to come in."

"You think we got X-ray eyes?" the officer behind them asked. "Lucky? He phoned us."

"He couldn't have!" Joe turned angrily to the old man. "We're not that dumb—we tied you clear across the room from the phone."

Pop smiled unhappily. "Sure, son. But didn't you ever used to wonder how I made my rounds on time when I was tied up most every night? You did a fair job, all right, but I reckon I've had more practice getting myself untied than anybody else since Houdini."



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The **THING** *in the Cage*



THIS is the story of how a couple of canaries brought about the pardon of a man who had been convicted of murder.

The man was Joe Blazenzits. Son of a Yugoslavian immigrant, he had taken to running with a teen-aged Detroit gang. At fifteen, he was imprisoned for a boxcar theft. At twenty-one, he was convicted of the murder of one Thomas J. Houghton in a holdup attempt and sentenced to the penitentiary at Marquette for life.

One day, thumbing through a magazine in his cell, he came across an ad offering canaries for sale. Money in prison is hard come by. In the ten years he'd been serving his murder sentence, all he had managed to save up was seventeen dollars but he sent this off now for a pair of canaries. He thought it would be nice to hear the voice of birds inside prison walls.

The ad had been placed in the publication by Mrs. Bertha Marie Hayden, a Minneapolis housewife. She raised canaries as a hobby.

When she noted the address of customer Joe Blazenzits, she returned the seventeen dollars along with the canaries she sent him. She wrote that she hoped the birds would make things pleasanter for him.

One day shortly thereafter Mrs. A. C. Macbeth called on her to buy some canaries. Mrs. Macbeth was interested in camps for juvenile delinquents and Mrs. Hayden mentioned the oddity of receiving a request for a pair of birds from a Michigan prisoner.

"It is hard to believe that a man who feels a great love for birds would do anything very wrong," Mrs. Hayden remarked.

Mrs. Macbeth agreed, and they wrote a letter to Prisoner Blazenzits, telling him about the camps for juvenile delinquents and asking him what he thought about this kind of work. His reply impressed them as being so profound and thoughtful, they were touched.

They wrote to state prison officials to find out more about their prisoner correspondent. They were somewhat shocked to learn that he was a convicted murderer and "a dangerous criminal."

But they couldn't believe it.

MRS. MACBETH, in her 70's, was too old to do much active work, but Mrs. Neil Corwin, a neighbor of Mrs. Hayden who was interested in the betterment of young people, became interested in the case. Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Corwin went to Detroit to study the transcript of Joe Blazenzits' murder trial. And they became fully convinced that there had been a miscarriage of justice.

A True Story by HAROLD HELFER

*If a man were soft-hearted,
would it prove he couldn't be a killer?*

Joe was a stranger to the three witnesses who had identified him as the man they saw running away from the shooting scene—it had been a cloudy winter evening and the whole thing had happened suddenly. There was a good chance, the two women felt, that under the circumstances, the three persons could have been mistaken about Joe. It could have been someone who more or less resembled him. But more affirmatively than that: Leo Schulte, a carpenter, had testified that Joe had been at the skating rink with him at the time of the shooting.

The two women then contacted the judge who presided at the trial. He confessed to them that he had grave doubts about Joe's guilt, both because of the weakness of the state's case and the strong alibi.

Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Corwin didn't stop there. They got in touch with the foreman of the jury that had convicted Joe. He told them that he had voted guilty with misgivings.

The two women wrote to legal experts all over the country for advice. They sent a transcript of the trial to the late Clarence Darrow, regarded as one of the most brilliant attorneys of the day and who had a reputation for fighting for the underdog. He wrote them that the evidence indicated the innocence of Joe Blazenzits, but that his failing health precluded his taking the case.

ALL of these efforts took time and a year went by before the two women saw Joe for the first time. He was most grateful for what they were doing, but he didn't seem to have much hope.



But they didn't despair. Their greatest handicap was that they didn't have the money it would take to bring the case into court again. Still they doggedly persevered—Mrs. Hayden mainly working away on the evidence involved, Mrs. Corwin in contacting state officials who might help their cause.

They got in touch with the doctor who had attended the robbery victim and he revealed that as Mr. Houghton was dying he had stated that the man who had killed him was the same one who had held him up two years before. This was, of course, a vital piece of information, one which would seem to have put Joe in the clear, but it had never come out in the trial.

The state officials, as a rule, had been pretty cold to the efforts on Joe's behalf. But other citizens, like John Barber White, professor of criminal law at the University of Missouri, became interested in the movement to have the case reconsidered.

The two women had meanwhile contacted

Leonard Keeler, of Chicago, inventor of the polygraph, as the lie detecting machine is commonly called. He was willing to use his machine in the case. But state officials had to be talked into allowing it.

Among the private citizens who had become interested in the fight being waged on behalf of the convicted murderer by the two women was the head of a big corporation. He had his lawyer look into the matter and the attorney, after studying the trial transcript, reported that he felt the case in favor of the prisoner was "meritorious."

With this illustrious industrialist now pressing for a lie detector test, it was finally

given the prisoner, with members of the parole board, state police and the prison warden present.

The verdict: Innocent.

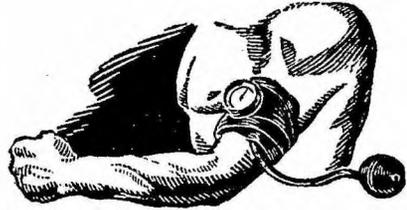
Three years after Mrs. Hayden was touched by the prisoner who wrote for a pair of canaries, Joe Blazenzits was a free man, pardoned by the governor.

But, actually, it is more than a story of a pair of canaries. It is also the story of a couple of wonderful human hearts—those of Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Corwin.

"It wasn't something we did for Joe," Mrs. Hayden said. "It was a matter of justice for us." ●

THE SECRETS OF DETECTIVE WORK

SLENDER CLUES



WHEN a person tells a lie, his blood pressure goes up. In addition, his breath comes faster, and the surface tension of his skin increases. It is upon these facts that the operation of the lie detector is based. They are slender clues—but they can add up to salient indications of guilt.

Another literally slender clue is a single human hair. Yet it, a mere chip of tooth, or a fragmentary scraping of skin found at the scene of a crime—perhaps lodged under the victim's fingernails—often is enough to prove the identity of the killer.

In a case that occurred recently, three suspects seemed equally guilty on the basis of the evidence at hand. Then an "innocent" strand of hair was found at the place where the homicide had been perpetrated. Its length and color was that of all three men, and its diameter indicated definitely that it was male hair, while its length showed that it had come from the head.

Examination of the hair in the police laboratory under a microscope proved the decisive

factor. Under the lens it was observed that the hair gave off a hazy purple glow—a condition known to be due to the excessive intake of aspirin by the person from whom the hair had come.

Only one of the three suspects took large enough quantities of the pills to create such a condition. And his hair, when examined microscopically, also gave off a faint purplish fluorescence!

Confronted with the evidence against him, he confessed.

When one suspect is a white man and the other a Negro, a bit of skin or tooth can also determine the really guilty party. This is because a tooth fragment, when ground to a powder and observed under an ultraviolet light, will give off a faint greenish glow if the person is white. The Negro's will be a deep orange.

The skin of a Negro, on the other hand, won't glow at all unless it is sunburned. The reverse is the case when the subject is white.

—Carter Critz

BABY NEEDS NO SHOES

—especially not of the concrete variety!

by BENTON BRADEN



Hippo didn't see the gun until she was pointing it at his heart

RUTH LANCE hesitated and frowned as she reached the door of Captain Mack's office. When a private dick was summoned to appear before the hard-boiled Chief of Detectives it generally meant, at the least, a severe dressing down. Ruth couldn't recall any particular act of hers that might have incurred the wrath of the captain but she didn't doubt that she was in for some trouble.

What made it worse was the fact that Ruth had wanted to be a detective on

the regular River City police force. She had been turned down because she was slightly underweight and a half inch short. But these minor qualifications could have been waived and Ruth had suspected that it was Captain Mack who had blocked the waivers.

This turndown hadn't stifled Ruth Lance's ambition. She had got a job with a private agency. After two years she had opened her own agency and she had been doing all right in a small way. But things were tough enough without

having the mighty Captain Mack taking pot shots at her.

Ruth opened the door and stepped into the captain's office. She didn't cringe when the stocky, square-jawed captain raised his eyes from his desk and looked at her. Ruth was a slender little redhead and at times quick-tempered and belligerent. Now she grew just a little angry and her eyes showed tiny flames.

"Whose toes did I step on this time?" she demanded in her full contralto. "I know I wasn't called down here for a Martini. So lay it on and get it over with."

Captain Mack crossed her up. He leaned back in his chair and smiled at her. A forced and speculative smile, Ruth thought. A smile that meant no good for her.

"Why, my dear young lady, you've got me wrong," he said silkily. "There have been no complaints against you. On the contrary, you stand very high with my department. The reports that I have received show that you run an excellent private agency. They say that you are intelligent, aggressive, courageous, devoted to the interests of your clients."

Ruth's face softened and she smiled a little at this flattery. But flattery she knew it was—and offered with a purpose. Captain Mack wasn't in the habit of calling private detectives into his office to compliment them. He wanted something of her.

What could it be?

"Thanks for the kind words, captain," she said. "Now don't tell me that I'm going to get a medal or something for good behavior."

"You would if this department were authorized to bestow one on you, Ruth," he said. "I don't mind admitting that I've been keeping an eye on you. I was thinking not long ago that I'd be glad to throw a little business your way if the opportunity came along. And it finally came along. Take this chair here by the desk and I'll explain it to you."

