saint
DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JAN.
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Pastoral Blackmail
by PETER CHEYNEY

Wanton Fate
by C. S. FORESTER

You Murdered Him
by BRUNO FISCHER

Bad and Dangerous
by HAL ELLSON

The Tough Egg
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

HOLLOW AS THE NIGHT
A NEW STORY by OLIVER LA FARGE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

ING-SIZE PUBLICATION

ALTHOUGH you will not read these ramblings until the season of sniffles and Long Johns is well upon you (at least those of you who are not lucky enough to live in Florida or Southern California) they are being written in the minimum costume of a French beach bum, which is very minimum indeed, on a balcony overlooking the translucent blue Mediterranean, where I am winding up a strenuous summer of wine-sipping and lotus-eating. A holiday in these parts is always a great hype to my morale, for besides being possibly the world's most consistent fans of the *roman policier* the French public sees nothing odd about rating mystery writers, according to their merits, on the same plane as any other authors, instead of in some kind of second-class category; so that I can bask not only in the sun but also in the rare sensation of being regarded as a real literary gent.

The crusade to sell this attitude to the English-speaking countries still has a long way to go, although we can rejoice that one of its most articulate advocates, the eminent critic Anthony Boucher, now has no less lofty a rostrum than the *New York Times* from which to raise his voice. Meanwhile, within the more modest limits of this magazine, we shall go on plugging the same gospel by example, trying to surprise you at intervals, as we have often done before, with the contributions of undisputedly "serious" writers who have thought it no condescension to take a whack at our kind of story.

This month's surprise is Oliver La Farge, who in spite of his French name does not have to come to France to be respected, who makes his début in the Royal Box with a brand-new story that is also a new approach to crime writing. Don't expect to find any of the hackneyed cops-and-creeps routines in HOLLOW AS THE NIGHT—and yet it belongs in our pages just as rightly as Hal Ellson's equally new BAD AND DANGEROUS. C. S. Forester's distinction in other fields makes his WANTON FATE interesting competition for Peter Cheyney's PASTORAL BLACKMAIL. And David Alexander's SOMETHING IN THE AIR, another first for us, is one of the most unusual "secret police" stories you'll ever read.

In fact, the only thing that may let down this elevated tone is the usual Saint story by the character who is making all the fuss.

Leslie Charteris

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night is a hollow sphere

by . . . Oliver La Farge

The night is a hollow sphere for those who remember yesterday with too great clarity —a hollow echoing sphere . . .

I AM sorry I dug up Jo Barlow's gun; I always did think it macabre of him to leave it to me, even if originally it was I who gave it to him. It was absolutely no fault of mine that some drunk spoiled the middle panel of his triptych; I could not possibly have foreseen such a thing. God knows no man ever took more trouble for a friend than I did restoring it. As good as painting it for him, to be exact. It bothers me, this weapon, and right now, at one in the morning—six after one, to be exact—when you can't sleep, you are wide open to wild, dire thoughts and feelings.

It was Hilda's idea. I had arranged those metal things for a still-life, from which I planned to get a semi-abstract, angular result. They have no meaning, just metallic shapes with an emphasis on line and light. It didn't jell. Then she was here and she said, "What about poor old Jo Barlow's pistol, isn't that what it needs?" To be exact, she said, "*How* about poor old Jo—"

To be exact! When did I start on that? Some time yesterday. This past year now I've been

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Oliver La Farge, Pulitzer Prize Winner and distinguished anthropologist, "probably the greatest living fiction writer identified with the South-West" (New York Times), *is the author of the recent* PAUSE IN THE DESERT (*Houghton Mifflin*) *and* PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN (*Crown*).

developing these verbal tics, if you can say that. You have to watch out for them, they get into your conversation and make you seem doddering. Middle age, I suppose, like my hand jerking—but that started years ago. It's not troubling me now, even sitting here right by the damn gun. Anyway it was my left hand, to be ex—stop that!

Hilda's a nincompoop, but she's so inoffensive and mild you can't be annoyed with her. I got the thing out after she left, and I thought again then, as I did whenever I saw it, that I ought to take those remaining live cartridges out of it—have someone take them out, to be— I mean, have someone who knows how do it. I just hate to handle the gun at all; it's not that I'm afraid of guns, I just know nothing about them and don't much want to, but this one has an odd set of associations. I was furious when I found out that that idiot, Tucker, had brought it loaded all the way from Taos. You'd think the police would have taken care of that. It did make the composition, or I thought it did, until last evening. An old revolver like that may be archaic, but there's still the suggestion of destruction, the lethal weapon. All of a sudden the arrangement had a meaning. You could do a whole lot like that, of this time, of the current mode, half abstract and also commentaries on the emotional content of these grisly days we live in. It could have a vogue.

I don't suppose, if you showed a picture or two with pistols in them, the police would come looking. Jo used to have a license, when he lived in the city. I could get in trouble. This time of night, you think of the grimmest things.

When I put it in, I began to see my picture. I found myself thinking how Jonas would have approached it, which was silly, because all his life Jo siphoned his ideas off me. I am the man who carried Jo Barlow, whose name has grown so big now, as if he never stopped being my student. Financially, too, to no small sum. Everyone knows that, but it doesn't sell my stuff. To be—more correctly, what I did was to use my recollection of him to bounce my thoughts off, as I used to do when we were together, over and again.

Good-natured, easy-going, sensitive—you don't usually find sick men who are so unworried and amiable—his illness didn't show much then—with a lot of imagination, but he lacked the gift of knowing just how to apply and control what he intended, he didn't care enough about technique, and he lacked the sharpness that makes for success. His first good sale came from a shove from me.

It was almost exactly—and I do not mean "to be exact"—ten years ago. A lot has happened

in that time. He was no longer my student, formally at least. I had him over for a meal. He needed one. He was on his uppers, painting along in his dreamy way and some of it pretty good stuff. I thought him the most promising student I'd had, but he hadn't yet caught on, hadn't found the formula. There were half a dozen of us, including Heldmann and his wife who came in after dinner, and we had one of those talks about art in general and painting in particular that ramble all over the place, getting into sex and out of it again every so often.

I clearly remember saying that our bunch was letting itself be influenced too much by drawing and had become too concerned about the outlines of areas. We needed to get back more to thinking about color masses, or color areas, thinking of them outward from their centers, and be less exact—I mean, looser—about their boundaries. Of course I was challenged, and in defense I elaborated and became enthusiastic. I hadn't done anything about the idea at the time, having unfinished work that was already committed, you might say. I planned to work out the new approach when I'd cleared my decks.

I dropped in on Jonas a few days later, I don't remember just why. I didn't much care for visiting the rock-bottom poor. I was getting by, but in those days I had no margin, and it was too easy to imagine being reduced to that condition myself. The mean, bad-walled rooms, the barren litter and the signs of thin living depressed me; they still do. If I had an income, if I felt insured, insulated, I suppose I could get a kick out of visiting the poor and struggling. I prefer to have them come to me, or I did; just recently I haven't cared to be visited, to be exact. If I could have the place painted—

I hate that streaked place on the wall where the green hanging used to be, and ever since Kaufmann, the lush, passed out on the sofa and dropped his cigarette on it the thing's been a disgrace. I've got to replace it or else have it all done over. Shabby. Fashions change, and I've had a streak of being out of step. You have to expect it. Can't afford repairs and have to watch my hospitality. It makes you *look* unsuccessful — passé — too much contrast between your name and the way you are momentarily living. As soon as I get this new thing going I'll take care of all that. My hand jumping the way it does holds me back, but I can control that.

Jonas' studio like something in a book, cot in one corner, electric ring to cook on, junk armchair, canvasses, bare, gritty, ugly floor—all that. The thing on the easel really hit me, and he said

with that happy smile of his, "You see I'm trying to work out your idea. I'd like to see what you're doing with it."

He was doing plenty. It was strong and fresh. He was never willing to put the effort he should have into getting a technically finished product. He was not a technician, and I am. There was that weakness, and then, his lack of grasp of the direction in which painting was moving—not caring, to be exact; he just went his own way in a dreamy, happy individualism. Even so, the thing was strong, and I didn't need to ask to know that he'd have it ready for the Community Exhibition and it would be his big bid there. I started getting angry at having my brains picked like that, for purposes of competition against me, then I stopped myself. Jo Barlow was an innocent; it would never occur to him that he was using me in order to outdo me. That was when I first saw that in many ways he was still my student.

I did burn the canvas I'd been working on—ripped it off the stretcher and threw it in the fire. Pure impulse, a blow-off of emotion. I made a study and went to bed, and, like tonight, woke up after a couple of hours, only it was so different. I was young enough to get a kick out of working in the solitude and stillness of the late night, when there seems to be an echo you can't quite hear, or it might be that the night itself, in that silence, can be heard—something on the order of a distant squeak, or a humming—I don't know just what. I can't work like that now. All I do is sit and think. The spot of light on the handle of the pistol has been half-hypnotizing me. Move it. The arrangement is plain no good with the pistol out of it. The thing to do is forget about it, go to bed, and hit it fresh tomorrow, only those damn sleeping pills have taken to working in reverse on me, and God knows I couldn't be wider awake. The *arrangement* was all right, but there's some kind of gap between it and me, or between it and the canvas. What's the matter with me, anyhow? And now my hand is jumping again.

It jumped that night, too, and I got mad, so I tried to fight it, which is just wrong. You have to sit and relax, like this, and smoke with your left hand so that you don't bring it back to mind, get upset when the cigarette misses your mouth, and just meditate along until it goes. I used to try to conceive of eternity, which is all right when you're young and can't really imagine the end of life, or you're too busy being alive to conceive of death, to be exact, but it's no subject for a man over fifty.

What I ought to do right now is put the gun back into the ar-

rangement and study it a little. Then maybe I'll see what I ought to do with it—not look at the canvas at all, just the subject, and try to get a clear vision of the realization. My vision of it now is fuzzy, more like talking about it than seeing it, or I see something that's obviously derivative. I absolutely have to click with this one. Things are getting serious—dead broke, to be exact. I'll do that in a minute. Silly to think that seeing the gun makes my hand jerk more, although it has a melancholy association. Let's exercise it.

Jonas said it was a Bisley—I think that's the name. He spotted it in the window. It's a special mounting of the old Colt's .45 that was started for some of those old Western gun experts when a team of them went to England and shot circles around the British pistol sharps. Firearms mean nothing to me, but they were a hobby of Jo's. After he began to sell, he was extravagant about buying them, and he'd sell them at a loss when he was down. All but this one, he always hung on to this. Sentiment. It had been in hock a long time. I bought it cheap and gave it to him for Christmas—sort of a joke. Clumsy looking thing, and interesting, the contrast between the heavy, blued metal and the mother-of-pearl butt. Clumsy as it looks, as Jo showed me, it has a natural, easy balance in your hand. When I hold it, the jerking stops—something to do with the weight and the muscular tension, I suppose. I'd better put it down. The damn thing might go off. It *is* a subject, or an element of a subject, if you could figure it out—I wonder what Jo would do with it. Too bad he never tried to do it. He didn't take it with him to Mexico, for fear of having it confiscated, or he might have. He made little notes and sketches of just about everything while he was down there, There are several dozen still in that pile on the top shelf, but no pistols. I looked this morning —yesterday morning to be exact. After he got to Taos and was really sick, he didn't have that kind of spare energy. Anyway, he was delighted with the gift. Lila wasn't; she didn't favor that hobby, and she had a leaning towards useful gifts. But I brought a big basket of fruit, too, and that evened it up.

Even Lila came to him from me. A good thing, I guess; she intended to be married, and you could easily have found yourself hooked. I found her, or anyway I first appreciated her, asked her to sit for me. She wouldn't pose for the figure, although I'm sure she wasn't a virgin. That quiet way she had of sitting, smiling, her head so beautifully poised on her neck—the real, swan-like neck you read about—saying very little and making herself felt all

over the room, seeming to welcome everyone. I had no intention of getting married, and Jonas wanted to marry her, so she went to him. He was selling then, but until she came along it hadn't occurred to him to move out of that grimy place. Just bought a heater and a refrigerator. He was too plain unworldly to think of making himself comfortable.