SLOWLY, suspiciously, Ruth sat down. This was just a bit too good to be true. There was bound to be a catch to it somewhere.

"You mean you're going to recommend me to a good client?" she asked.

"I'm going to do better than that." The captain's face fairly beamed with good will. "The River City detective department is going to be your client in this case. You're going to work for us—with all the power and resources of the department behind you. The pay won't be bad either. Twenty dollars a day and expenses while you're on the case."

"That's nice," Ruth conceded. "Very nice. Just what case is this that I'm to work on?"

"Oh, it's of no great importance," the captain said with studied carelessness. "It just happens that you can fit into the picture in the particular circumstances of the case. Have you ever heard of the Hippo Belkes gem mob?"

Ruth had heard of the mob. That mob had rated headlines in the past few days. Something about a mob kill—and a girl who had happened to witness the kill.

"Yes, I read something about it," she told the captain. "But I didn't have time to read the details."

"I'll give them to you briefly," the captain said. "I don't mind admitting that this Hippo Belkes mob has given us plenty of trouble. They've pulled one job after another but we haven't been able to nail them. Three days ago a man was shot down on Vinson Street, killed. By two men who shot from a sedan. It just happened that a young lady by the name of Mona Grimm, a clerk in a five-and-ten, stepped from a doorway as the murder was committed. She saw the whole thing, got a good look at the faces of the two men who did the shooting, saw the victim fall dead on the sidewalk. Later we brought Mona to headquarters. From pictures she identified Hippo Belkes and his right-hand man, Beano Lurck, as the two

men who had done the shooting. The victim was Nick Garvos, also reputed to be a member of Hippo's mob. Our guess is that Nick had tried to hold out some loot on the mob and they bumped him for it."

"Have you picked up Hippo and his mob yet?" Ruth asked.

Captain Mack frowned heavily. "We picked up Beano Lurck," he replied. "But we haven't been able to get hold of Hippo or any of the others. Beano is just a run-of-the-mill jerk. It's Hippo we want most of all. He's the brains of the mob."

"And you want me to help you locate Hippo? You've got a lead on him and it will take a woman to turn the trick."

"No." The captain shook his head. "That's not it at all. It's just a matter of time till we pick up Hippo. It's this Mona Grimm that we're worried about. She saw the kill. Without her we'd have no case at all against Hippo and Beano. We want to protect her. Frankly she's not very smart."

"Where do I come in on this?" Ruth asked, puzzled.

"It just happens that you look a lot like Mona Grimm," Captain Mack said smoothly. "She's a redhead and about your size. You even look like her in the face. Now we've decided that we'd better take Mona out of circulation. Here is the idea. Tomorrow morning Beano comes up for preliminary hearing. His lawyer will ask for the usual continuance. That suits us because we don't want to show our hand, produce Mona in open court till we've got at least Hippo, too. So we'll take Mona into the witness room at court tomorrow morning. She will be veiled. You'll be in that witness room long before she gets there. The continuance will be granted. Then Mona Grimm will leave the witness room and go home. Only it will be you instead of Mona. You will have switched clothes with her. You will impersonate Mona from that moment on. We'll get Mona out of the witness room later. We'll have her hair dyed, get her a new

place to live, keep her under cover until we're ready to use her as a witness. Get the idea?"

"I get it!" Ruth flared. "The idea is that I am to be a sitting duck. Hippo Belkes knows that his only chance to beat the chair is to knock off this Mona Grimm before she gets a chance to testify in court. So the idea is that Hippo gets me for a target instead of Mona Grimm. How long do I live? Three days? That's sixty bucks I'll get. Only it won't be me that will get it. It will be my heirs, executors, and assigns or whoever—"

"Now you've got it all wrong, Ruth," Captain Mack interrupted hastily. "We've got no intention of setting you up as a target. You'll be protected. The full force and power of my department will be behind you."

"Yeah, you'll be behind me!" Ruth jeered. "I'm to go right in and live in the same place Mona lives. I can't just hole up in a dump like that indefinitely. So the first time I go to a show or somewhere, Hippo Belkes will be laying for me. A rifle shot from an unseen assailant—and lights out for me. But that's all right with you. Who cares if a female private dick gets knocked off? You'll have men spotted all around and you'll get Hippo after he bumps me. All you're planning to do is trade me dead for Hippo Belkes alive!"

Captain Mack seemed to ponder for a minute. "I was afraid you wouldn't have the nerve for a job like this," he said slowly. He picked up a page of a newspaper from his desk and looked at it thoughtfully. "It was this story that misled me," he sighed. "This piece that was written about you in the Sunday feature section of the *Tribune*. Written by that sob writer, Elsie Barnes. It said that you claimed to be the equal of any man as a detective, said that you could handle a gun as well as any man and could protect yourself under all circumstances. It said that you were absolutely fearless, that you were so brave that you wouldn't hesitate to walk in on the

toughest mob and—”

“Just skip the rest of it,” Ruth cut him off. “You win, captain. I’ll take on this Mona Grimm job. Just reserve me a nice cool slab in the morgue.”

FOR two days Ruth Lance had been playing the role of Mona Grimm. This second afternoon she stood in Mona’s apartment, preparing to go out. It wasn’t much of an apartment, just a large room with a two-plate burner and some shelves partitioned off in a corner. Ruth was wearing one of Mona’s shabbiest suits. She had a small automatic in her purse. She had another one strapped on the inside of her left leg. She could get that second gun in her hand very fast if occasion required.

She made a final check, opened the door, went into the hall and walked down a flight of battered stairs. When she reached the street she turned to her right and walked eleven blocks to a business section. She smiled a little when she saw the tall man who strolled along behind her. That, she knew, was one of Captain Mack’s men. He made no effort to conceal himself, just followed her and watched her and the people and cars that came near her as she walked.

After she had covered several blocks Ruth became convinced that another man was interested in her movements. This second man wasn’t in sight all the time but he invariably reappeared. Once when he closed in a bit she got a fair look at him in the little mirror that she was using. He was a small man in a brown suit. She couldn’t see his features but she could guess that he had a sharp, ratty face.

Ruth came to a building that had an arcade. It was crowded with people, looking at the shop windows. Ruth turned in there and she moved fast. When the headquarters dick turned in to follow her she was nowhere in sight. Two minutes later she stood in a doorway some distance down and across the street. From that spot she had a clear view of the entrance to the arcade.

She saw her bodyguard come out after a few minutes and look up and down the street in disgust. Finally he shrugged and walked away. Then the little man in the brown suit came out and looked around. He didn’t give up so easily. He went back into the arcade for another look.

Ruth walked to the corner, flashed the special badge Captain Mack had given her as she got in a taxi. “Just hold it,” she ordered the cabbie. “In a moment a little man in a brown suit will come out of the arcade over there and I’ll want to follow him.”

The driver nodded. “Okay.”

It was ten minutes before the little man appeared again. Then he walked up the street, stepped over to the curb and got in a taxi. Ruth’s cab, at a word from her, moved out in pursuit. It was easy because the little man obviously had no idea that anyone was interested in his movements. Twenty minutes later the little man left his cab on Front Street. He got out on a corner, waited until his cab had rolled away, then walked to an old house, in the middle of the block, and entered it. Ruth’s cab rolled past the house.

The houses here were built wall to wall with their rears facing the river. Forty years ago this had been a nice residential street. Now the old two-storied buildings were falling to pieces and had the appearance of being haunted.

TWO blocks on, Ruth got out and had the cab wait. She walked down the short side street to the river, looked back up the river in the direction of the house which the man in the brown suit had entered. Then she returned to her cab.

When, back downtown, she finally dismissed the taxi, she walked several blocks to make sure that she hadn’t overlooked anything. But there was no one tailing her now. She smiled, went on two more blocks, entered a palatial movie house, and enjoyed herself for

two and a half hours.

It was late when she returned to Mona Grimm's apartment. Sawyer, one of the captain's men, was waiting for her there. Sawyer had been on duty the night before in the hall outside the door of her apartment. She had no objection to that. She could sleep a bit better with the knowledge that a husky detective was guarding the door of her apartment.

"The captain is pretty mad at you, Ruth," Sawyer told her. "He was here himself until about ten minutes ago. He said it was reckless of you to shake Neal who had been assigned to watch you during the afternoon. He said if Hippo Belkes had had any idea that you would pull a stunt like that they'd have got you."

"The captain shouldn't worry," Ruth replied. "I think I'm quite capable of protecting myself without any protection of any kind."

"You're wrong, Ruth," Sawyer said earnestly. "I don't think Hippo will make a move at you as long as he's convinced that you're covered by us. But he'd have a try at you if he thought you weren't. Now I'll have to phone the old man. He told me to let him know the moment you showed here. I expect he'll come roaring out here right away."

"You just tell him to save it till morning," Ruth chuckled. "Tell him I'm tired and I'm going right to bed." She opened the door of the apartment and went in. But before she closed the door she called out to Sawyer. "I called the captain's office a while ago but he wasn't in. Left word that I was on my way here. So I guess he won't be so excited about it now."

Ruth locked her door. She was tired. In ten minutes she was in bed. But she hadn't had time to fall asleep when the knocks came on her door. She got out of bed. She quickly picked up the leg harness and strapped the gun on her left leg. She took the little automatic that she carried in her purse and held it in her right hand as she went to the

door. She smiled a little sheepishly at the thought that she was taking unnecessary precautions. Sawyer probably had a message for her from Captain Mack. The raps came again on the door.