The pattern of plagiarism—or, to be ex—stop that! Anyway, the following me, deriving from me, runs all through. It did a lot for him, and it didn't hurt me. To be honest, I suppose the enthusiastic way he went into something that caught his imagination may have—well—prodded me when I might have delayed, gone too slow. And in other ways, like that first time, when we showed in the Community. Both our pictures got a lot of notice. His sold for five hundred, I think it was, and mine for twelve, my best price until then. Everyone could see that the two were related, possibly the beginning of a school, and Jonas very honestly told everyone how much he owed to me. That brought me more students, better ones, better able to pay.

I found Lila about a year after that, and at the same time he was following my lead there, occurred the business of the contrasting alizarins. We were deep in earth colors, everything dull and rich, and the idea was to spot some hot alizarins in for contrast, a form of shock. I don't remember just when I set that forth—there was always so much talking, and Jonas usually wherever I happened to be. As usual, he dived in fast, and he got an interesting effect, but I thought putting the contrast in a streak of lightning was much too obvious. I had a one-man show coming up, and I did half a dozen pieces for it with the new device. It bothered a lot of people, then it took hold, and when Jo had his show, he did very well, too. So then he moved into a place with heat and a bedroom and kitchen, and Lila married him. I didn't object; how could I? And now, I see it was probably a break for me, but at the time I was hurt, and when I saw her beauty and their closeness, the sense of my loss was upsetting.

She would have stayed with him if he'd been a little more practical. She loved him to start with, loved him for several years, but of course she assumed that his success, his material success, would continue and increase. She wanted a stable home and children; she wanted comfort. The uncertain way they lived, the ups and downs, the realization it would never be any different, wore her out. It was natural. Jonas wasn't an ascetic, he just didn't think about comfort. Set him down before a fine meal and

he'd relish it—but he'd live indefinitely on cold beans eaten out of the can. She wanted what other women had. I asked them over often for dinner. I had the Filipino then, and this place was fresh and new. I put on a good deal of style, rather showed off, to be—to tell the truth, and I couldn't help putting on the dog when she came to dinner. She'd always been poor, and a remark she made one evening showed rather pathetically that the kind of thing I was able to do at that time, white table cloth, man in white jacket, silver candlesticks —I miss those candlesticks, they were a sort of symbol—things like *baba au rhum* or *fruit flambé* for dessert, all that kind of thing, she associated with restaurants, and at that, restaurants she had heard about more than been inside of. That was the high point of my earnings, except for the year following the Leverett Triptych. She knew she wanted a better life than she'd had, and I suppose what she saw at my place helped to form her idea of it.

Jo suddenly went nuts over etching, which cost him a lot of money and definitely was not his line. If I hadn't lent him money again they'd have lost the apartment. He made real efforts at times to pay back what he owed me, but I never pressed him. I recovered it after he died. In a way, I figured it was worth it. I mean, bouncing ideas off him, using him as a sounding board, was fruitful, even if he coasted along on it. He wrote that that pistol was "in settlement of the more curious part of our debt," which was wild and strange, like his last letter to me. Between the drinking and the sickness, he wasn't himself. I prefer not to think of it; I want to keep my happy memories of him.

It wasn't a payment or settlement on anything. I don't know why I've kept the damn thing floating around all this time. I must get someone to unload it. He showed me one time, you open that sort of gate behind the cylinder, then you have to pull the hammer back a certain distance, and then turn the cylinder, and push the cartridges out with the plunger. Calls for three hands, and dangerous. You poke those things and they could go off. Explode back into your left hand. It was my left hand—but that was pure accident; no one could have helped it.

That is definitely the wrong subject. How can you be so dead tired and depressed, and be so wide awake? Everything seems lethal when I get like this, there seems to be no way out at all, and it doesn't matter what comes into my head, there's something wrong or frightening or shameful about it. Sitting here, nearly two A.M., and listening to the ring of the empty night. That's what the sound is, something

like the ring of crystal when you rub it. I used to love it; it was romantic, and a fine time to work, the total solitude, the sense of the city asleep, under magic, and I at work. That was when I thought of the crystal ring. I was poetic.

In my teens and even my early twenties I was certainly poetic. I was going to be a poet, painter, sculptor, God knows what, a regular Michaelangelo. It was fun, though. Nothing was going to deter me, and if I had to live in a garret, why that would be wonderful. The starving artist restraining himself from eating the fruit until he's painted it—that appealed to me. Only I had sense, too, even then, and a little money, and natural technique, and I was adaptable. I was poor, but I never hit bottom.

Jo's garret, which, to be exact, was on the ground floor. Gritty floor, unpleasant to walk on, the whole place chill, stark. A Neanderthal man by the fire in his cave had more homeliness. Inevitably, Jo used boxes. He had a big box on its side, with shelves in it, the electric ring and coffee pot on top, a few plates and cups and whatever food he had on the shelves below. No ice box, the first years. It was miserably cold in winter. A hell of a setting for a man with a touch of TB. Twenty a month, and more than once—four times, my accounting showed afterwards—I put up the twenty. I used to hope to God I'd never have to live like that. What happens if that's where you land when you're old, when you've begun to tire and the spring is gone? You hear of men being found dead in such places, such tombs, and it's always contrasted, naturally, with their earnings and fame when they were younger. Why didn't they save when they were in the money? Artists, actors, what have you, they spent it all while they had it—that's what people think, a few years of orgy and then, the cricket and the ant, and the ants feel sorry and shake their heads. Hell, if a painter wants to live just in modest comfort it can take about all he can drag down. A couple of bad years and his savings are gone. How well I know.

That is *not* a sedative line of thought. Lila. Jonas didn't get down to that phase again while she was with him, but he shaved mighty close to it, and if I hadn't come through a couple of times they might have. I could see she wouldn't stand it forever, and for a time I thought that in the end she might come to me; she would have, if I'd encouraged her. I didn't. It had obviously become impossible, and I could not risk a break with Jonas—that is, I was too fond of him, and, to be exact, he was stimulating and helpful. She found a man quite outside the arts, and

it really was a relief when she disappeared from our scene—to be exact, both a relief and a loss. She's done all right, and she has her children and her security. God save me from having children, but sometimes I think it would be nice to be one again. Everything is taken care of for a child. Your business is eating, sleeping, and playing; the grown-ups take care of the rest. The rest—rest, I need rest, from this exhaustion now, this dry and wakeful exhaustion, and from the long tension. That was a car honked somewhere. Why does a car honk at this hour, in the empty streets, in the dark, empty city? What was that strange sound—?

Goodness, I haven't thought of that in years. I don't remember when we played it, one of those games that spring up and die away; I must have been very small. I'd say, "What was that strange, strange sound, Mummy?" And she'd answer something silly like, "It's a mouse in your shoe, darling." When she spoke of it years later, in my poetic period, I thought it had the makings of some sort of eerie ballad, on the *Lord Randall* order, but I never worked it out. "What was that strange, strange sound, mother?" "It's only a mouse in your shoe, darling." "What was that strange, strange sound, mother?" "It's only a worm in your heart, darling." "What was that strange, strange sound, mother?" "It's the ring of the empty night, darling." "What was that strange, strange sound, mother?" "It's the sigh at the end of hope, darling."

Not a bad line, *the sigh at the end of hope.* The night is a hollow, dark sphere, empty and silent except for that ring that you don't hear with your ears. If I were Blake I would paint it, but I am not Blake; by myself I am close to nothing. In the arc of the night the truths shoot at you. At the beginning there is more than hope, there is assurance. At the end, hope is something you keep making, it's a stage set you build around yourself to shut out the emptiness. Then it starts falling in. *What am I going to do?* If I could discuss this new picture with Jo, bounce it off him once more—When I try to see what I intend to realize, I don't see it; I see half a dozen other men's pictures, of other subjects. It's as if my faculty for conception had gone dead. If Jonas were here—well, he isn't.

Lila finished him really; I am not in any way to blame, it's this dire thing in the hollow night that makes you feel as if you carried the guilt of the world. I did everything a man could for him. Who else ever worked himself almost into collapse to restore a competitor's cartoon for a great, rich job?

When Lila left, it knocked him endways. He started drinking like an idiot, all but stopped work, spent his money, spent his health. When he was medium drunk he had brilliant ideas; I enjoyed talking with him, just so he didn't go over the edge and get messy. He wasn't coherent enough to exploit what he thought up—often enough could not remember it. When he pulled himself together, he was in dreadful shape. Active TB, to be exact. He had to go somewhere warm and cheap, where he could get some work done. I lent him enough to get him to Mexico and keep him there for a time. He was to send back work, and I would try to sell it for him, pay myself back and send money to him.

I was afraid that the expatriate crowd down there might get him to drinking again. It seems he did stage some benders, but on the whole he stayed sober and did a lot of good work. Pretty soon he sent me some water colors, and by pricing them cheap I sold them all and split the money with him. He must have been living as usual, on next to nothing, because he didn't send me anything more for over six months. Then all of a sudden I was stuck with the freight on about everything he'd produced, which was no small item, especially as I was rather strapped. Being taken by surprise like that annoyed me, as I told him plainly when I wrote. Seems a letter had gone astray. He wanted me to get him a show right away, to raise enough money so that he could come back and compete for the Leverett Triptych from here. That cockeyed thing. I was having troubles of my own, and I was shooting for the triptych. If an eccentric millionaire puts up that kind of money you go after it, no matter what you think of what he wants. You can't set up a one-man show just like that, and I had no time. Jo's stuff was good, exciting, to be exact, his best work to date, his most mature. On the strength of it I sent him two hundred, all I could afford. I wasn't in as bad shape as now, but I'd been having an off spell, and I was worried about things like the rent. Even on that loan, I had to recoup part of it by selling a couple of his water colors. Then I hit a good streak in my own work again, a very good streak. God, I wish I could hit another like that.

He used the money to come back to the States. It brought him as far as Taos. He moved in with Merriwether, which wasn't good, because Merriwether is strong as an ox and drinks like a fish. He'd wear anyone out. They say it's cold as hell there in winter, and Merriwether's place had nothing but fireplaces. Jo had had a brilliant idea about my paying his way to New York and then his

moving in with me. Good God! I had to squelch that. He managed to keep working for quite a while. A couple of months later, with four weeks before the competition closed, he sent me his cartoons. They were in tempera. He wanted them mounted in a tricky way, with touches of gold, and figured that Aligrossi was the man who could do it. He sent sketches and instructions. And there I was trying to get my own done, and hung up, the way you get sometimes. The idea was a kind of glorification of Leverett's products, business methods, and manufacturing in general, to occupy three big panels on a wall in an auditorium he was giving his native city. As good as Jonas' cartoons were, I didn't think they'd win. The old man had picked three acquaintances to be judges; I'd found that out, and who they were. All old-fashioned, all with the same tastes, the same prejudices. If the money was what you were after, and I couldn't see why else you'd go in for a thing like that, the trick was to paint with just enough modernism and abstraction to make them feel pleased with themselves and advanced for understanding and liking it. Jo was too simple; he didn't flatter the judges—to be exact, his design didn't. It was just good old Jo Barlow, enraptured with the idea of having that much space to put paint on and going all out. Anyway, I looked the cartoons over and saw how his general idea could have been treated to be a sure winner, if I'd been around when he was starting, to tell him, and then I put them aside to be mounted later. I dove into my own problem again, and solved it. That was the last time I enjoyed working at night, the last time the sense of infinity all around, just outside my four walls, didn't give me the creeps.

I finished with a week to spare, and had a little party on the strength of it. I figured to get Jo's thing over to Aligrossi's the next day; they were in the way. I didn't like to keep them rolled up, and flat, between sheets of cardboard, as they'd come, they were in the way wherever I put them. For that evening I rolled the three sheets. Two went on a shelf all right but I was stuck with the third, the center panel, a big thing, three by five to be exact, so I put it flat between two hunks of the cardboard and stuck them together with Scotch tape and just leant it against the wall behind the table. That seemed perfectly safe and to be exact I forgot all about it. I was at the table pouring a drink for Agnes Tiller and some idiot had left a tumbler of vodka and water just standing so that when I put the soda bottle down my left hand brushed against it and knocked it over but

even then I never thought half of it had landed so that it ran down between the boards. I found that out after the party. God, did I feel awful. Like a murderer to be exact. I never have told anyone that my hand knocked the glass over, but it haunts me. I don't like to think about it. It comes back at me on these sleepless, hollow nights and I've been running away from it night after night, but there's nowhere to hide in the curve of the sphere.

Now I've come to it, and maybe things will be different. The panel was a mess, mostly the upper left-hand corner. I remembered in a general way what had been there, but only in general. To be exact, there was something curious he'd done with raw sienna that got away from me entirely.

Now certainly this I can think about with pure satisfaction; not even the dire sense of the night can spoil it. I nearly killed myself restoring that panel. I wired Jonas, and he sent his sketches on airmail—at my expense. I got hold of Leverett's secretary or whatever he was and told him the panel had been accidentally damaged, and got a couple of days' grace. I arranged to have the judges informed that what they saw was a restoration. It was through them mostly that the story got around about how the panel was damaged in transit, and the terrific effort I made to fix it up, although I was in the competition myself. I didn't spread it; of course I don't know what Jonas and Merriwether may have said. We were well into the winter, most of the Taos colony had scattered, and Jo was in pretty bad shape. Anyway, I didn't talk about the business; it was too unpleasant. Once I had Jo's sketches, I did a good job. Of course it was impossible to produce a perfect imitation of what he might have done, but as far as that goes, my version was very likely a little better.

I won. Jo got fourth mention, which meant a consolation prize of three hundred, I think, and his thing was held over to be shown with the winner and the other mentions in Boston. I had time, then, to arrange a show for him, before I went to Leverett's plant near Lowell for the job itself. That was real money, and the Boston exhibit got a lot of notice. I figured I was in for keeps at last. How could I have run so dry all of a sudden? How could anyone see that coming?

While I was in Lowell, I got a nasty, drunken note from Merriwether. It made me so angry I destroyed it. Since then, I hear he's put out some pretty mean talk about me. He's a bum, always been envious, and I figure the best thing is to ignore him. But then there was a letter from Jo. He must have been drunk

when he wrote it, too; I learned later that he'd hardly drawn a sober breath since he mailed me the sketches of the cartoon. He went on very disagreeably about TB and fourth mention and the handsome check it had brought him, and obviously sarcastic, effusive expressions of gratitude for all the trouble I'd gone to. I didn't dream it was in him to write such a letter. He said, and I wish I didn't remember it, "Your devices are beyond imagining. Did you ever think of illustrating *Dracula*?" I burned that letter, too. I was sure he'd straighten out and be himself again, and it was clear that his new show was going to bring him in some solid cash.

I'm glad I did let myself think this business through at last. It's not just that awful accident, but behind that, his letter, and that it should be his last to me, that have been riding me, because for so long I've tried to forget all that and remember only my old, faithful friend. Before he shot himself he wrote a sort of testament, and in that he gave me the gun, and had that line about the more curious part of our debt. That bothers me the way impressive things that make no sense will sometimes. I had set up the exhibition, I had a goodly part of his work right here, so I became his executor by default.

Now, I've gone all the way through it, maybe I can forget it and go to sleep. The night is an empty sphere and that noise I hear now is not strange, it's my ears ringing. When did I last have a whole night's sleep? I am a shell as curved and hollow as the night. What is that strange, strange sound, mother? It's the wind in an empty shell, darling. Or, to be exact, the last breath of air leaving a collapsed bladder.

He's had his big success since he died—how often that happens! A dead man's work can have scarcity value, so they build up the ghoulish, post-mortem reclame. I quickly paid myself back what he owed me justly—no more. A sour, two A.M. sort of joke—dead, he's shot ahead of me, a big name. I'm in a jam, and his ghost is coining money, for a couple of sisters who were ashamed of him and never helped him. And I made him.

God! sitting here is pure murder. I'll put the gun back, and then I may be able to see the picture, and if I can do that, I can let go and sleep. Sleep! Funny how holding this thing steadies my hand; it causes an oddly comfortable feeling. There's nothing the matter with the arrangement as it was with this in it; it composes, it makes it point. I could paint it literally and never sell it. The missing thing is in me. *What am I going to do?* They won't wait any longer for the rent, they've made that clear enough. Then what am I going

to do? A splintered, dirty floor, breaking walls, cold, desolation —and where do I get twenty a month? I like to eat, too. It's all done, it's gone. It's gone with Jonas. I can't get any more out of his sketches and studies.

What is that strange, strange sound, mother? It's an old man starving alone, darling. It's an old fraud whimpering at the truth. Jo saw it all in the end, except the one thing he couldn't know, and that he suspected. The more curious part of our debt—*our* debt—to be exact, whose to whom? It hasn't paid anything either way so far; I thought it would when I put it in the arrangement, but it isn't going to. That wouldn't have been payment, to be exact, that would have been more credit.

I'll never find anyone else like Jo Barlow, and I'm through. I never did find out—never could ask — who left that glassful standing just there on the table, so perfectly placed, so just where the natural fall of my left hand —I saw it in a flash, and did it, and then you couldn't undo it. And the sense of fear and of relief—you restore, you copy, you fudge. And he had given me the key, again. This—I'll never be able to paint this, not and say anything. Did I ever have anything to say, that is, all my own? The night is an empty sphere and I am tired, tired. They'll throw me out of here the end of the month, and then there is nothing. With the gun in it, my hand is steady and feels right. I knew what Jo meant as soon as Tucker brought me the thing and quoted that line, and I've spent these years pretending I didn't—and hanging on. It really seems like an excellent idea, and it's right in the pattern. He showed me one time. You pull the hammer back with your thumb. Now in the hollow sphere and the crystal ring of the night. And the funny thing, yes, to be exact, not merely peculiar but funny —at my expense—is that a guy as innocent and sweet and friendly as Jonas Barlow could have thought up a thing like this. . . .

the tough egg

by . . . Leslie Charteris

The American visitor was not too impressed. So this Saint was some sort of fancy hijacker? Well, let him try!

CHIEF INSPECTOR TEAL caught Larry the Stick at Newcastle trying to board an outward-bound Swedish timber ship. He did not find the fifty thousand pounds' worth of bonds and jewelry which Larry took from the Temple Lane Safe Deposit; but it may truthfully be reported that no one was more surprised about that than Larry himself.

They broke open the battered leather suitcase to which Larry was clinging as affectionately as if it contained the keys of the Bank of England, and found in it a cardboard box which was packed to bursting-point with what must have been one of the finest collections of small pebbles and old newspapers to which any burglar had ever attached himself; and Larry stared at it with glazed and incredulous eyes.

"Is one of you busies saving up for a rainy day?" he demanded, when he could speak; and Mr. Teal was not amused.

"No one's been to that bag except when you saw us open it," he said shortly. "Come on, Larry—let's hear where you hid the stuff."

"I didn't hide it," said Larry

EVEN YEARS AGO THE SAINT FOUND MEN LIKE MR. KEMMLER TO BE FAIR GAME, REQUIRING HIS VERY SPECIAL ATTENTION.

flatly. He was prepared to say more, but suddenly he shut his mouth. He could be an immensely philosophic man when there was nothing left for him to do except to be philosophic, and one of his major problems had certainly been solved for him very providentially. "I hadn't anything to hide, Mr. Teal. If you'd only let me explain things I could've saved you busting a perfickly good lock and making me miss my boat."

Mr. Teal tilted back his bowler hat with a kind of weary patience.

"Better make it short, Larry," he said. "The night watchman saw you before you coshed him, and he said he'd recognize you again."

"He must've been seeing things," asserted Larry. "Now, if you want to know all about it, Mr. Teal, I saw the doctor the other day, and he told me I was run down. 'What you want, Larry, is a nice holiday,' he says —not that I'd let anyone call me by my first name, you understand, but this doc is quite a good-class gentleman. 'What you want is a holiday,' he says. 'Why don't you take a sea voyage?' So, seeing I've got an old aunt in Sweden, I thought I'd pay her a visit. Naturally, I thought, the old lady would like to see some newspapers and read how things were going in the old country—"

"And what did she want the stones for?" inquired Teal politely. "Is she making a rock garden?"

"Oh, them?" said Larry innocently. "Them was for my uncle. He's a geo—geo—"

"Geologist is the word you want," said the detective, without smiling. "Now let's go back to London, and you can write all that down and sign it."

They went back to London with a resigned but still chatty cracksman, though the party lacked some of the high spirits which might have accompanied it. The most puzzled member of it was undoubtedly Larry the Stick, and he spent a good deal of time on the journey trying to think how it could have happened.

He knew that the bonds and jewels had been packed in his suitcase when he left London, for he had gone straight back to his lodgings after he left the Temple Lane Safe Deposit and stowed them away in the bag that was already half-filled in anticipation of an early departure. He had dozed in his chair for a few hours, and caught the 7:25 from King's Cross—the bag had never been out of his sight. Except . . . once during the morning he had succumbed to a not unreasonable thirst, and spent half an hour in the restaurant car in earnest collaboration with a bottle of Worthington. But there was no sign of his bag having been tampered with when he came back,

and he had seen no familiar face on the train.

It was one of the most mystifying things that had ever happened to him, and the fact that the police case against him had been considerably weakened by his bereavement was a somewhat dubious compensation.

Chief Inspector Teal reached London with a theory of his own. He expounded it to the Assistant Commissioner without enthusiasm.

"I'm afraid there's no doubt that Larry's telling the truth," he said. "He's no idea what happened to the swag, but I have. Nobody double-crossed him, because he always works alone, and he hasn't any enemies that I know of. There's just one man who might have done it—you know who I mean."

The Assistant Commissioner sniffed. He had an irritating and eloquent sniff.

"It would be very tiresome if anything happened to the Saint," he remarked pointedly. "The C.I.D. would have a job to find another stock excuse that would sound quite as convincing."

When Mr. Teal had cooled off in his own room, he had to admit that there was an element of truth in the Assistant Commissioner's acidulated comment. It did not mellow his tolerance of the most unpopular Police Chief of his day; he had had similar thoughts himself, without feeling as if he had discovered the elixir of life.

The trouble was that the Saint refused to conform to any of the traditions which make the capture of the average criminal a mere matter of routine. There was nothing stereotyped about his methods which made it easy to include him in the list of suspects for any particular felony. He was little more than a name in criminal circles; he had no jealous associates to give him away, he confided his plans to no one, he never boasted of his success in anyone's hearing—he did nothing which gave the police a chance to catch him red-handed. His name and address were known to every constable in the force; but for all any of them could prove in a court of law he was an unassailably respectable citizen who had long since left a rather doubtful past behind him, an amiable young man about town blessed with plentiful private means, who had the misfortune to be seen in geographically close proximity to various lawless events for which the police could find no suitable scapegoat. And no one protested their ignorance of everything to do with him more vigorously than his alleged or prospective victims. It made things very difficult for Mr. Teal, who was a clever detective but a third-rate magician.

The taciturnity of Max Kemm-

ler was a more recent thorn in Mr. Teal's side.

Max Kemmler was a Dane by birth and an American by naturalization. The phase of his career in which the United States Federal Authorities were interested started in St. Louis, when he drifted into Egan's Rats and carved the first notches in his gun. Prudently, he left St. Louis during an election clean-up and reappeared in Philadelphia as a strong-arm man in a news-stand racket. That lasted him six months, and he left in a hurry; the tabs caught up with him in New York, where he went over big for a couple of years as typewriter expert in an East Side liquor mob. He shot up the wrong speakie one night after a celebration and was lucky to be able to make a passage to Cherbourg on a French liner that sailed at dawn the next morning. How he got past the passport barriers into England was something of a mystery. He was down on the deportation list, but Scotland Yard was holding up in the hope of an extradition warrant.

He was a thick-shouldered man of middle height, with a taste for camel-hair coats and very light gray Homburgs. Those who had been able to keep on the right side of him in the States called him a good guy—certainly he could put forth a rugged geniality, when it suited him, which had its appeal for lesser lights who reckoned it a privilege to be slapped on the back by the notorious Max Kemmler. His cigars were uniformly expensive, and the large diamond set in the corner of his black onyx signet ring conveyed an impression of great substance—he had been paying for it at the rate of $32.85 a month until the laborious working-out of the installment system bored him, and he changed his address.

Max knew from the time he landed that his days in England were numbered, but it was not in his nature to pass up any profitable enterprise on that account. In a very short space of time he had set up a club in a quiet street off the Edgware Road, of which the police had yet to learn. The club boasted a *boule* and a black-jack table, as well as a *chemin-de-fer* game which was always going: everything was as straight as a die, for Max Kemmler knew that gambling does not need to be crooked to show a long dividend for the bank. The *chemin-de-fer* players paid ten per cent of their winnings to the management, and the smallest chips were priced at half a sovereign. Max did the steering himself and paid his croupiers generously, but he was the only one who made enough out of it to live at the Savoy and put three figures of real money away in his wallet every week in addition.