"I'm up," she called out. "Who is it?"

"Sawyer," came the answer.

She opened the door. She opened it with due caution, just an inch or so. She opened it with her left hand and she had the little automatic in her right hand. She didn't get a chance to use it with any degree of accuracy. She shot once, just an instant after something hit her in the face. It wasn't a solid object. It was like fine sand—or a spray. She was blinded instantly and her eyes stung.

She tried to get the door closed but she had no chance against the two men who were pushing it open. They had her gun hand and were pushing her back into the apartment, at the same time slapping a strip of adhesive over her mouth so she couldn't scream. She had to give up the gun. They pushed her down on the bed. She pulled the robe that she had thrown about her when she had first got up more closely to her body.

"Drag that dick in here," she heard one of the men say. "We'll lock him in the joint. Then you go down and get the car and drive it right in front. I'll give you three minutes after you leave to get the car in front. I'll have her down there on the second and we'll get away from here fast. Hurry it up!"

She couldn't see but she knew that one of the men went out into the hall and dragged Sawyer in. That same man went right out again.

"Just take it easy and you won't get slapped around," the man with her said. "You'll walk out and down the stairs when I say so. You don't and I'll crack you on the head and carry you down."

Ruth knew that was no idle threat. When, after two minutes, the man pushed her, she walked docilely out of the apartment and down to the street. She heard the car moving in to the curb.

She climbed in with a rough assist, fell on the cushions of the rear seat. The car moved out at once.

After a moment she tried to open her eyes. Her eyes stung and tears blinded her but she could see lights. She put her head down and blinked her eyes, letting the tears roll down her cheeks until her vision cleared a little. When she tried a second time she knew her vision was clearing. And, after ten minutes, when she could see a little, she knew the car was heading for the river.

She still couldn't identify the street when the car at last stopped but she was fairly sure, when they pulled her out of the car, that they were going to enter that old house on Front Street. They went up the short steps and entered the house, went on up a flight of stairs and down a hall to a room that was at the rear of the house.

THAT room was lighted and two men were waiting there. One of them was grinning delightedly. He was a squat, barrel-chested man with long arms and she knew at a glance that it was Hippo Belkes. Hippo motioned and they pushed her down on a wooden chair.

"It went off all right, Max?" Hippo asked.

"It was a cinch," the man who had ushered Ruth in said with a grin. "It worked out just like we figured. I was wearin' that cap and carryin' that big bundle of laundry when I went up the stairs to that second floor where her apartment is. This gumshoe is standin' there and I just nod and smile to him as I go by. I ain't never been tabbed with your mob so he don't recognize me at all. I go on down the hall and leave that bundle of laundry in front of a door.

"When I come back this dick don't even give me a look. I just take two steps over on my toes and sock him and he goes down without a sound. I frisk him and find from an envelope in his pocket that his name is Sawyer. This fluff falls for it and opens the door

when I rap and give his name. She had a gat in her hand and she manages to shoot once before we duck under and grab her as we blind her. I worry a little about that shot but nobody shows before I hustle her out and down to the car. We got away in good shape. We both looked good. No tails. We got here clean with her."

"Good enough, Max," Hippo said heartily. Then he turned and fixed his small vicious eyes on Ruth.

"It's your tough luck, baby," he said. "You was just in the wrong spot when you stepped out from that stairway and saw Nick Garvos get his. That rat won't never hold out on us again. You saw too much, baby. Your number went up right then. Why, we could have bumped you on the street easy enough, any time. Them dumb cops must be crazy to let you parade around the streets like you did. We had a man on you most of the time. And Max could have bumped you right there in your apartment a while ago. But we got other plans."

He paused as though expecting Ruth to say something. Then he remembered that her mouth was taped and shrugged.

"Yeah, we could have got you almost any time," Hippo went on. "With you out of the way the cops can't pin a murder rap on us for fixin' Nick Garvos. And they ain't goin' to pin any murder rap on us for fixin' you, either. They ain't even goin' to get a chance to prove that you're dead. That's the reason we brought you here, baby, instead of givin' you the lead right there when you opened your door."

Hippo's grin widened. He leaned forward and leveled a forefinger at Ruth. "Baby," he said, "what you need is a new pair of shoes."

Ruth didn't get the portent of that remark. She just continued to stare.

"Yeah, you need a new pair of shoes, baby," he repeated jovially. "And when we give a dame like you a new pair of shoes we don't go in for any cheap stuff. That cheap stuff wears out too quick. The shoes we're goin' to give you will

last you a long time. A long, long time. All right, Max. You and Tony go down in the basement and mix up a nice batch of cement."

Ruth's eyes dilated and she couldn't conceal the horror that showed in her eyes. Hippo had a nice sense of humor. What she was going to get was a pair of concrete shoes. They'd put her feet in concrete and let it set. Then they'd throw her in the river and she'd sink to the bottom—and stay there for a long time. From Hippo's point of view, that would fix everything. The only witness to the Nick Garvos kill would be gone and yet the cops wouldn't be able to prove that she was dead. Even if the cops caught Hippo later they'd have a hard time proving anything that approached a murder rap.

Hippo Belkes, of course, would get a bad shock when he discovered that they had put the cement shoes on the wrong girl and that the real Mona Grimm was still alive. But that thought was only scant comfort to Ruth Lance. She knew her own chances were very slim. The windows of this rear room, she was sure, were flush with the river's edge below. They'd mix a tub of cement and water in the basement, bring it up here, put her feet in it, let the stuff set. Then all they'd have to do would be raise a window and heave her out. She'd hit the water, sink to the bottom and stay there.

"Baby doesn't need any shoes," Ruth thought. "Not this baby—and not that kind of shoes."

Ruth was thinking a lot more—and furiously—as Max and Tony went into the hall and disappeared from her sight. She was left alone in the room with Hippo Belkes. She still had a gun, but it was strapped at the inside of her left leg and adept as she knew she was at drawing it she also knew that Hippo Belkes could grab her or get a gun on her before she could get that gun in her hand.

HIPPO BELKES was watching her taut, pale face and he was enjoy-

ing what he thought was her obvious terror. "Yep, baby," he said. "That new pair of shoes—you're goin' to get 'em quick. Did I tell you they'd be water-proof? Well, they will. You won't get your feet wet and catch cold. We don't want you to get a cold or the flu? Now ain't that nice of us?"

Ruth swayed in her chair and her eyelids fluttered and almost closed. Hippo grinned widely. "Go ahead, kid," he said. "A good faint won't hurt you none. You got a nice soft floor to fall on. Go ahead and keel over."

Ruth swayed still more. She put her hands out uncertainly as though she were trying to catch hold of something. Then she slid to the floor. Her right leg was stretched out straight but her left leg seemed to be twisted so that the knee was near her breast. She moaned and seemed to shudder. Then she rolled over until she was facing Hippo.

Hippo didn't see the gun until it was pointing straight at his heart. He half rose from his chair and his hand moved about three inches.

"Go ahead, Hippo," Ruth said grimly. "Just try to get to your gun. Then you'll forget all about cement shoes with a hole in your heart."

Hippo looked into her eyes and he didn't like what he saw there. He lowered himself back into the chair and his hand came back to rest on his thigh.

"You made one bad error, Hippo," Ruth taunted him. "You were sure you had snatched Mona Grimm, a helpless five-and-ten girl. But I'm not Mona Grimm. I'm just a stooge that Captain Mack put in Mona's place while he hid her out. And I'm not a helpless stooge, Hippo. I'm a dick myself and I know how to use a gun. I'm going to walk out of here now. I don't think I'll have any trouble because you are going to walk in front of me and if your boys try anything, you get it! Get up! Walk out through that door. Down the hall—slowly, then out the front door. If there's anyone in our way you'd better think fast and get them out of the way!"

Hippo moved. He got to his feet and walked to the door, went into the hall and started to walk slowly toward the stairs. Ruth reasoned that she had plenty of time, that Max and Tony would be in the basement for several minutes. She thought there was a fourth man somewhere on the premises. He might be stationed in front of the old house as a lookout.

Ruth hadn't taken more than a step into the hall behind Hippo before she saw that she had been mistaken. Tony and Max appeared at the head of the stairs, carrying a big tub. They dropped that tub as they saw Hippo and Ruth. They weren't slow thinkers, Max and Tony, and Ruth had been very wrong in believing that Hippo Belkes could be used as a safe shield for herself. When the chips were down like this, it was every man for himself and the two mobsters had no intention of letting Ruth walk out of the house alive, regardless of the consequences to Hippo.

The two men drew guns and started shooting down the hall. Ruth leaped back into the room at the first shot. Hippo tried to turn but he couldn't make it. Caught in the hail of lead he went down and he didn't move again.

Ruth slammed the door of the room shut, reached out and turned the key that was in the lock. The door splintered as bullets struck it. Even with Hippo out of the way Ruth knew that the odds would be against her when they shot the lock out of that door or battered it down and came in after her. And from the shouts and commotion that she heard she concluded that there would be more than three of them after her. From the roar of guns and flying splinters it seemed that there might be any number of men out there in the hall.

Ruth was away from the line of fire, standing by one of the rear windows. Someone was beating on the door now. Ruth raised the window. She could see only blackness below. She hoped that she hadn't miscalculated in thinking that this window was flush with the

river's edge. She had to take the chance anyway. In seconds that quivering door would fly inward and they would pile into the room and start blazing away.

Ruth was poised on the sill. She leaped just as the door flew open. Her last glimpse, a little late, was of the face of Captain Mack. It flashed through her mind that it would be a tragic joke if she landed on a stone or concrete area-way instead of water. But she didn't. Her feet parted water and she went down and down. Then she used her arms and legs and kicked herself back up to the surface again.