He had dinner one night with

his chief croupier before going to open the club, and it happened that there was a zealous young detective-sergeant from Vine Street at the next table. It was a small and inexpensive chop-house in Soho, and the detective was not there on business; neither did Max Kemmler know him, for the gambling club was in a different division.

Half-way through the meal Max remembered an enigmatic telephone call that had been put through to his room while he was breakfasting, and asked the croupier about it.

"You ever heard of a guy called Saint?" he queried, and the croupier's jaw fell open.

"Good God! — you haven't heard from *him*?"

Max Kemmler was surprised, to say the least of it.

"Yeah—he phoned me," he replied guardedly. "What's the matter with you? Is he the wheels in this city?"

The croupier acknowledged, in his own idiom, that Simon Templar was the Wheels. He was a tall hard-faced man, with iron-gray hair, bushy gray eyebrows and mustache, and the curried complexion of a rather decayed retired major; and he knew much more about the Saint than a law-abiding member of the community should have known. He gave Max Kemmler all the information he wanted, but Max was not greatly impressed.

"What you mean is he's a kind of hijacker, is he? Hard-boiled, huh? I didn't know you'd got any racket like that over here. And he figures I ought to pay him for 'protection.' That's funny!" Max Kemmler was grimly amused. "Well, I'd like to see him try it."

"He's tried a lot of things like that and got away with them, Mr. Kemmler," said the croupier awkwardly.

Max turned down one corner of his mouth.

"Yeah? So have I. I guess I'm pretty tough myself, what I mean."

He had a reminder of the conversation the next morning, when a plump and sleepy-looking man called and introduced himself as Chief Inspector Teal.

"I hear you've had a warning from the Saint, Kemmler—one of our men heard you talking about it last night."

Max had done some thinking overnight. He was not expecting to be interviewed by Mr. Teal, but he had his own ideas on the subject that the detective raised.

"What of it?"

"We want to get the Saint, Kemmler. You might be able to help us. Why not tell me some more about it?"

Max Kemmler grinned.

"Sure. Then you know just why the Saint's interested in me, and I can take the rap with him. That dick at the next table ought

to have listened some more—then he could have told you I was warned about that one. No, thanks, Teal! The Saint and me are just buddies together, and he called me to ask me to a party. I'm not saying he mightn't get out of line sometime, but I can look after that. He might kind of meet with an accident."

It was not the first time that Teal had been met with a similar lack of enthusiasm, and he knew the meaning of the word "no" when it was pushed up to him in a certain way. He departed heavily; and Simon Templar, who was sipping a Dry Sack within view of the vestibule, watched him go.

"You might think Claud Eustace really wanted to arrest me," he remarked, as the detective's broad back passed through the doors.

His companion, a young man with the air of a gentlemanly prize-fighter, smiled sympathetically. His position was privileged, for it was not many weeks since the Saint's cheerful disregard for the ordinances of the law had lifted him out of a singularly embarrassing situation with a slickness that savored of sorcery. After all, when you have been youthfully and foolishly guilty of embezzling a large sum of money from your employers in order to try and recoup the losses of an equally youthful and foolish speculation, and a check for the missing amount is slipped into your hands by a perfect stranger, you are naturally inclined to see that stranger's indiscretions in an unusual light.

"I wish I had your life," said the young man—his name was Peter Quentin, and he was still very young.

"Brother," said the Saint good-humoredly, "if you had my life you'd have to have my death, which will probably be a sticky one without wreaths. Max Kemmler is a tough egg all right, and you never know."

Peter Quentin stretched out his legs with a wry grimace.

"I don't know that it isn't worth it. Here am I, an *A1* proposition to any insurance company, simply wasting everything I've got with no prospect of ever doing anything else. You saved me from getting pushed in the clink, but of course there was no hope of my keeping my job. They were very nice and friendly when I confessed and paid in your check, but they gave me the air all the same. You can't help seeing their point of view. Once I'd done a thing like that I was a risk to the company, and next time they mightn't have been so lucky. The result is that I'm one of the great unemployed, and no dole either. If I ever manage to get another job, I shall have to consider myself well off if I'm allowed to sit at an office desk for two hundred and seventy days out of the year, while I get fat

and pasty and dream about the pension that'll be no use to me when I'm sixty."

"Instead of which you want to go on a bread-and-water diet for a ten-years' sentence," said the Saint. "I'm a bad example to you, Peter. You ought to meet a girl who'll put all that out of your head."

He really meant what he said. If he refused even to consider his own advice, it was because the perilous charms of the life that he had long ago chosen for his own had woven a spell about him that nothing could break. They were his meat and drink, the wine that made unromantic days worth living, his salute to buccaneers who had had better worlds to conquer. He knew no other life.

Max Kemmler was less poetic about it. He was in the game for what he could get, and he wanted to get it quickly. Teal's visit to him that morning had brought home to him another danger that that accidentally eavesdropping plain-clothes man in the restaurant had thrown across his path. Whatever else the police knew or did not know, they now had the soundest possible reason to believe that Max Kemmler's holiday in England had turned towards profitable business; for nothing else could provide a satisfactory reason for the Saint's interest. His croupier had warned him of that, and Max was taking the warning to heart. The pickings had been good while they lasted, but the time had come for him to be moving.

There was big play at the club that night. Max Kemmler inspired it, putting forth all the *bonhomie* that he could call upon to encourage his patrons to lose their shirts and like it. He ordered in half a dozen cases of Bollinger, and invited the guests to help themselves. He had never worked so hard in his life before, but he saw the results of it when the club closed down at four in the morning and the weary staff counted over the takings. The *boule* table had had a skinner, and money had changed hands so fast in the *chemin-de-fer* parties that the management's ten per cent commission had broken all previous records. Max Kemmler found himself with a comfortingly large wad of crumpled notes to put away. He slapped his croupiers boisterously on the back and opened the last bottle of champagne for them.

"Same time again tomorrow, boys," he said when he took his leave. "If there's any more jack to come out this racket, we'll have it."

As a matter of fact, he had no intention reappearing on the morrow, or on any subsequent day. The croupiers were due to collect their week's salary the following evening, but that consideration did not influence him.

His holiday venture had been even more remunerative than he had hoped, and he was going while the going was good.

Back at the Savoy he added the wad of notes from his pocket to an even larger wad which came from a sealed envelope, which he kept in the hotel safe, and slept with his booty under his pillow.

During his stay in London he had made the acquaintance of a passport specialist. His passage was booked back to Montreal on the *Empress of Britain,* which sailed the next afternoon, and a brand-new Canadian passport established his identity as Max Harford, grain-dealer, of Calgary.

He was finishing a sketchy breakfast in his dressing-gown the next morning, when his chief croupier called. Kemmler had a mind to send back a message that he was out, but thought better of it. The croupier would never have come to his hotel unless there was something urgent to tell him, and Max recalled what he had been told about the Saint with a twinge of vague uneasiness.

"What's the trouble, major?" he asked curtly, when the man was shown in.

The other-glanced around at the display of strapped and bulging luggage.

"Are you going away, Mr. Kemmler?"

"Just changing my address, that's all," said Kemmler bluffly. "This place is a little too near to the high spots—there's always half a dozen gumshoes snooping around looking for con-men and I don't like it. It ain't healthy. I'm moving over to a quiet little joint in Bloomsbury, where I don't have to see so many policemen."

"I think you're wise." The croupier sat on the bed and brushed his hat nervously. "Mr. Kemmler—I thought I ought to come and see you at once. Something has happened."

Kemmler looked at his watch.

"Something's always happening in this busy world," he said with a hearty obtuseness which did not quite carry conviction. "Let's hear about it."

"Well, Mr. Kemmler—I don't quite know how to tell you. It was after we closed down this morning—I was on my way home—"

He broke off with a start as the telephone bell jangled insistently through the room. Kemmler grinned at him emptily, and picked up the receiver.

"Is this you, Kemmler?" said a somnolent voice, in which a thin thread of excitement was perceptible. "Listen—I'm going to give you a shock, but whatever I say you must not give the slightest indication of what I'm talking about. Don't jump, and don't say anything except 'Yes' or 'No.' "

"Yeah?"

"This is Chief Inspector Teal speaking. Have you got a man with you now?"

"Uh-huh."

"I thought so. That's Simon Templar—the Saint. I just saw him go into the hotel. Never mind if you think you know him. That's his favorite trick. We heard he was planning to hold you up, and we want to get him red-handed. Now what about that idea I mentioned yesterday?"

Kemmler looked round inconspicuously. It was difficult to keep the incredulity out of his eyes. The appearance of his most trusted croupier failed to correspond with the description he had heard of the Saint in any respect except that of height and build. Then he saw that the Anglo-Indian complexion could be a simple concoction of grease-paint, the hardness of the features and the mustache and eyebrows an elementary problem in make-up.

The croupier was strolling around the bed, and Kemmler could scarcely control himself as he saw the man touch the pillow underneath which the envelope of notes still lay.

"Well?"

Kemmler fought out a battle with himself of which nothing showed on his face. The Saint's right hand was resting in a side pocket of his coat—there was nothing in that ordinary fact to disturb most people, but to Max Kemmler it had a particular and deadly significance. And his own gun was under the pillow with the money—he had been caught like the veriest greenhorn.

"What about it?" he demanded as calmly as he could.

"We want to get him," the detective said. "If he's in your room already you can't do a thing. Why not be sensible? You're sailing on the *Empress of Britain* today, and that suits us. We'll turn a blind eye on your new passport. We won't even ask why the Saint wants to rob you. All we ask is for you to help us get that man."

Max Kemmler swallowed. That knowledge of his secret plans was only the second blow that had come to him. He was a tough guy in any circumstances, but he knew when the dice were loaded against him. He was in a cleft stick. The fact that he had promised himself the pleasure of giving the Saint an unwholesome surprise if they ever met didn't enter into it.

"What shall I do?" he asked.

"Let him get on with it. Let him stick you up. Don't fight or anything. I'll have a squad of men outside your door in thirty seconds."

"Okay," said Max Kemmler expressionlessly. "I'll see to it."

He put down the receiver and looked into the muzzle of Simon Templar's automatic. With the

detective's warning still ringing in his ears, he let his mouth fall open in well-simulated astonishment and wrath.

"What the hell—"

"Spare my virginal ears," said the Saint gently. "It's been swell helping you to rake in the berries, Max, but this is where the game ends. Stick your hands right up and feel your chest expand!"

He turned over the pillow and put Kemmler's gun in a spare pocket. The envelope of notes went into another. Max Kemmler watched the disappearance of his wealth with a livid face of fury that he could hardly control. If he had not received that telephone call he would have leapt at the Saint and chanced it.

Simon smiled at him benevolently.

"I'm afraid we'll have to see that you don't raise an alarm," he said. "Would you mind turning around?"

Max Kemmler turned reluctantly. He was not prepared for the next thing that happened to him, and it is doubtful whether even Chief Inspector Teal could have induced him to submit meekly to it if he had. Fortunately he was given no option. A reversed gun-butt struck him vimfully and scientifically on the occiput, and he collapsed in a limp heap.

When he woke up a page-boy was shaking him by the shoulder and his head was splitting with the worst headache that he had ever experienced.

"Is your luggage ready to go, Mr. Kemmler?"

Kemmler glared at the boy for a few seconds in silence. Then recollection returned to him, and he staggered up with a hoarse profanity.

He dashed to the door and flung it open. The corridor was deserted.

"Where's that guy who was here a minute ago? Where are cops?" he shouted, and the bellhop gasped at him uncomprehendingly.

"I don't know, sir."

Max Kemmler flung him aside and grabbed the telephone. In a few seconds he was through to Scotland Yard—and Chief Inspector Teal.

"Say, you, what the hell's the idea? What is it, huh? The grand double-cross? Where are those dicks who were going to be waiting for the Saint outside my door? What've you done with 'em?"

"I don't understand you, Kemmler," said Mr. Teal coldly. "Will you tell me exactly what's happened?"