She saw a light at the end of the next street near the water's edge and swam toward it. Two cops waiting there reached down and pulled her up over the stone wall to the street. They walked to Front Street. Captain Mack came out of the house as they reached it. He gasped his relief at the sight of Ruth.

"You must have gone crazy," he said to Ruth. "Taking a dive like that when you saw me coming into that room."

"I saw you too late, Captain," Ruth explained to him. "I thought it was the mob coming in after me. I didn't know cops had come in."

"Right after you phoned me, left the word about this house for me, I had it covered," Mack said. "It all busted at once. Report that a woman had been hustled into this place. Then Sawyer came to, got to a phone and reported. We closed in on the place as fast as we could with every available man. We got upstairs, found three of them blazing away at a door with Hippo dead on the floor in the hall. We cleaned them out, kicked in the door of that room in time to see you going out the window. You hurt, Ruth?"

"No," she said shivering. "But that water was cold."

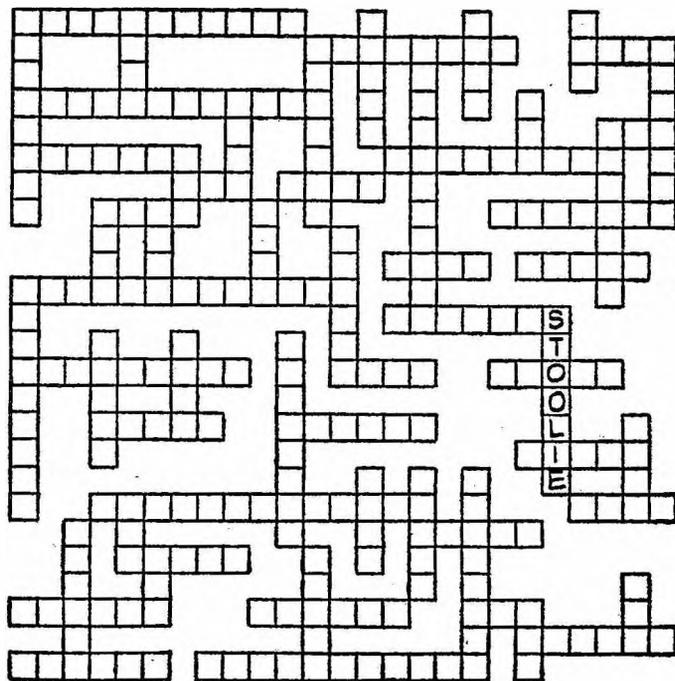
"We'll get you some clothes," Captain Mack said quickly. "And some socks and—"

"Don't say it, Captain!" she cut in with a wide smile. "The last thing this baby needs is a new pair of shoes!"

PUZZLE PAGE

SKELETON PUZZLE

THE words given below all fit into this skeletal framework, like flesh on bones—if you can find the proper places for them. One word is already in place. As an added clue, to start you on this interesting bit of reconstruction, note that there is only one 12-letter word.



3-Letter Words

- | | |
|-----|------|
| Ace | Clew |
| Bet | Dope |
| Gun | Fake |
| Hot | Hang |
| Lam | Jail |
| Nab | Jury |
| Out | Lock |
| Pug | Mask |
| Rap | Riot |
| Spy | Rope |

4-Letter Words

- | | |
|------|------|
| Bail | Safe |
| Bank | Tail |
| | Vice |

5-Letter Words

- Alibi
- Badge
- Blood
- Choke
- Fence
- Grand
- Judge
- Money
- Nitro
- Scram

- Robber
- Rub out
- Trusty

7-Letter Words

- Dollars
- Foreman
- Getaway
- Numbers
- Stoolie
- Stripes
- Witness

9-Letter Words

- Courtroom
- Detective
- Racetrack

11-Letter Words

- Counterfeit
- Fingerprint
- Lie detector

12-Letter Word

- Manslaughter

13-Letter Words

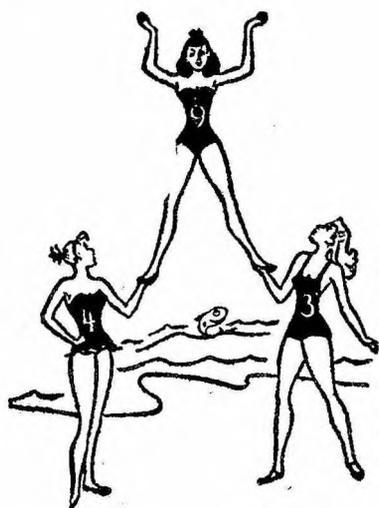
- Chiller diller
- Electric chair

6-Letter Words

- Corpse
- Escape
- Indict
- Murder

8-Letter Words

- Criminal
- Flatfoot
- Prisoner
- Sentence



← BEACH ATHLETES

TYPICAL beach athletes, if we ever saw them!

They stack up pretty nicely, too. The only complaint is that the arrangement of numerals reads 493. And, as any cut-rate numerologist can tell you, a number not exactly divisible by 7 isn't exactly propitious.

Simple enough, then! Rearrange the three girls so they form a number exactly divisible by 7.

ONE *Stormy* NIGHT



*First,
they found the
warm corpse, and
then, behind them,
they heard
the splashing
footsteps of the killer!*

by **PEIRSON RICKS**

IN the first place, they had waited too late to get started. They regretted it now—now that they faced the night and the storm and the unfamiliar road through the mountains—now that they had a tense, tiresome journey to endure. Fifty miles to go, and it was already past midnight!

They had had plenty of warning about the storm, too. But it had been

such a pleasant weekend—three delightful days with Frank and Letty at their cottage in the Smokies—that they had been reluctant to leave, and had put it off too long. If only Allen hadn't had to be at work first thing tomorrow morning.

The rain thudded in gusty sheets against the old sedan; the windshield-wipers thumped disconsolately.

"You're tired, aren't you, Irene?" said Allen, patting her hand, glancing for a moment at his wife. Her eyelids drooped, her quiet young face looked wan in the dim light from the dashboard.

At that instant she started, her eyes staring straight ahead. "Allen! Look out!" she cried.

He glanced hastily to the road, and saw black nothingness looming in the headlights. He swung the car sharply as the highway made a hairpin turn. He exhaled noisily. "Whew! These mountain roads!"

"You keep your eyes front," she admonished him uneasily.

The lightning flashed eerily, revealing through the streaming panes of the windshield a landscape of towering rocks and dense roadside shrubbery that tossed and billowed violently. The road wound and bent back upon itself, twisting crazily.

They had been driving for about a half an hour when Allen complained: "The car's not pulling right. It seems sluggish." Then he noticed the temperature gauge. He gave a low whistle. Irene glanced at him, vaguely anxious.

"These mountain roads," he continued in an exasperated tone. "The water's boiling. This old second-hand boat wasn't built for mountain climbing."

"But it didn't do that coming up," she said. "And now we're going downhill most of the time."

Allen scowled as he thought it over. "But something's wrong," he said in a worried voice.

"Maybe it's—" she hesitated. "That's the way it acted last spring," she said faintly. "You know, when we had trouble with the—" she didn't want to say it—"the water pump."

"I was just remembering that," Allen said grimly.

A few moments later the car sputtered and gave a little cough, and then they heard the ominous grumbling and hissing from the radiator.

"That's what it is," said Allen in a low, tired voice. "The water pump."

VIOLENTLY the car began to jerk. The motor coughed and actually

seemed to retch. Then it died. In the abrupt silence, they could hear the howling of the wind in the mountain hollows. Under the lash of the driving rain, the still car shook and shuddered. While the radiator groaned and heaved, the sedan filled up with a dry, acrid stench.

They stared at each other, aghast. Irene's face looked so desolate that Allen reached out and put his arm around her and drew her to him. "It's all right," he said gently, patting her shoulder. "We'll work out of it somehow. I'll start coasting. First thing you know, we'll come to a filling station and find a mechanic and be on our way in a jiffy." He tried to make his voice sound cheerful and reassuring. He was far from feeling that way himself.

"Find a filling station?" she said in a voice that sounded as though she was about to cry. "Open?—at this time of night? Oh, Allen! The few places we've passed, houses and filling stations—they're all dark. Everything! We've met only one car since we left. What will we do?"

"We'll coast. We'll find something. You wait and see."

He released the clutch and the car moved slowly down the gradual incline, the radiator thrashing and rumbling. They followed the crooking highway, rounding quick curves, swishing through the rain. From time to time, the lightning shuddered in vivid bluish flashes.

They crept round a sheer face of granite, where the road had been blasted from the living rock, and there below them in the distance, near the end of a long serpentine slope, they saw a wonderfully cheering sight. It was a tiny filling station, perched on the side of the mountain, its windows and doorway ablaze with friendly light.

"Oh!" sighed Irene, suddenly relaxing. She glanced at Allen and their eyes met and they laughed with relief. "It's too good to be true!" she exclaimed.

The car coasted into a deep S curve and the filling station disappeared from view, cut off by the projecting cliffs.

When the car came back and rounded the bend a half minute later, the friendly lights had vanished. Out there below them lay only a solid pool of blackness.

"Oh, no!" cried Irene. "No!"

"We'll hurry," said Allen quickly. "We'll catch them. Don't worry. They probably live nearby—they may even have quarters in the filling station." He let out the brake and the car rolled faster and faster.