"The Saint's been here. You know it. You phoned me and told me. You told me to let him stick me up—give him everything he wanted—you wouldn't let me put up a fight—you said you'd be waiting for him outside

the door and catch him red-handed—"

Kemmler babbled on for a while longer; and then gradually his tale petered out incoherently as he realized just how thoroughly he had been fooled. When the detective came to interview him Kemmler apologized and said he must have been drunk, which nobody believed.

But it seemed as if the police didn't know anything about his passage on the *Empress of Britain* after all. It was Max Kemmler's only consolation.

INDIFFERENT MURDERER

Dr. Marcel Petiot (1897-1946) never did deny that he had killed quite a number of people—he admitted to 63, the authorities said less—but where he and the prosecution disagreed was in the description of just who *had* been killed. Petiot insisted he had confined himself to German soldiers and collaborators, and that he knew nothing about all these people whom it was charged he had helped to usher out of this life. As for the human heads and assorted scraps of human beings found, in March of 1944, in the cellars of his house at 21 Rue Lesueur, a sober and dignified street, he could quite understand the pained reaction of the firemen, called in by neighbors when the furnace at 21 was giving off acrid fumes (a body was still smouldering as they broke in), "The place is full of corpses!"

Upon investigation, it appeared that all sorts of people, rich and poor, friends as well as strangers, had all disappeared shortly after visiting Petiot. The former Mayor of Villeneuve-sur-Yonne had come to Paris in the mid-thirties. A wartime arrest for the theft of drugs, and occasional deaths and disappearances of later patients at Yonne, somehow never had affected the social and political career of the young doctor who even performed the autopsy in one case, calmly certifying that the sudden death had been from natural causes. It was only when the Mayor was caught stealing from municipal stores that he was imprisoned and then removed from office.

The German Occupation brought him, as it did others, the chance to make an honest penny. It was soon whispered that he—by his own admission a patriotic Frenchman—would be able to help people who wanted to leave Paris both suddenly and quietly, preferably without the knowledge of the Germans. And soon many did.

The fares were 50,000 francs if you wanted to go to Spain, and up to 200,000 if you thought it better to go to South America. Petiot always insisted that his clients did reach their destination, but the State claimed that they never got further than 21 Rue Lesueur, where they would be given an injection against diseases one could catch abroad, aided or pushed into the next room to die, and then crammed into the furnace or thrown into the lime pit in the courtyard. Eventually, of course, it all ended, and the indifferent Marcel-Andre-Henri-Felix Petiot was guillotined. Up to the moment of his death he refused to confess. "When one sets out on a voyage," he replied, "one takes all one's luggage with one."

you murdered him

by . . . Bruno Fischer

The dead man had liked them young, like this girl. He'd wasted a fortune—and now his life—while proving this.

I HAD heard a lot about this Cecil Baldwin. Who on the force hadn't? Some of the lads called him The Brain and some called him The Boy Wonder, and they weren't exactly being complimentary. Cops don't cotton to their fellow cops who are too smart and at the same time a lot younger than they are. Baldwin came up so fast from rookie patrolman to first-grade detective that he made a breeze.

The civil service exams were responsible. He was so good in written stuff and interviews that he overcame his low experience ratings.

But was he a good cop? That was what I asked Inspector Lingley when he told me that Cecil Baldwin was being transferred uptown to my Homicide squad to replace Phil Griswold, who had retired on his pension.

"His record is all right," Inspector Lingley said without enthusiasm. "Captain Willow's chief complaint was that Baldwin was always writing him memos on how to run his job."

"That kind of guy," I grunted.

Bruno Fischer, veteran mystery novelist, author of the recent MURDER IN THE RAW *(Gold Medal) and* STAIRWAY TO DEATH *(Pyramid), makes a first appearance in these pages with this story of Lieutenant Walsh, who believes in the old-fashioned methods, and Detective Cecil Baldwin, boy wonder.*

Originally published as IKE WALSH AND THE BOY WONDER in the January, 1945, issue of *The Shadow Magazine.*

"Do I have to take him on my squad?"

The inspector's eyes crinkled. "You're not scared of his brain, are you, Ike?"

"Me?" I said, outraged. "Has Baldwin a cop's brain? That's what I want to know."

"You'll find out soon enough. And Ike, don't slap him down too hard. You're tough and you've a tough squad. Don't break the boy's spirit."

"If he's got spirit," I said, "it won't break."

Cecil Baldwin looked even younger than he was. He had the kind of bland face and wide eyes that would never let him appear his age. His build was slender, boyish, and he wore a Phi Beta Kappa key. But his handshake was firm.

"I am glad to know you, Lieutenant Walsh," he told me. "While I don't approve of your methods—"

"My methods will be your methods," I snapped. "Get that into your head."

"Naturally, I will not be guilty of insubordination," he replied meekly.

"You'd better not be."

He just looked at me, his eyes wide, as if he couldn't understand why I didn't like him. I went to my desk and started looking through the latest reports on the Carter case. There was one from the D.A. saying that there wasn't a chance of holding Georgie Ames unless we could break his alibi through Cookie Bungman or Julia Paris. The D.A. thought our best chance was through Cookie. He was telling me that!

Sergeant Ed Scully came in. He was short and wide and had a face like a mountain crag. He was a good man with his fists or with a gun, and he could think fast on his feet. We had been together a long time.

I waved a hand toward Cecil Baldwin, who was sitting glumly behind the desk I'd assigned to him, and told Scully who he was.

"The boy wonder?" Scully took in the kid's glum expression and gave him a playful thump on the chest. "Did the lieutenant jump down your throat already? You'll learn he has a heart of gold under that nightmare exterior."

"It doesn't matter," Baldwin said indifferently. "I'll do my job."

"That's the spirit." Scully turned to me. "Ike, I can't get a peep out of Cookie."

"What'd you do," I said, "promise him a lollypop if he sang?"

Scully shifted his feet. "Well, Ike, he's only a witness. Not even that, in fact."

"Hell!" I stood up. "Cookie Bungman is a mug, and there's only one way to handle that kind." I strode to the door. With

my hand on the knob, I turned. "You're coming, Baldwin. Might as well see how we work."

His eyes were excited as he sprang up. "The Carter murder problem fascinates me."

"What do you know about it?" I demanded.

"Everything," the boy wonder replied blandly. "Even though I was stationed downtown, I keep myself informed on all crimes in the city."

Scully and I both nodded almost approvingly. A good cop knows what's going on outside his district as well as inside.

"What do you know?" I prodded him.

"At ten minutes to three the morning before last," Baldwin said, "Frederick Carter was shot dead with a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver as he was entering his house. There was no witness to the crime, although the shot awakened neighbors. Carter was a bachelor in his early forties; his two interests were race horses and attractive young women. He appears to have been more successful with the young women than with the horses, for Georgie Ames, a notorious bookmaker, held ten thousand dollars worth of Carter's IOU's. An illegal bookmaker like Ames has no way to collect such debts save through terror.

"Besides, Georgie Ames has a girl friend named Julia Paris, a young nightclub singer. Carter became interested in her, and it appears that she returned his interest. Thus Georgie Ames had a double motive for murdering Frederick Carter: to inspire other welshers to pay their debts to him promptly and because he was jealous of the attention Carter was giving Julia Paris.

"Georgie Ames, however, has an alibi. It may not be a convincing one, but legally it will do. Reliable witnesses state that Ames and his chauffeur, Cookie Bungman, called for Julia Paris at the nightclub where she sings at two-thirty. The doorman of Miss Paris' apartment house saw her get out of the car at three o'clock. All three, Ames, Bungman and Miss Paris, agree to that. In other words, at the time Carter was murdered Ames was driving Miss Paris home; but the fact is that he could have had sufficient time to stop off on the way and shoot Carter. Bungman and Miss Paris both swear that Ames did not leave the car for a moment. Get either to change their story and Ames's alibi will be destroyed."

"Well, anyway," I told Baldwin when he had finished, "you'll give me complete reports. Come on."

The three of us went down to the basement. Cookie Bungman was seated at a bare, wooden table with his head in his hands. Bob Lowe was flinging questions at him, while Jones, a stenog-

rapher, had pad and pencil ready to take down any statement. I noticed that Jones hadn't made a single pothook.

Cookie Bungman didn't raise his head when we entered. He was a wizened man in his fifties, who was Ames's chauffeur and bodyguard.

"No soap, Lieutenant," Bob Lowe told me.

"I'll show you how to get soap," I said, brushing Lowe aside.

I dug my fingers in Cookie's thin hair. I yanked up his head and slapped him hard across the face.

Glancing around, I saw that Cecil Baldwin had turned pale.

Scully moved in to the other side of Cookie's chair, and together we worked him over. Blood gushed from Cookie's nose. Some of it splotched my knuckles.

"We'll open you up if we have to take you apart bit by bit," I raged. "This is the way it was, mug. You drove Ames and Julia Paris away from the nightclub at two-thirty all right, but you didn't drive straight to her home. It's only a fifteen-minute drive and it took you half an hour. You dropped Ames off near Carter's place at around a quarter to three. Ames was gone five or ten minutes, then he came back and you drove Julia Paris home."

With the back of a hand Cookie Bungman wiped off blood that had trickled from his nose to his mouth. "No. We drove straight to Miss Paris' place."

"And it took thirty minutes?"

"The boss said I should go slow."

Breathing hard, I set fire to a cigarette, and walked across the room. Scully took over. He clamped a big hand around the back of Cookie's scrawny neck and did things to make him moan.

I looked up to see Cecil Baldwin stand in front of me. He was wiping his face with a handkerchief. His lips were quivering.

"Can't take it, eh?" I sneered. "Are the naughty policemen being too rough with the nice man?"

He said unsteadily: "If you must go in for this sort of thing, why Bungman? Georgie Ames is the man you suspect of the murder."

"We can crack Ames's alibi through this mug."

"That won't prove Ames's guilt," he pointed out.

Ordinarily, I wouldn't have argued with him, but he had me at a sore point. "We'll be a long way if we crack Ames's alibi."

"What you mean," Baldwin said slowly, "is that you don't dare bring Ames down here and beat him up. He has too much political influence, whereas Bungman, as you say, is just a mug."

The kid had me there. I would have given a month's pay to be

alone in this room with Georgie Ames for just an hour, but a man doesn't rise on the force unless he knows his politics. Ames was the biggest bookie in the state. The fact that he was outside the law didn't lessen his influence on election day.

"I give the orders," I snapped and went back to the table.

I lit another cigarette and offered Cookie Bungman one. He looked at me as if he didn't see me or the pack of cigarettes. One of his eyes was swollen shut.

"Why be a dope?" I said, making my voice soft. "You know as well as we do that Ames blasted Carter down. You're making yourself an accessory. If you hold out on us, you'll burn along with your boss. Sing and you walk out of here a free man."

"I told you," he said thickly. "The boss didn't—"

I almost tore his head off with the flat of my hand. He sagged low in the chair. I yanked him up and, with Scully's help, gave him a once-over, not lightly.

Suddenly Scully stepped away. I looked up to see him hurry across the room to where Baldwin was leaning weakly against the wall. The kid's face had turned green.

"Where are you going?" I barked at Scully.

"The kid's going to be sick," he said. "Can I take him out?"

"And don't bring him back," I growled.

Scully put an arm around Baldwin's shoulders and led him outside. I turned back to Cookie Bungman.

I didn't get anywhere. Cookie was tough, and I couldn't help admiring him a little. He was a better man in his way than the boy wonder who had been dumped into my squad.

After a while I gave up. I told Bob Lowe to clean him up and toss him back into his cell and then I went upstairs.

Donlin was waddling his fat bulk up the hall toward my office. He was Georgie Ames's mouthpiece, and he waved a writ in my face.

"I was wondering how soon you'd be around," I said, taking the writ from him. "Bungman will be out in a little while. He had a slight accident."

"I bet he did," Donlin said amiably. "Did he fall down the stairs or did he try to assault an officer?"

"Both." I turned on my heels and went into the office.

Cecil Baldwin sat behind his desk. He looked a lot better now, though he was still white around the mouth. Sergeant Scully had one leg thrown over the desk and was talking down to him soothingly. He broke off when I entered.

"Get anything, Ike?" Scully asked.

I shook my head and picked

up my phone to order Cookie Bungman released.

When I hung up, Baldwin was turned in his chair looking at me with those wide eyes of his. "I was taught that our job was to prevent violence, not to use it ourselves."

"You carry a gun, don't you?" I tossed angrily at him.