They skidded to a stop under the shed of the darkened filling station. Allen hurriedly rummaged in the glove compartment and found the flashlight. Then he stepped from the car and, picking his way among the muddy rivulets, crossed to the closed door of the building. He rapped sharply on the panel with his knuckles, then paused, his head cocked to one side, listening. He could hear no sounds except the steady drumming of the rain on the roof, except the mournful gurgling of the water in the gutters.

He knocked again, louder. Then he rattled the knob. To his astonishment, he felt the door give. It swung slowly inward, its hinges creaking dismally. He poked his head through the doorway and called into the darkness: "Hello! Hello in there!"

He heard nothing but the ringing echo of his own voice. Then he snapped on the flashlight and played its beam about the room. The spot of light slid over the cold drink cooler, past a tilted crate of empty bottles, past a stack of dark new tires, over the cash register and the shelves. He paused. Suddenly he brought the light back to the cash register. The chromium trim of the machine glinted brightly. The cash drawer protruded, its compartments gaping darkly. Allen stepped quietly into the room.

He saw it suddenly and threw the beam to the floor. There, sprawled grotesquely in a corner, was the collapsed body of a burly man. Allen gasped. He stood there.

The man's head hung limply forward on his chest. The light exposed a glistening bald spot, fringed by a sparse growth of reddish hair. He was in his shirtsleeves. He didn't move. Allen took a short, involuntary step forward. Then, on the man's shirt, he glimpsed a soggy crimson stain. The next instant he smelled a faint trace of gunpowder in the air.

He suddenly wanted to flee, to get out of there fast. With a powerful effort, he

forced himself to cross the room and touch that dreadful figure, feel its pulse. The man was warm. But he was dead.

Allen straightened up and in three strides had crossed to the door. He slammed it behind him. He moved swiftly to the car and scrambled in.

"Why, Allen! What's the matter?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," he said hoarsely. He turned the switch, pressed the starter. With a prayer of thankfulness, he heard the motor start. He threw it in gear and tore out into the highway. Then he cut the engine and let the car coast swiftly.

Allen held his eyes to the road; his lips clamped shut tightly. He was acutely conscious of Irene's face turned toward him, tensely inquiring. He knew perfectly well it was no use trying to keep it from her. She understood him too thoroughly for that.

"Allen!" she said. "Something's wrong. What happened?"

"Nothing happened," he said. He paused. "It's what I saw. There's a man in there—dead."

"Dead?" she whispered in an unbelieving voice.

He nodded curtly. "Shot. Just a few minutes ago. He's still warm."

"Oh!" she gasped, pressing her hands to her cheeks.

"Our problem now is to get as far as possible away from here. Whoever did it may still be nearby. He may have seen us stop there."

A HUNDRED yards below the filling station the road went into another of its intermindable curves, hugging the face of a vertical cliff. The car began to slow down noticeably as the highway leveled off. They lost speed rapidly. And suddenly, at the same instant, they both understood that the road was beginning to climb.

They looked at each other, the cold dread shining in their eyes. Neither one said a word.

Allen reached down and turned on the switch. He started the motor. "Maybe she'll pull till we get over the next hump," he said in a dry voice.

The incline grew steeper. They hadn't gone far before they saw they were not going to make it. They could hear the

water beginning to churn in the radiator. And then the car was coughing and sputtering, moving in explosive jerks. And then it stopped.

"What'll we do now, Allen?" she said in a low voice.

"Sit here. Wait till the motor cools. Then try it again."

He switched off the lights. They sat there in total darkness, listening to the dreary downpour. From time to time, abrupt sheets of lightning lit up the gaunt peaks and glittered on the winding road.

"Allen," said Irene suddenly, "I'm afraid. Let's lock the car doors."

They snapped the front door latches. Allen turned, and with one knee on the seat, reached over to fasten the doors in the rear. As he did so, there was a brilliant flash of lightning. Through the rear glass, sharp and distinct as in a photograph, he saw, not fifty yards away, a man approaching.

"Somebody's coming!" he said. "A man—coming up the road behind us!" He snapped the latches and sat down quickly. He turned on the lights.

Irene stared at him; she clutched his arm. "But where did he come from?"

"I don't know. The road was empty a few minutes ago. I don't remember seeing any paths. There were a few clumps of bushes, and that patch of mountain laurel beyond the curve. A person would be out of sight there."

And then, above the sounds of the storm, they could hear footsteps rapidly approaching on the pavement. They saw a shadowy, moving shape appear on the driver's side. And then a face was peering through the window. It was a broad, thick face, blunt and brutal, with staring pale blue eyes. The man's sun-burned cheeks and jaws were covered with a sandy stubble.

He rapped on the glass. The water poured in steady rivulets from the drooping brim of his shapeless felt hat. He was hunched up and shivering in a blue jean jacket that was sopping wet.

"What do you want?" called Allen. He lowered the window slightly—a bare inch.

"You having car trouble?" said the man. His voice was coarse. He examined them with those wide pale eyes.

"It heats up," said Allen. "I think it's the water pump."

The man grunted. "I know something 'bout cars," he said. "I can take a look at it if you got a flashlight."

Allen hesitated. Then he took the flashlight from the glove compartment and, lowering the window a little more, passed it out to the stranger.

"Do you live nearby?" said Allen.

"Up the road a piece." The man pointed vaguely.

"Do you have a telephone?"

The man shook his head. He stared a long moment into Allen's face. "Ain't a phone in five or six miles of here," he said roughly. He went up front and, lifting the hood, bent over and began to flash the light about inside.

"I don't like his looks," whispered Irene suddenly.

"Neither do I," said Allen. "He could be doing us a service, and then again, he could be—" He didn't finish it. "At any rate, we're not going to unlock the car while he's here. And I'm not going to mention what I saw in the filling station. Not to anybody—till we find a telephone."

Soon the man came back. He stood there, peering in. "I could fix what's wrong in a little bit. If you'll coast back to the foot of the hill, I can step up to the filling station and get what I need." He watched them fixedly.

"That filling station is closed," said Allen. "It was dark when we came by."

THE pale eyes wavered. A petulant, unpleasant look flickered across the man's hard face.

"The feller that runs it lives in the back. I'll wake him up an' get what I need."

Allen shook his head. "Thanks a lot," he said. "But I think we'll just sit here. We've gotten this far, and I don't want to coast back. If you'll hand me my flashlight now—" He rolled down the window a little and reached up to the opening.

But the man didn't hand him the flashlight. "What's the matter?" said the man in a low voice. "Don't you think I can fix it?"

"It's not that," said Allen pleasantly, "and I appreciate your offering to help."

But we'd rather just sit here till a car comes along. So if you'll hand me my flashlight now—"

The man suddenly tried the handle of the front door, then the rear door.

He peered in again, his eyes blazing. "All right," he said roughly. "Sit there, then! You can sit there till kingdom come for all I care!" He laughed harshly. Then he turned, and went striding off into the stormy blackness in the direction from which he had come.

"Allen!" whispered Irene. "He's got our flashlight!"

"He can keep the damned flashlight," said Allen, twisting around, staring through the rear window. "It's worth a dozen flashlights to get rid of him. I don't like that bird at all!" He craned his neck. "There he goes! He's using the flashlight. He's heading down the hill fast."

He watched till the man had disappeared around the bend in the road. Then he snapped on the switch and started the car up again. But they didn't go far.

When the car had jerked to a stop, Allen turned to his wife. "Irene," he said quietly, taking her hand, "I think we ought to get away from this neighborhood—quick. There's only one way to do it. We'll have to get out in the rain, and walk—walk fast." He squeezed her hand. She pressed her face against his shoulder. She was trembling.

"All right," she said.

"We'll stop in at the first house we find. Or flag down a car if one comes along. But the main thing right now is to get away from here. When we stopped at that filling station, we stepped out of our secure little world. We stepped into something dangerous. I think we'd better hurry."

Allen quickly skinned out of his coat and handed it to his wife. "Put this on," he directed. He plucked off her hat and tossed it to the back seat. He slapped his panama loosely on her head. He removed the ignition key and, when they had stepped out into the chill, driving downpour, cut off the car lights and locked the door.

Then he gripped her arm. Leaning into the wind, staggering and stumbling, they began to dig against the slope.

They hadn't gone a half dozen steps before they were drenched to the skin. The icy rain lashed them and the wind shoved and pummeled. Doggedly they fought the slope and elements, oblivious of any thought, any purpose, but that of keeping moving. The entire object of existence was to conquer that hostile incline and find the easier going of the downhill grade.

They blundered about in the pitchy darkness, using the edge of the pavement for their guide. They lost all sense of time.

After a while they rounded a bluff that shielded them from the direct force of wind and driving rain. From that point, progress was easier. But they were tired and shivering, and panting heavily.

Much later, they felt freer. They seemed to be walking with less effort. A flash of lightning showed them they had passed the crest. The road before them, as far as they could see, was downgrade.

But so far they had met no car, had found no habitation.

LITTLE by little, the rain had let up some and the angry wind abated. A mild, barely perceptible glow seemed to light the falling raindrops, and for a few moments they imagined the moon must be struggling through a rift in the black overcast. But when they glanced around, they saw behind them the distant headlights of a car, far above, winding along the face of the cliff.

They stopped. "Oh, Allen, thank heavens!" Irene caught his arm and clung to him tightly. "I just don't believe I could have gone much farther."

Allen put his wet arm around her. They stood there, shivering and bedraggled, watching the headlight come nearer. In the sudden relief they felt, they were almost gay.

When the car was a hundred yards or so away, they moved out into the highway, into the full beam of the headlights, and began to wave their arms.

They felt like singing as the two blinding spots of light moved slowly toward them. Then the lights were alongside, and the dim dark shape of the car loomed out of the darkness. The car stopped, the sound of its motor welling

up comfortingly. The door was flung open, and a husky voice said shortly: "Climb in."

Irene had already raised one foot to the running board, with Allen just behind, his hand on her elbow, when she gasped. Allen felt her body go tense. Then, over her shoulder, he saw. There, looking at them, faintly illuminated by the dim lights from the dashboard, was the broad rough face of the man who had offered to work on their car.

"You didn't think I could fix it, did you?" said the man. "Well, I did. Climb in."

"Why this is our car!" said Irene in an agitated voice. She looked back at her husband, her eyes wide and frightened. "Allen! What—?" She finished the question with her eyes.

Allen didn't know what to make of it. He stared at the man.

"Well, are you gonna get in, or ain't you?" said the man in a sharp, impatient voice. "I already done spent more time than I ought to on you two. I fixed your car, didn't I? Well, if you want your car, crawl in, so I can get home. I want to go to bed sometime tonight."

"Well—" gasped Irene uncertainly. She looked at Allen again. He gave her a reassuring little pat. He suddenly felt like a fool. What a stupid pair they must seem, standing there, bedraggled and weary, soaked to the skin. They had misjudged the man.

The man got out and Allen slid over behind the wheel. Irene slipped in beside him.

"Don't let it choke down," warned the man. "I had to do a little trick on the ignition to start it. You can't turn it off, but you can choke it." He crawled into the back seat. "Now, if you'll just drive me home, I'll change the ignition back, an' you can get on your way."

"We owe you an apology," said Allen humbly as they rode along. "You'll never know how much we appreciate this."

"Forget it," grunted the man. Allen could see the staring, pale blue eyes watching him in the rear-view mirror. "You better start slowing down. At the foot of this slope is where you turn off to take me home."

The turn-off appeared from a thicket of rhododendron. It was a narrow, for-

bidding path, and if it had not been for the debt of gratitude they owed their passenger, Allen would have hesitated before attempting it.

But he turned in readily at the man's direction, and they found themselves climbing a steep, rocky road, swaying and jolting, the sides of the car brushed by dripping branches. When a wet mass of leaves whipped in through the driver's open window, Allen tried to roll up the glass. But no glass appeared.

"I had to break the window," said the man softly. "You locked the car."

"Oh," said Allen. He stared ahead thoughtfully, scowling a little.

"I knew you wouldn't mind," went on the man. "I knew you'd rather have the car. Hadn't you?"

"Oh, sure."

"You see, the trouble was only a busted fan belt. It wasn't the water pump at all. All I had to do was get a new fan belt. Then I installed it. That was all."

"A new fan belt?" said Allen in a low voice. "Where did you find one?"

"At the filling station," said the man. "Where else would I find one?"

HIS voice seeming to fail him, Allen didn't reply immediately. He gripped the steering wheel tightly. He could feel chill drops of perspiration popping out on his forehead. From the side of his eye he could see Irene sitting tense and rigid, gazing straight ahead.

"Of course," said Allen finally, in a dry, flat voice. "Of course."

"You see, the old man that runs the filling station knows me. I do a lot of work for him, fixin' cars. So he didn't mind gettin' up—not for me. He was glad to let me have the fan belt."

As he talked, the man had leaned forward further and further, till now his face was just behind them, hovering near the back of the seat.

"He wasn't a bad old man, except for his temper. He used to curse me like I was a mule. Sometimes I couldn't hardly stand it. Another thing—he was a regular tightwad, never would pay me what I was worth. But he didn't mind givin' me the fan belt. Me'n him is on good terms now." In the mirror, the pale eyes glittered brightly.

They came over the crest of the steep slope and lurched into a clearing. The headlights picked out a tumbledown, weatherbeaten old house, its porch sagging, its windowpanes broken. It looked as though it hadn't been lived in for a decade. The road ended in the unkempt weed-grown dooryard. Beyond the house rose the shadowy shapes of outbuildings.

"Here we are," said the man very softly. "The end of the road. Pull up to the door."

Allen drew up as directed. His hands were shaking slightly.

"Now that we're here, I'll tell you something," said the man, speaking very slowly, very distinctly. "When I went back to the filling station after the fan belt, I saw fresh car tracks under the shed. Those tracks weren't there when I was in the place just a little bit earlier. That's mighty strange, ain't it?"

Suddenly the man stepped out on the lefthand side and flung open the front door—the one by Allen. The man had a pistol in his hand. They sat there, motionless, gazing straight into the barrel.

"You thought you'd cross me up, didn't you?" he said roughly. "Well, so did the old man. You saw what happened to him, didn't you?"

He paused a moment, and let that sink in. The car motor purred softly. "Now get out," he murmured in a low, hard voice. "Both of you. In the beginning I only wanted your car to get away in. But now—" He stopped. "Get out!" he snarled.

Allen saw the man and heard his coarse, rasping voice, as in a horrid nightmare. It wasn't real! This couldn't be happening to them. But as the man spoke, Allen's unsteady hand had inched toward the gearshift, had touched the knob. Now, with a wild prayer, he thrust the lever, pressed the gas. The car plunged, as a leap of flame spurted with a sharp crack. On the glass of the windshield a shivered design appeared like a splattered cobweb.

The car lurched crazily, the wheels thumping and sliding. They skidded round the corner of the house, barely missing an old stump. They went jolting and swaying across the rough, uneven yard, dodging the superstructure

of a well. Allen didn't know where they were going or which way to turn. Suddenly the headlights picked out the entrance to a lane leading toward the outbuildings, and he headed for that.

The lane was thick with mud and crisscrossed with eroded gulleys. The car went bumping down it, slipping and sliding. It was a short lane. At the end, sharply defined in the headlights, was the gate to the fenced-in barnlot. The gate was closed.

Allen slapped on the brakes, but the car skidded on. As they smacked into the crude framework, the rear end whipped around and thudded into the wet earth of the ditchbank. The motor coughed and died. And all was silent.

"Out of the car!" cried Allen. "Quick!"

They tumbled out, and in the bright gleam of the headlights, panting and gasping, were trying to climb the swaying wire fence of the lot. Behind them, on the lane, they could hear the splashing footsteps coming fast.

"Hurry!" cried Allen, helping her. "Hurry!"

Then Irene was over, and Allen, the wire biting into his hands, was clambering after her. "Run!" he panted, catching her arm. They fled across the lot.

WITH an appalled feeling, Allen suddenly realized they wouldn't have time to climb the fence on the other side. They were hemmed in. And the lot was lit up in every corner by the diffused glow from the headlights.

Up the lot was the barn, a gaunt log structure with a caved-in roof. Its gaping doorway offered haven. They turned and raced frantically for it. They flung themselves over the threshold, and the darkness closed about them. Irene clung to him—she was trembling violently.

The light from the car shone dimly through the wide chinks between the logs. As their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, they could faintly make out the interior. It was bare, with a shadowy heap near the center that seemed to be rotten shingles that had tumbled from the collapsed roof. There were no other openings.

At that instant, the lights from the car flicked off, and they were in total

darkness. Then the beam from the flashlight caught the doorway and held there. They heard the scraping of the gate as the man pushed it open.

They started to cross the room, but stepped back quickly, feeling the rotten floorboards sag with a warning crackle.

"Keep close to the wall," whispered Allen hoarsely. "We'll slip around behind the pile of shingles."

They crept along the wall, moving fast. Through the chinks they could see the flashlight growing brighter, coming closer. Allen tested the floor—he located a crossbeam. They crept out along it and squatted down, with the heap of old shingles between them and the door. He found her hand and pressed it. The light snapped off.

Suddenly, through the door, the light flashed on again and the beam darted the length of the wall across from the entrance. Then, abruptly, darkness again. Now Allen could see starkly how it was going to be. The man would ease himself through the doorway, gun ready, and suddenly flash the light along the other wall. Then he would know. He would creep out to the pile of shingles and the light would find them. The gun would shoot twice—

Then, near the door, Allen heard a soft sound, and he knew the man had stepped inside. Allen leaned quickly to Irene, and pressed his mouth to her ear. "Follow me," he said softly. "Catch my hand." He slipped along the beam, skirting the heap of shingles. Grimly, very quietly, he crossed over to the front wall and started edging toward the door. They would make a dash for it and meet fate head-on—not huddle in fear, waiting for it to find them.

At that instant, Irene's hand was snatched from his. Behind him there was the harsh crackling of rending timbers—a scuffling thump. The light—not ten feet away—flashed toward the noise. There was a momentary glimpse of Irene on all-fours in a patch of brightness, as Allen leaped blindly, diving toward the light. His arms hugged unseen legs and the gun fired as they went tumbling. The light darted wildly across walls and ceiling and then went spinning through the air!

Now they rolled over and over, gasping, grunting. They struggled in fierce desperation, flailing and punching. Then thick fingers found his throat and clamped down tightly. The room swirled dizzily, but even as he gasped desperately for air, twisting and squirming, Allen was thankful. The man had lost the gun.

The faint light grew suddenly brighter. There was a neat whacking sound and the hands on his throat relaxed. The man collapsed limply and rolled over.

Allen looked up, and there, standing over him, with the flashlight in one hand and the pistol—gripped by the barrel like a hammer—in the other, was Irene. . . !

They tied up the man with strips torn from his own blue denim jacket. They left him lying on the floor and went over and sat wearily in the doorway. Irene rested her head on Allen's shoulder while she massaged her bruised and aching shins. She shivered a little and he put his arm around her.