"Only because regulations demand it," the boy wonder replied evenly. "I understand that the English police go about unarmed. If we did the same thing, we would depend on our efficiency as policemen instead of on brute force."

My mouth twisted. "Why don't you send a memo to the commissioner?"

"I did," he said. "Several. But I haven't been able to convince him."

Scully laughed from his belly. "What can you do with a guy like that?"

I put on my hat. "I'm going to have another talk with Julia Paris. You come, Baldwin. I want you to slap my wrist if I forget myself and speak sharply to her."

The day before I'd had a two-hour session with Julia Paris. She claimed to be only eighteen, and, for all her attempts to act and sound tough, looked it. She had a small graceful figure and doll-like features—the kind of kid a couple of middle-aged lechers like Frederick Carter and Georgie Ames would go for. Only in her few years she'd learned all the sixty-four dollar answers, but I'd found her even more close-mouthed than Ames or Bungman.

Julia Paris opened her apartment door in answer to my ring. Her eyes got scared; she tried to slam the door in my face. When I put my shoulder against the panel, she realized the hopelessness of trying to keep the police out and backed into the living room. She had a wet washcloth in her hand.

"What do you want now?" she said thinly.

Baldwin and I moved into the living room. Cookie Bungman was reclining wearily on the couch.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him.

Bungman lifted himself on his elbows and glowered and said nothing. The girl answered: "I met the poor man in the street. He'd been all battered up by you. I'm trying to clean his face up a little. Is that a crime?"

Baldwin was staring intently at Julia Paris. "You know, Miss Paris," he mused, "I have a sister who looks very much like you. She's a sweet, pretty girl, almost a child, though I doubt if she's much younger than you. If she saw a hurt man she knew in the street, she'd ask him into her home, too."

"So what?" Julia said savage-

ly. Her mouth tightened. "You got any business here, say it and get out."

"I suppose," Baldwin went on dreamily, "it was because you had a good voice and got a job singing in nightclubs. You met the wrong kind of men. You got involved in murder. But it's not too late to lead a clean, decent life. If you will help us out, Lieutenant Walsh will promise you a fresh start."

The girl laughed in his face. "Good Lord, a cop preacher!"

I'd given the boy wonder a chance to make himself silly. Now I said, "I'll do the talking, Baldwin," and grabbed the girl's arm. She was wearing a sleeveless housedress and my fingers dug into soft, bare flesh. "You're heading straight for the gallows, sister, as an accessory."

She screeched and tried to pull away from me.

I yanked her hard against me. "Don't be a fool. Do you want to hang for Georgie Ames? Do you—"

"She's only a kid," Cookie Bungman's voice came from the couch. He was sitting all the way up now, swaying with fatigue.

"Lieutenant Walsh won't hurt her," Baldwin assured him.

"Won't I?" I said testily. Julia Paris was cowering against a table. My fingers again tightened on her arm. "I don't wear kid gloves, sister. I won't stop at anything to break this case."

She moaned and sagged at her knees and her eyes rolled with stark terror. A little more, I thought, and she'd talk. I raised my other hand to grab her other arm.

The bathroom door opened and Donlin, the lawyer, moved casually into the living room. His fat face beamed around at all of us as if he were entering a friendly social gathering.

"You are a tenacious man, Lieutenant," he said cheerfully.

"What's the idea of hiding in there?" I demanded.

"Hardly hiding. It's a bathroom, you know. Have I interrupted anything?"

He knew he had. A cop had to know the time and place to throw his weight around. A mug like Bungman didn't count as a witness, but a respected member of the bar did.

I said angrily: "I'll keep questioning and questioning. And I'll do it my own way, at headquarters. When I'm ready, I'll have Julia Paris alone for a couple of hours before you can get a writ out."

"And have her fall down the stairs, like Cookie Bungman?" Donlin inquired with a smile.

"I'll get the truth any way I can." I looked hard at the girl. "Well, sister, do you talk?"

Her head drooped to her bosom. She sobbed softly.

There was nothing more to be accomplished there at the mo-

ment. I nodded to Baldwin and we left.

Baldwin didn't say anything until we stepped into the automatic elevator. Then he looked at me with hurt eyes. "Lieutenant Walsh, you weren't serious about taking Miss Paris down to the basement room and beating her up?"

"What do you think I am?" I snapped. "I only tried to frighten her."

"Oh." He was relieved. "Still, you shouldn't have hurt her arm."

"I suppose your preaching worked better? You can't act like a gentleman with that kind."

"She could be a very nice girl."

"Don't tell me you're falling for her?" I sneered.

"No. I don't care for hard-boiled girls."

Then he fell silent. His eyes had a distant look in them.

He didn't get into the car with me. "Do you mind, Lieutenant, if I don't go back with you? I have a hazy idea I'd like to look into."

"Sure." I was glad to get him out of my hair.

When I got back to my office, there was a complete report on Frederick Carter compiled by a couple of my men. He had been a rich boy who had always spent money faster than inherited investments could produce it. Now, at forty-two, he had been dead broke, which accounted for the ten grand he had owed Georgie Ames. At seventeen he had been kicked out of school because of a woman, and for the next twenty-five years he had gone through a flock of them, preferring them very young like Julia Paris and doing right by none.

In short, a heel.

After a very late supper, I returned to my office. Sergeant Scully was the only one there, brooding over the reports that had come in while I was gone.

"Anything, Ed?" I asked without hope.

He shook his head and then looked up and grinned. "The boy wonder has come and gone," he said, sliding a typewritten sheet along the desk.

We had office forms for regular reports but none like this. Baldwin had made it up. I read:

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

Date: June 15th
Time: 8:27 P.M.
To: Lieutenant Ike Walsh
From: C. Baldwin,
Detective First Grade
Subject: The Carter Case

After we left the residence of Julia Paris, I stationed myself at the alley at the side of the building. At 3:31 P.M., Donlin and Bungman came out. They entered a taxi and drove away.

At 6:18 P.M., Julia Paris appeared and proceeded to walk

rapidly down the street. I caught up to her. She was very frightened of me, probably because of the threat that had been made to her concerning what would be done to her if and when she was taken in for questioning. With great effort, I managed to assure her that I meant no harm and walked several blocks with her.

The essence of our conversation, eliminating the embroidery, follows:

I: Did it ever occur to you that you yourself are under suspicion?

Julia Paris: You're nuts! What would I have against poor Freddie Carter?

I: Were you very fond of him?

Julia Paris: Sure. He was a swell guy and handsome as the devil.

I: Do you imply that you cared for him more than you do for Georgie Ames?

Julia Paris: That greasy slob turns my stomach.

I: So you threw Georgie Ames over for Frederick Carter?

Julia Paris: Georgie don't own me, though he seems to think he does. He even wants to marry me, but I'd rather be dead than his wife.

I: How do you feel about Ames having killed the man you love?

Julia Paris: He didn't.

I: Why are you trying to protect Ames by establishing a fake alibi for him?

That last question was a mistake, for Julia Paris refused to say another word. She flagged a passing taxi and jumped into it.

It appears obvious that both Carter and Ames were extremely fond of her. Ames's affection even going so far as offering marriage, but she preferred Carter. A man of Ames's type would not hesitate to murder a rival.

"Well?" Scully asked when I had finished reading.

I tossed the memo or report or whatever it was on the desk. "This almost convinces me that the Paris girl didn't give a hoot for Carter. She tried too hard to convince Baldwin that she loved Carter and so wouldn't knock him off."

"I don't know," Scully said. "That boy is smart."

"Smart in civil service exams. If Julia was nuts over Carter and disliked Ames, why is she going to bat for Ames? A girl in love would move heaven and earth to pin the rap on the killer."

"Suppose," Scully pondered, "she hasn't opened up to us because she's scared of us. Kids are scared of cops. Even a mild-looking guy like Baldwin frightened her because he has a badge. Why not keep him working on her?"

I rocked back in my chair. "Too inexperienced. You try it, Ed. Give her your fatherly approach. Talk moonlight and roses

to her and how tough it is to lose the man of her heart and what a rat Carter's killer is."

"Right," Scully said and left.

About twenty minutes later Cecil Baldwin came in. He stopped just inside the doorway.

"I went home for supper after leaving that memo," he said. "Then I went to the Bluebird Club where Julia Paris sings. The manager said she hadn't shown up yet, though she was supposed to sing two numbers in the dinner show. Perhaps she went back home after she left me. Should I have another interview with her?"

"Sergeant Scully is handling that."

Baldwin nodded. "I'm glad you sent him. He looks like a roughneck, but I'm sure he knows how to treat young girls decently."

"Damn you!" I yelled, pushing my chair back. "Is that supposed to be a crack against me? If it is, I'll—"

My phone rang. I scooped it up and barked: "Yes?" A prowl car sergeant spoke to me at the other end of the wire. Slowly I hung up.

My face must have looked pretty bad. "What is it, Lieutenant?" Baldwin asked.

"Scully is dead," I said dully.

Sergeant Scully lay where he had fallen, as if he had tripped while walking along the sidewalk and pitched forward on his face. It was a bullet that had tripped him, entering his back and reaching his heart. He lay near the entrance to the apartment house in which Julia Paris lived.

"He never had a chance," I said, replacing the blanket that had been thrown over him.

Uniformed policemen were holding the gawking crowd back. Around me and the dead man stood my squad. Every face was grimly set, and in Cecil Baldwin's eyes tears glistened.

For the first time I almost liked the kid. "You thought a lot of Scully, didn't you? So did all of us."

Baldwin gulped and turned his face away.

I yanked myself back to business. "Somebody wanted to keep Scully from entering this house and speaking to Julia Paris. That would be Georgie Ames. Lowe, you and Gregory go find him, but save him for me."

The doorman was waiting for me. He said he had been in the lobby, speaking to one of the tenants, when he had heard the shot. The last time he had seen Julia Paris had been about ten minutes before the killing. She had entered the elevator, and he was sure she hadn't left the house. He had been outside or in the lobby all the time.

I told a couple of my men to get statements from other witnesses and took the elevator up-

stairs. Cecil Baldwin was turning from Julia Paris' door.

"She's not in," he told me.

"She's got to be in," I said. "The doorman saw her go up and didn't see her leave."

"She slipped out of the building."

"You're sure, eh?" The boy wonder was again getting under my skin. "What's the idea rushing up here ahead of me without orders?"

He just stood there looking at me. His eyes had become hard.

"You sent Sergeant Scully to his death," he said bitterly.

I could forgive him a lot at the moment because of the way he felt about Scully. "Scully was a cop, son. He took his chances like the rest of us. Anyway, it was only a routine assignment."

"No, it wasn't."

I didn't know what he meant by that and didn't much care. I said: "Go to the Bluebird Club and pick up Julia Paris if she's there."

"She won't be."

"Damn you, that's an order!" I roared.

"Yes, Lieutenant Walsh." He inclined his head and went down the hall.

I fetched the building superintendent to open the door with his passkey. Julia's apartment was empty.

Down in the lobby I got the reports on the witnesses. There had been, as far as we knew, seven people in the street at the time of the murder, and all of them had heard the shot and had seen Scully fall. But none of them had glimpsed anybody firing the shot.

I went outside and studied the alley. The shot could have been fired from that corner of the building. The killer would be fairly well hidden in the dimness. Then he had scurried back down the alley and hidden there until he could mingle with the gathering crowd and slip away.

Gregory returned with word that Georgie Ames was in his apartment. It was only three blocks away. I walked it, clocking myself, and learned that the distance could be covered in less than two minutes if the walker was in a hurry.

Detectives Lowe and Gregory had broken up a poker game. Donlin and Ames were two of the players; the other four were racing men with fair reputations. Cookie Bungman, with his face patched up, was the seventh in the apartment.

"The game started at around nine," Ames told me. "It went on without interruption until your boys barged in."

The others agreed. Ames handed me a cocky smile. The bookie was dumpy, with a smile that ran to grease. Julia Paris had called him a fat slob, and that was as good a description as any.

I asked Ames: "Did you go out for smokes or anything like that during the game?"

The greasy smile broadened. "Sorry, Lieutenant. Of course a guy can go to the can."

Sure, I thought, and slip out through the bathroom window and be back and walk three blocks there and back without the other players suspecting that he had left the house. They were all hazy about the time Ames had been in the bathroom. Donlin remembered that he had gone downstairs for cigars at around that time, but he hadn't looked at his watch.

I turned to Cookie Bungman. "Did you have a hand in the game?"