"We'll wait here till the sun comes up," he said in a comforting voice. "Then we'll go for help." ●

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Cabin For Two

by ROBERT ALDRICH

THE SANDY road off the highway wound up in a series of hairpin curves. This was good country. The pines, warming in the morning sun, gave off a sharp, sweet odor.

The smell took my mind off the girl lying back there in the brush, the marks ugly on her slender throat, mud caking her soft yel-

low hair. I wanted to park and go up there to the little streams where Harry Malek and I used to hook rainbow. I'd take a four-ounce rod and a dry fly and make a few practice casts. I'd see a splash in the stream somewhere and I'd hit slightly above the rise and let the stream take my fly right down over the spot and watch the trout

make silver arcs in the sun. . . .

I forced myself back to the present and swung the car onto the private road. I stopped in front of the log tavern where the sign said, *H. Malek, Cabins*. Back of it the mountain hovered, scarred and ugly, like the scenery in a bad dream. Down close by the lake was a row of cabins, empty now at the tail end of the season.

Somehow I was surprised to see her behind the bar, her back to me, her black hair touching the creamy tan of her shoulders. I stood there and looked at the messy tangle of Harry's fish lines hung on the wall, the spoons and hooks still in them. There were three tables with wireback chairs, the usual beer signs, and a jukebox. She saw the outline of my state trooper's hat in the mirror and turned.

"Hello, Jim."

"Morning, June." I felt the same warm goosepimples I always got at sight of her. Maybe the red skirt and white peasant blouse were for the tourists, but I liked them fine. I liked everything about her. Her black hair was longer, but the rest was the way I'd remembered. Wide dark eyes with something hidden and sad in them. Nice, firm eager breasts. I said, "Harry around?"

She shook her head. "He was gone all night." She couldn't keep the hurt look out of her eyes.

If she knew, I thought, the look would be careful, guarded. I said, "When did you see him last?"

"About five yesterday. I—I was frightened, Jim. He'd been drinking all day." She was turning pale. "What is it?"

MY OWN square, sunburned face glowered back at me from the mirror and I thought, go on, hit her with it.

"They found Esther Burns this morning in some bushes off the highway. Dead since about midnight, the Doc said. Somebody strangled her."

She blinked once, her lacquered nails digging into the bar. I could have told her about the man's dark green handkerchief wound around Esther's neck when she was found. Maybe it was my cop's brain warning me to trust nobody, not even her. In

Eagle Pass I'd found three people who said Harry was wearing the green handkerchief in the breast-pocket of his coat that same night.

"You know about Harry and Esther Burns," she said.

I knew. I knew they'd both been drinking at Beulah's place in Eagle Pass—though where they'd gone after that was not clear.

"He wouldn't do it," she said. It was as if she dared me to argue. "Maybe Harry's bad, but not like that."

I heard the noise and turned, glad somebody else had come in, even Monk Storm. He said, "Beer, Mrs. Malek," and raised his weasel face until his little cold eyes were on me. "Busy day, Trooper?"

"Busy enough." His eyes gave me an annoyed feeling.

"You ain't still sore, are you, Wallace?" he asked. He had a carefully polite way of talking and smiling, a manner he used on city people who liked flattery with their fish. He was a guide when he worked.

I shrugged, and Monk added, "I mean, you ain't still sore about me helping Harry beat that shooting charge? That was the truth I told the judge."

"Where's Harry?" I said.

Monk smiled. "Haven't seen him since yesterday."

"Where were you last night, Monk?"

"Home in bed."

"Not in Eagle Pass with Harry?" From the corner of my eye, I could see June stiffen.

Monk finished his beer, wiped his mouth. "I told you, Trooper. I haven't seen Harry for twenty-four hours."

"You never drank beer in the morning before, Monk. Go on, give her Harry's message. I know that's what you're here for!"

I walked out, sore—and sore at myself for showing it. I squinted at the sun, hating the day, and the thing that had brought me here.

I went down to the empty cabins. It was all June had left—thinking Harry was a great guy who had made a mistake or two. I remembered three years before when she came from Chicago to teach Plum Creek School. Harry and I both worked hard to act as if we weren't interested, and both

showed up wherever she was. It had hit me plenty hard when she married him. I knew it wasn't Monk that had me sore. It was seeing June still care what happened to Harry.

As I searched the cabins, I heard a whisper inside me. It said it stood to reason a woman like June wouldn't stick with a bum like Harry forever. And it said something else, louder. *Nobody will ask questions if you bring him in dead. Not after he killed that girl.*

I tried not to listen to that whisper, but I kept thinking about how I could do it and make it look like an accident or self-defense.

ALL MORNING I hung around, watching her wait on the occasional fishermen who dropped in. At noon she gave me a cold beef sandwich and a bottle of beer. She acted as if there were nothing between us—as if Harry were perhaps merely away on business. And I kept on getting madder about things.

When the clock over the bar said one, I told her I was heading back to Eagle Pass. She nodded, not saying anything. But I saw her watching from the tavern window when I backed the car out in the road. I drove around the curve, parked in some pine trees, and walked back, keeping out of sight.

It was only a few minutes until she came out, the handle of a basket over her arm.

I let her get quite a way ahead, up the steep, wooded slope. Once she looked back, and I was sure she had spotted me, but she apparently hadn't, for she kept right on. We must have gone on like that for ten minutes when I suddenly realized where Harry's hideout was.

I had never seen the cave, but I had heard about it years ago. Somebody built a still there during Prohibition days. It had to be around here somewhere.

The pines thinned out and I had to belly-flop back of a boulder. There was a rocky cliff with brush spotted in its crevices, the kind you see from the highway through your car window. She walked straight into the wall of the cliff and disappeared.

I blinked. There was a pile of rocks there that you'd think some avalanche had left,

but I saw now that somebody had spent a lot of time piling them up so they would look natural. They made a kind of screen in front of the cave. I never would have found it if I hadn't seen her go in.

Crouching there, I swore. Whoever was in that cave could see somebody approaching for fifty feet. A man with a gun could defend himself in there a long time.

I thought about grenades and tear gas and starving Harry out, but mostly I thought about June's eyes and her half-sad smile, and why did she stay loyal to him?

When she came out, I kept down low and let her go by. After a while, I yelled Harry's name. Then I shouted, "It's me, Jim Wallace!"

It was quiet so long I had about decided he wasn't there. Then he called out gruffly, "Yeah? What do you want?"

I peered up over the boulder, expecting to be winged by a bullet. "You willing to talk this over, Harry?"

He said, "Okay, Wallace. Come in."

I laughed. "You think I'm crazy? You come out here, with your hands in the air. Throw your gun ahead of you."

"I ain't got a gun, Jim." He came out then, slowly, his hands up over his head. He was big and dark and handsome, with something a little unhealthy in the fleshiness of his face. He saw me and grinned.

The Smith and Wesson .38 felt heavy in my hand. I said, "Harry, I don't like this, but I've got a job to do."

"Yeah. Wish we could forget it and go fishin' again. Huh, Jim?"

He was taking it better than I had figured. There was a glitter in his dark eyes, as if it were all a big joke. I started to slide my gun in my holster.

I bent to frisk him, and the only warning I had was the sudden savage glitter in his eyes. I didn't see the rock until he brought it crashing down on my head.

Waves of colored light danced jerkily in my eyes. All I knew then was I had a mouthful of dirt and something heavy and cruel was chopping into my face. Harry's boot. I tried to raise up, tried to grab the gun he'd pulled from his pocket. He lifted it out of my reach and it struck.

The sun blew up in my eyes then, and everything blacked out.

EVEN BEFORE I got my eyes open, I was saying to myself through the pain, "What kind of cop are you, falling for a sap trick like that?"

He'd had that rock in his hand when he came out of the cave, the hand turned slightly so I couldn't see it.

We had been friends once, and I thought that meant something, but it hadn't, and maybe that hurt worse than the ache in my head.

I got to my feet and cussed a while. My gun was gone, of course, and there was no sign of Harry. I added up the score. I had a rifle in my car, to hellangone down the road. He had two guns. He could be anywhere by now.

I went back down to the tavern. Harry's car was still in the shed, which surprised me. I found my own car where I'd left it, drove it back up the road, and locked it. I took my rifle and went inside.

June saw me—the bruises on my face where Harry's boot had struck, my torn khaki shirt—and her eyes grew big and scared. I knew it wasn't me she was worrying about and my old resentment flared up.

"Harry enjoy his lunch?" I asked bitterly.

She came around the bar and her long fingers were cool and tender on my arm. "Jim, don't hate me for wanting to help him."

"You'd be happy if he was the one who came in here now, and I was dead up there, wouldn't you?"

Her face went pale and it hit me that it sounded to her as if I'd killed Harry. To me, that proved one thing. He hadn't been back to see June since he crowned me with the rock.

I let her stew a minute, and then I said, "Harry's not dead. He's not even hurt. He got away."

She started breathing again and some color returned to her cheeks.

"His car's still here," I said. "He must have been scared to use the highway. That means he's in the brush somewhere. I'm go-

[Turn page]

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ing to find him, and this time I'm going to shoot on sight."

My mind hadn't been settled on that until I said it. Maybe I wanted to hurt her. I didn't know what I wanted. I was all mixed up.

She didn't say anything right away. She just looked at me, her eyes cold. Her eyes said that I wasn't Jim Wallace to her any more. I was the Law, a man with a gun and the power of life and death. The power of murder. Only they wouldn't call it murder. They'd have a brief, formal inquest and they'd say Trooper Wallace had killed a man in line of duty.