"I ain't got the dough for those stakes," the wizened little man said. "I was in the kitchen mixing drinks and making sandwiches and in here serving them."

So there I was. Even if I suspected the alibis, they'd stand up legally. And with Donlin there ready to throw the law at me, I hadn't enough on Ames and Bungman to even take them in for questioning.

Besides, I was very anxious to see Julia Paris.

Though I'd sent Baldwin to the Bluebird Club, I drove there anyway. From the manager, I learned that he had come and gone. What was more to the point, Julia Paris hadn't appeared for the first two shows and now the final one was about to begin.

By then it was past one in the morning. I'd done about all I could for one night, but all the same I stopped off at my office in case anything had turned up. Nothing had except another memo on my desk from the boy wonder. It read:

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

Date: June 17th
Time: 12:32 A.M.
To: Lieutenant Ike Walsh
From: C. Baldwin, Detective First Grade
Subject: The murder of Sergeant Scully

You murdered Sergeant Scully as surely as if you had pulled the trigger yourself.

Your threat to take Julia Paris to headquarters and beat her up drove her into flight. That was why she slipped out by way of the alley. When she reached the street, she saw Sergeant Scully about to enter the building.

Her arm still hurt where you had tortured. She thought of what you had done to Cookie Bungman. Terror made her lose her head. Believing that Sergeant Scully had come to arrest her, she snatched a gun out of her handbag and shot him dead.

Sergeant Scully would now be alive if you had not forced his murder through your brutality.

Let that be on your conscience, if you have one.

Angrily I started to rise from my desk, as if Cecil Baldwin were in front of me. Then slowly I dropped back into my chair. For a long time I sat looking at the memo in my hand.

After a sleepless night, I reached my office late the next morning. Ballistics had reported that Sergeant Scully had been shot with the same gun as Frederick Carter. That made me feel a little better. It meant that Julia Paris hadn't shot Scully, or that she had killed Carter and then shot Scully while trying to make a getaway. In either case, it wasn't because of anything I had said or done.

And another memo from the boy wonder was waiting for me:

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM
Date: June 16th
Time: 9:06 A.M.
To: Lieutenant Ike Walsh
From: C. Baldwin,
Detective First Grade
Subject: The Carter-Scully murders

I was wrong. Julia Paris did not shoot Sergeant Scully. But I was not wrong about anything else.

I am conducting further investigations.

He was, was he? Did he think he could run about without orders when he pleased and where he pleased?

Bob Lowe came in to report that so far Juila Paris had not been found. I told him to keep every available man on the hunt.

"What's Baldwin working on now?" he asked as he was leaving.

"He's working himself back to pounding a beat," I said.

"Yeah. Well, about twenty minutes ago I saw him in the City Hall."

I pounded my desk. "If he's gone over my head to the commissioner—"

"He wouldn't find the commissioner in the Bureau of Records office," Lowe said. "That's where I saw him. He said he had the case practically solved and went away."

When Lowe was gone, I studied Baldwin's latest memo as if there was something I should be able to read between the lines. After a while I drove over to City Hall and browsed through records.

All at once I was in a terrific hurry. I drove downtown to a crummy slum area. The staircase was dim, rickety. I went up to the third floor with my gun in hand and kicked a door open.

Cecil Baldwin stood in front of me, his mouth open in surprise. Behind him Julia Paris, dressed for the street, stood stiffly with her hands on the table.

"In back of you, Lieutenant!" Baldwin yelped.

I started to turn, but it was too late. Cookie Bungman was pressed against the wall at the side of the door, and now my back was to him and he had a gun in his hand.

"Lift his rod, Julia," the wizened little man ordered.

The girl moved around Baldwin in a kind of daze and took the gun from my fingers. "Two policemen!" she shrilled. "That means they'll all be here."

"Nuts!" Bungman kicked the door shut. "Why didn't they come together?" He moved farther into the room and showed me his yellow teeth. "I kept Julia watching at the window, copper. Where there was one cop, there might be two."

"One of my men was up here last night," I said. "How come they didn't find her?"

Bungman laughed. "Because he was a dope. She was in an empty flat next door. She's here now because we're scramming. Then that dick barged in."

The boy wonder spoke for the first time. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant Walsh. I was as careless as you. How did you get here?"

"I was right behind you," I growled. "Lowe saw you coming out of the Bureau of Records. I had a look for myself. I thought Julia Paris might have been married, but there was no license. Then I tried the birth records and found a Julia Bungman had been born eighteen years ago."

The girl swayed. "They know everything."

"Naw. Why didn't they come with a squad? Hang onto that rod, Julia, and shoot if you have to."

Ignoring the two guns, Baldwin said as if delivering a report to me: "I wondered why a girl like Miss Paris would bring a mug like Bungman up to her apartment and tenderly wash his bruised face. And she loved Carter. Would she protect his murderer? She would if the murderer was her father. But what about the name? Well, Paris was what a singer would call herself who had been born with a name as dull and uninspiring as Bungman. Though, of course, it was her birth certificate that actually proved the truth to me.

"Bungman didn't hold out during your third degree to protect Georgie Ames. It was the other way around: Ames and Julia Paris were protecting him. It all goes back to the sort of man Frederick Carter was—a wolf who went in for young girls. Bungman couldn't persuade his daughter to keep away from him, so he decided to protect her by killing him."

"Dad, we're wasting time!" the girl cried.

"Let him talk." Bungman's battered face was grimly set. "I want to hear where we stand."

Baldwin acted as if we two were alone. "While driving his daughter and Ames home, Bungman must have passed Carter. He stopped the car on some pretext. I doubt if either Ames or Miss Paris knew that he had left them for those few minutes to murder Carter, though they guessed later. She, of course, would alibi her own father. Ames was afraid not to because he himself had motive and might be considered an accessory for a crime committed by his bodyguard.

"You were too tough, Lieutenant. You frightened both Bungman and his daughter into believing that you would hurt her in order to get a confession. Bungman decided to get her out of town. I read the report Lowe wrote up on the alibis of Ames and Bungman and Donlin; but Bungman was in the kitchen most of the time preparing refreshments for the poker players. He went out to see his daughter. Sergeant Scully was coming along. Bungman shot him in the back and slipped back into Ames's apartment without having been missed."

Bungman's face contorted. "I wasn't going to let you guys work her over."

"You fool!" I said heavily. "Scully wouldn't have harmed her."

"That's what you say now." Bungman raised his gun a little. "I heard enough. Julia, go down and wait in the car for me."

With my gun still held limply in her fingers, Julia Paris moved toward the door. She passed between Baldwin and her father. Bungman saw the danger and leaned forward from his hips, gun out-thrust, yet not daring to warn her because that would give Baldwin the idea. But the boy wonder got it by himself. He threw his arms about the girl and pulled her fiercely against him, making her body a shield.

I was in motion, then, toward Bungman. He was doing a kind of dance as he skipped to get Baldwin in line with his gun without danger of hitting his daughter. The tail of his eye caught me coming. I was close to him by then, but not close enough. The muzzle of his gun gaped at me. I lunged, knowing that I could never reach him in time.

The shot did not come from Bungman's gun. I felt the whiff of the slug past my ear and I saw a hole open in the man's temple as he dropped away from me. Bungman was dead before he reached the floor.

There was unnatural silence in the room. Slowly I turned. The boy wonder had my gun in his hand. At his feet Julia Paris lay in a motionless heap.

He looked at his knuckles in sorrow. "I had to knock her out with my fist," he apologized. "It

was the quickest way to get the gun away from her." His gaze shifted to brood at the dead man. "I would have preferred wounding him."

"So you're sorry you shot him?" I clipped.

"Every man is entitled to stand trial." His wide eyes were very grave. "But he was about to shoot you, so I had no choice. All the same, I don't like it."

"Cops do a lot of things they don't like," I told him. I had an urge to give him a fatherly pat on the shoulder, but I restrained it. "Run down and phone the squad.

"Right, Lieutenant," he said stiffly.

I looked at the door closing behind him. I knew that we'd never approve of each other, but that was all right. He was a good cop, and that was all I ever asked of any man on my squad.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Believe it or not, New York, soon after 1800, *was* a town where you could lose yourself. Thomas Hoag did so.

Some time after his arrival in the city in 1800, the young carpenter met and married Catherine Secors. He lived happily with her for the next three years, had a daughter by her, and then disappeared.

Two years later his sister-in-law was walking along the street and was startled to run into a man who seemed to be her missing brother-in-law. He not only looked like Hoag, but also had his distinctive lisp. The man was arrested and brought to trial in 1805.

Eight persons swore that this man was Thomas Hoag, including the Judge who had married him and for whom he'd later worked. Hoag's former landlord said the man was Hoag, identifying him by the scar on his forehead and a wen on the back of his neck. Still another witness insisted that this was Hoag; they'd exercised together, and Hoag had a scar on the sole of his foot.

On the other hand, sixteen witnesses and the prisoner himself insisted that his name was Joseph Parker. Mrs. Parker testified that they had been married in 1799 and that they had never been separated for one night up to the time of the arrest.

Both sides were convincing. Finally the Judge hit on a possible solution. It had been testified that Hoag had this scar on his foot. The Judge told the prisoner to remove his boots. There was no scar on the sole of either foot.

Thomas Hoag was still missing.

something in the air

by . . . David Alexander

No one had tried to assassinate him. They'd even shown perfunctory respect, their sullen hatred half visible.

THERE was something in the air.

To the secret agent known as Bardo it was almost a palpable smell. Back in the headquarters of the Secret Police in the Capital, they made grim jests about Bardo's Roman nose. They said that when the flaring nostrils of his big nose quivered, Bardo smelled death.

It was a kind of hunter's excitement that made Bardo's nostrils dilate, of course, the tiny nervous impulse that shivers through the lean barrel of a good field dog when he makes the point. Someone usually died when Bardo's big nose began to sniff. To the few people in the world who knew Bardo for what he was, the twitching nose was an ominous token. A traitor, a zealous patriot, a member of the Underground, or one of the mounting numbers of Enemies of the State was likely to disappear quite suddenly when the relentless Bardo smelled something in the air.

Bardo was a gaunt man, now well past middle life. His thin,

"History offers no more striking parallel between eras nineteen centuries apart in time," as Dave Alexander correctly points out, "than the remarkable similarity between Palestine, under the domination of Rome at the time of Christ, and any of the small Iron Curtain nations." Alexander, author of the recent HUSHABYE MURDER *(Random House) is a former newspaper man.*

sharp face, dominated by the vulturine beak, was somehow like a bas-relief of an ancient Roman Senator, or the profile of a Spartan warrior of a time far more remote. There was something in the face that was at once patrician and austere and cunning.

Bardo had been a beardless youth when the first great earthquake stirrings swelled through the streets of the Capital some forty years before, when the words of orators were whips that flayed the masses to rise and mutiny. Bardo had seen blood flow in the streets on that Day That Shook the World, that day an old autocracy had died and a new autocracy was born. He had known the blood purges and the battles, the cold wars and the hot ones, ever since. He had lived through the death and the downgrading of dictators and he had stood aloof while the heirs-apparent fought among themselves for power. For awhile there had been three who governed, and then there were two, and now, inevitably, there was one. That was the lesson in the history of empire and ideological conquest. Always there must be one who is supreme.

Bardo had served all the masters without question, and in the same capacity. He was a hunter, and his hound's nose was keenly sensitive to the smell of treason. He had served in many lands, some of them inside the Iron Curtain, some of them in the Free World outside. Always and everywhere Bardo's nose was a weapon as fearful as the executioner's ax or the hangman's noose. That was why he, among so few, had survived the blood purges and the change of dictators.

Bardo was no politician. He was an animal with a nose.

He might privately disapprove of the new policies, but never did he question them. He was content to hunt. His nostrils quivered and his finger pointed and men died. In this way he had always served. He knew that the present regime had opened chinks in the Iron Curtain and had even made gestures of inviting foreigners into the sacrosanct precincts of the Capital itself. He knew that the dictator was concerned mainly with the West, with extending his boundaries of political and military power throughout Germany and beyond the Rhine. The dictator thought the slave states in the East were conquered and secure. Bardo knew better, but he said nothing. He knew no vassal state was ever quite secure, so long as dreamers dreamed. Bardo was in the East now, in a small satellite nation on the fringe of the Iron Curtain. And there was dissidence even here. There were incidents, seething unrest. Bardo had already smelled out a well-

organized Underground that was called the Macs.