Her lips moved. "Jim—once you said you loved me." It was as if she were talking half to me and half to herself. "Even if you don't shoot him, they'll give him the gas chamber for what he did to Esther. Yes, I believe it now. I didn't at first, but now I think he killed her." She came toward me, her eyes pleading. "Jim, let him get away."

My laugh was short and bitter.

She dropped it slow and easy then, the way you toss a pebble in a stream and watch the ripples. "If you still want me, I'll get a divorce and marry you."

If you still want me . . .

I read where a fellow named Oscar Wilde said the worst thing that could happen to a man was to get what he wanted. I believed it then. I wondered how it would be, living with the thought that I'd given a murderer his freedom and taken his wife in trade. Maybe it would be no worse than killing him to get her.

"I don't love him," she said, "not now. I found out he married me only to get ahead of you. I was a prize he'd won, like a kewpie doll, and then he didn't want the prize any more." Her voice broke. "But I don't hate him. I can't. I don't want him to die."

I STOOD THERE, looking down at her, my heart ready to burst with the feelings I'd stored up for three long years.

"We can go away, Jim," she murmured. "We can forget everything . . . live again." Her slender arms went around my shoulders and the fragrance of her dark hair was soft and sweet. All I had to do was kiss her once

and the warnings that clamored in my tired cop's brain would be silenced for good.

I put my hands against her arms and shoved. She went back against the bar and caught at the rim of it, and her elbow struck a bottle. It smashed, and the whisky smell drifted up strong. She stared, red lips parted, her eyes hurt and bewildered.

"If you see Harry," I growled, "tell him you tried, but it didn't work!"

Her eyes were green flames under the dark lashes. Her lips rolled back from her white teeth.

"I hope he kills you!"

I turned then and Monk Storm's grinning face was pressed against a window. As I dove for the door, it vanished.

Outside, I could find no trace of him. The sun was getting down so it almost touched the higher peaks. I could still feel the touch of June's fingertips on my cheek. The anger inside me settled slowly into a deep, bitter resolve.

I'd taken enough, from both of them. I knew now what I wanted, what I had to do. I didn't want to kill Harry Malek. I wanted to put him behind bars in the Eagle Pass jail. I was going to make him stand trial for murder, and I wanted her there in the courtroom, watching. Somehow, I had to make her see she'd figured me for everything but what I was—a good cop.

But, first, I had to prove it—to myself!

Something moved in the underbrush, just then and I glimpsed Monk Storm running as if he had the devil after him. He was heading up in the general direction of the cave.

Monk didn't move that fast often. Watching him, I got a hunch that raised a crop of goosepimples on my back.

All the way up there, I tried to put the pieces together. Harry must have played it smart after he'd slugged me. Instead of running, he'd gone back inside the cave. He'd figured on my sending out an alarm. He'd take it easy in there, while the state cops watched roads and highways. Then, when things cooled a bit, he'd make a run for it.

Only he wasn't going to run—if I could stop him. I was almost to the mouth of the

cave now. Harry had a date with me he didn't even know about.

The shadows had thinned out around the rock and brush wall and their slender lines were like long fingers reaching for me. I waited, listening, until my nerves couldn't stand the strain. In the cave, the yellow-orange light of a match flickered.

I sucked in my breath and charged.

He whirled just before I hit him, and the match dropped and went out. I caught his arm and twisted it hard. He let out a whimper and I knew then it wasn't Harry. I dragged him outside.

"Don't, Copper," Monk whimpered. "I ain't done nothing."

"Talk fast. Where's Harry?"

"I don't know."

I leaned back and belted him one hard across the face. "You ran straight up here to report on your window-peeping. You must have known he was here. C'mon, talk."

"I'll do the talking, Jim," Harry Malek said behind me.

I didn't have to turn because I could feel Harry's gun, or maybe it was mine, prodding me. When I looked, he had a gun in each hand and his eyes were hollow and red-rimmed in his slightly plump, too-hand-some face.

"You yella wife-stealer!" he said. He had some other names. He called me most of them on the way down to the tavern while Monk, carrying my rifle, chuckled gleefully.

"I've got a bullet in here for you, Wallace," Harry said. "But first I got one for my wife. I want you to watch while she gets hers."

I didn't see much hope of talking him out of it.

WHEN WE GOT to the tavern, he locked the front door behind us. He stood there and looked at June a minute and then he gave one of the guns to Monk.

She stood in front of the bar. At first, she looked relieved that Harry was still master of the situation. Then there was terror, driving the blood from her face.

Monk leered happily.

June said, "Harry, don't be a fool."

[Turn page]

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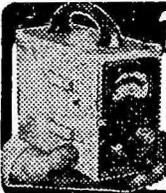
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I said, "Wait, Harry," and felt his cold eyes on me. "You've got June wrong. Sure she tossed her curves at me. Why not? She was trying to save your skin."

"You got one minute, Wallace."

My heart beat off the seconds. I had a feeling that nothing I could say would change his mind. I knew Harry too well to have any hope.

"Hand over your gun," I said, "and there's a chance you can beat a prison rap. If you commit murder again, you're sunk. The State Police office has three witnesses who saw you carrying the same handkerchief that was used in killing Esther Burns."

I saw I wasn't scaring him. There was nothing to do but try to stall him.

"They ain't going to get me," Harry said. His brow knotted. "I was so drunk, I don't remember what happened."

Monk spat. "They got nothing on you, Harry. A lousy green handkerchief!"

Harry took a step toward me and raised the gun. There was an inhuman look in his eyes, a look like that a cornered animal has when turning on its tormentor. Without looking away from him, I said, "Monk, how did you know it was a green handkerchief?"

Harry didn't move.

"Why," Monk said. "I saw him wearing it."

"Where, Monk? And when? Harry was in Eagle Pass. You were home in bed, remember?"

"Well, maybe I saw him before he left. Say, I don't have to answer your questions!"

Harry's eyes were unpleasant. Sheer terror whitened Monk's little pinched face.

"I remember now," Harry said. "Esther and me were drinking in Beulah's place. I got sick and went out in the alley for air. I must have passed out. When I came to, the handkerchief was gone from my breast-pocket, and so was my car key. The car wasn't where I'd left it. You must have followed us, Monk. You and Esther went for a ride."

"That's how you knew the handkerchief was green, Monk," I said, hammering the words. "You used it to strangle her, so Harry would take the blame!"

For a second there was no sound, only

Monk's quick, nervous breathing.

Two guns roared.

Harry's shot got off a fraction of a second late. His mouth worked, trying to form a word. Monk let a second shot go. Harry swayed and struck the floor on his face. I felt sudden panic, backing into Harry's fish-lines hung on the wall. Monk turned the gun on me.

"You big guys think you're so good," he said, and gave a little crazy laugh. "Esther went for big guys. I told her I was nuts about her, and she thought it was funny. Who's got the laugh now, huh, Trooper? The cops'll think you and Harry shot it out—after Harry killed his wife. You go next, Copper, and then her."

I saw June's hand travel slowly to a bottle on the bar.

Monk saw June, whirled, and fired. The bottle crashed in her hand. She screamed. I snatched the fish lines off the wall and hurled them.

The lines with their murderous hooks settled over Monk's head and he jerked his arm as the gun blasted. Pain tore at my shoulder. He clawed at the hooks and I jumped on him, clutching for his gun. I slammed one fist against his jaw, and he went down.

June looked at Harry, lying there. She didn't say anything. I stood and waited for her to tell me what low form of life she thought I was.

She glanced up then, her eyes filled with tears, and there was a sudden warmth in them that gave me a big lift. Everything was going to be all right.

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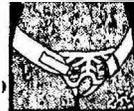
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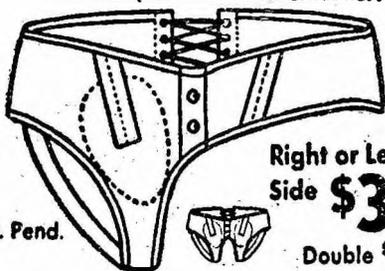
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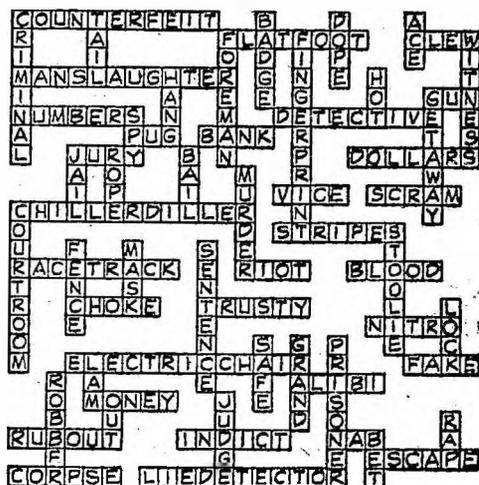
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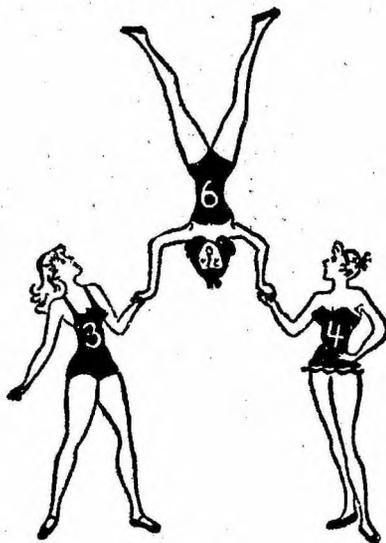
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