Throughout the land he had smelled out the Macs and exterminated them with his pointing finger. But he knew he had not found them all. There were too many. He felt that they were all around him now, even in this tiny, dust-hazed town that had slept its way through history. Bardo's nose would sniff tremulously and his bright, hard eyes would scan the enigmatic faces of the crowds and he would say to himself: *This unshaven fellow has a suspicious look to him and is probably a Mac;* or, *that one is a Nationalist;* or, *the other is a sympathizer who can be goaded into riot by a clever agitator.*

The tiny village was crowded to overflowing. Why? Bardo asked himself. They had been gathering, this sullen horde of peasants, for a dozen days. They had come, of course to hear the government official explain a new and complicated method of taxation that a distant bureaucracy had devised. It had virtually been an order from the puppet governor of this unimportant satellite that had brought them here. But the people had stayed on. There had been no place for them to sleep except in the streets and in the fields outside the village, even on the first day. There was no apparent reason for their continued presence. They were a backward, agricultural race, Bardo told himself, and they had their crops and their herds and their flocks to tend. Still, they stayed on.

Bardo had come here twelve days before to protect the government official charged with explaining the system of taxation. Almost at once he had sensed that there was something in the air. It was an electric prescience, like the portents of an approaching storm.

No one had tried to assassinate the official. The crowds had even shown him a perfunctory respect, considering the sullen hatred they usually displayed toward the representatives of the Power that governed them. There had been no overt act of any sort, and the official and his little retinue of fussy quislings had left the place quite safely and uneventfully.

Bardo had intended to leave with them.

But his nose had twitched again.

The crowds were not leaving. They lingered on, inexplicably. They had come here virtually under mandate, against their will, as they had always come to such official gatherings. Yet they had stayed on long after the reason for their presence was removed.

Bardo had stayed, too, because he could not understand. When Bardo could not understand, his nose began to quiver.

For a dozen days he had walk-

ed among the people and he had tried to disguise himself as one of them and he had asked sly questions. But they had only shrugged and stared at him with their dumb-beast, peasant eyes in which a strange light seemed to burn.

Oh, there was something in the air, all right.

Bardo could smell the thing, but he could not identify it.

Bardo had encountered rebellion in many forms during his long decades of hunting. But this was something new to him, this mute and passive mingling of the people in the village streets. An air of hushed waiting hung over this hateful little place. Time and time again Bardo asked himself, *"What are they waiting for?"* And he found no answer.

At first frustration made Bardo merely irritable. And then he began to hate the silent figures that moved through the twisting, dusty streets. This, too, was something new for him. A hunter does not hate his quarry. He merely seeks it. A secret agent cannot afford the luxury of emotion. He does not condemn men to death and slave camps because he hates them. Men are only figures in the ledger-books of history and Bardo was nothing more than an efficient clerk in history's counting house. But by the sixth day of his vigil he had learned to hate. And now, on the twelfth day of his frustration, he knew that he was cracking up, that the iron self-control and discipline that had distinguished him for all his life no longer sustained him.

Sometimes Bardo thought that the strangeness of this place was having an effect on him. He had traveled the earth in his time, but nowhere else had the atmosphere seemed so weirdly unfamiliar. Each day the sun gazed down on him steadily through a yellow swirl of dust. At night he stood beneath the silver stare of stars.

And the behavior of the silent, waiting peasants, too, was strange and baffling. They looked at him with their dumb-beast eyes and they did not seem to see him. There was a new expression in those eyes, but Bardo could not read its meaning. He was good at reading men, but these waiting people eluded him completely. In all his years of hunting, he had never encountered that exact expression in human eyes before. It portended something, of course, but Bardo could not guess the nature of it. Sometimes when he mingled with the crowds, the eyes of a peasant would rest on him for the briefest moment and recognition of a sort would flicker in them. Bardo did not like this expression, either. The eyes seemed to regard him with both pity and amusement. Then the eyes would shift away from Bardo as if there

were more important things for them to contemplate.

When the sun shone through the yellow haze, the eyes looked inward at some private image, or so it seemed to Bardo. At night the eyes turned toward the star-sheened skies and seemed to search, as if they expected some winged machine from Heaven to swoop down.

Oh, he had discovered some things, of course. He knew that the peasants gathered daily at a vacant, tumbledown structure near the edge of the village. It was a ruined building that might well have been in the path of war or might have begun to collapse from age and neglect. The walls leaned at crazy angles and the roof was partially caved in. Bardo was unable to determine the original purpose of the building. Apparently it had been used recently as a kind of storehouse and even as a shelter for livestock, but he suspected that it was mostly a refuge of vagrants. He had consulted the landlord of the only inn in the Village, a fat, ugly fellow with a mole on his nose, who enjoyed special privileges as a collaborationist. The fat man had told Bardo that the frame of the building concealed a kind of cellar or cave. He said the building had a special name in the town. As near as Bardo could translate the colloquial gibberish into his mother-tongue, it was called "The Unthrifty Place." The reason, he supposed, was that unthrifty people, itinerants and displaced persons, made use of the abandoned structure.

Bardo felt quite certain that the cave concealed contraband, probably arms, and that it was a cache of the Resistance forces called the Macs. He had tried to enter the place and investigate the portion of it that was underground. He had used many ruses, but all of them had failed. The ox-eyed peasants had formed a human wall to block his entrance, no matter what hour of the day or night it might be. They had shown him no physical violence. They had simply refused to move aside. They had pretended that he didn't exist when he tried to talk or shove his way through their solid, waiting ranks.

He might have gone to the local authorities, of course, and bade them force an entrance into the place. But Bardo always distrusted local authorities in satellite countries. In more than one instance, he had found them to be members of the Underground. It was possible they would use delaying tactics and that the arms or contraband would be removed by the time legal entry was effected.

The capital city of this small country was only a few miles distant. Neither the roads nor the transportation facilities were good, but Bardo might have

made the trip in a matter of hours. He abandoned the idea of seeking aid there, however, because he thought he might be playing into the hands of the waiting men if he left for even so short a time. Some explosive event was in the making, he was sure of that. If it occurred while he was absent, Bardo knew what to expect. In his country, mistakes were not forgiven, especially when they were made by men of his profession. His long years of service would not be taken into consideration. If something happened while he was gone, Bardo would be quietly liquidated. Even his famous nose could not save him.

He had been here long enough to send a dozen messages to the capital city of the little country, of course, but he had hesitated to ask assistance in this way. They would think that the famous hunter was not equal to his task. They would think it strange that stolid, passive peasants who had committed no overt act of any kind could defeat an expert in the art of espionage. And suppose he did send the message and force his way into the place with the help of the authorities? He might find nothing but an empty cellar or cave or whatever it was behind the leaning walls. He would appear to be a fool. In Bardo's profession it was as fatal to appear a fool as it was to make mistakes.

It was evening of the twelfth day of Bardo's vigil now. Dusk walked slowly on the earth, like a mourner garbed in shadows.

Bardo, a dark figure in the lowering twilight, lurked near the Unthrifty Place watching the silent peasants mill about. Tonight, Bardo thought, the crowd seemed more restive, more expectant. An event was in the making. Bardo sensed that. But the nature of the event evaded him. These peasants did not have the look of rioters, but there might be Macs among them, and if there were, anything might happen. As the last gray veils of the day trailed across the heavens, the heads of the waiting people turned upward, one by one. They were like the Twelve Astronomers on the Hill of Vaus, seeking counsel of the skies.

As the night descended, the secret agent cursed beneath his breath. He knew how to deal with violence and open treachery. But these waiting people defeated him completely. When he spoke, they answered him with silence.

Bardo, the hunter, owned many weapons and most of them were deadly, but all of them were completely ineffective against the waiting people.

When the sky was silvered with the first pale stars, Bardo spat into the dust. Then he walked through the silent streets to the inn to eat his evening meal.

He knew the meal would be coarse peasant fare fit only for a pig. In this forsaken village of a people who were slaves, Bardo was denied even creature comforts, he thought bitterly.

The fat landlord awaited him at the inn, his moon-face glistening with sweat and excitement. Bardo despised the fat man as he despised all collaborationists. He made use of collaborationists in his work only when it was absolutely necessary. All were opportunists, he knew, and none was trustworthy.

The landlord was bald and obscenely plump, and he reminded Bardo of a sleek, fat cat that has shed its fur and become a pink and hairless monstrosity.

The fat man rushed up to Bardo and took him by the arm. A protuberant, lashless eyelid quivered in a conspiratory wink and a plump, pink finger tapped significantly against the mole on the landlord's nose. The fat man led Bardo to a deserted corner of the inn.

"There is news tonight, Excellency," the landlord said in a rasping whisper. "News brought by a traveler no more than an hour ago."

"What news?" asked Bardo, disdainfully shaking off the grip of the fat man's moist and fleshy hand.

"A traveler from the city dropped by for refreshment," the landlord went on eagerly. "He says that dignitaries have been received there only this afternoon. Dignitaries from foreign powers, he says."

Bardo's brow crinkled in a frown. He had received no notice from headquarters that foreign visitors were expected in this satellite. Such notice would have been standard operating procedure with the Secret Police. Bardo had been assigned a task in an unimportant country, but he was still an important agent. Most certainly he would have been notified.

Bardo said, "That is quite impossible. No visitors were expected."

The landlord winked wisely and rubbed his pudgy finger against the mole again. "That's the point, Excellency," he said. "They *weren't* expected. They simply *arrived*. And they were received with all the customary formalities accorded to officials of foreign States."

Bardo shook his head. This was unbelievable. The Iron Curtain had been lifted to some extent, of course, but it had hardly been lifted this much. It was unthinkable that border guards should permit representatives of a foreign power to enter without the proper credentials. And the proper credentials could come only from the Capital of Bardo's own country. It was incredible, too, that the puppet governor of a satellite state should dare to

receive such officials against all precedence.

"That's not all, Excellency," the landlord declared, obviously relishing the importance of the news he had brought the famous hunter.

"What else?" asked Bardo sharply.

"They are coming *here*!" the fat man exclaimed. "Here to our own small village! They were due to leave at dusk, I understand."

"But why?" asked Bardo. "Why on earth should foreigners come to this place?"

Then suddenly Bardo's lean body stiffened and his nostrils dilated widely and his nose began to quiver.

Bardo, the hunter, had found the scent at last.

The visit of the foreigners was unsuspected in his country, but it was a planned thing with the traitors of this satellite nation and it was known to the Resistance, to the Macs, to the peasants who had waited now for days in the village.

This was the thing that Bardo had been smelling in the air.

Ever since the Iron Curtain had been lifted slightly, the satellites had been doing things like this. They waited until foreign visitors were present and they staged riots and demonstrations to impress them with the fact that the cause of freedom was not dead.

They had chosen this small place because there were no troops here and no authorities worthy of the name.

They had simply waited for the proper moment.

Tonight they would pass out the arms they had stored in the cave beneath the Unthrifty Place and they would surge through the streets and destroy property and take human lives before the military arrived to crush them. There would be another scandalous incident, and the ruling power would lose face.

"Who can be trusted?" Bardo asked urgently. "I must have a messenger at once to send to your capital. They must rush troops before the visitors arrive. We must keep order here at any price."

"*I* can be trusted, Excellency," the fat man answered. "You have seen my *dossier*, have you not? I informed against the Macs when your soldiers and officials first arrived here to organize the country. Twenty-six were executed. My own cousin was among them."

Bardo nodded soberly. It was a poor choice, but it was the only choice he had. He scribbled a message hastily and handed it to the fat man. "Give it to the military commander in person, you understand? Tell him that you come from Bardo."

The landlord nodded eagerly and hurried toward the door, his

fat buttocks wobbling with his haste.

A hungry gut is often a hunter's fate. Bardo went forth again without his dinner. He returned to the Unthrifty Place and found the crowds still assembled there. It seemed to him that they had grown more numerous but it was too dark now to count heads.

There was one Bardo noticed especially, though—a tall, bearded peasant he had seen before, the one he suspected of being a leader of the Macs.

Bardo had no great respect for the military commander of the nearby garrison. But he had worded his message strongly and even a dunce would understand that it was top priority, that there was need for haste. Bardo's nose had quivered at the last possible moment, but perhaps it had quivered in time to prevent catastrophe.

He could see the ribbon of road that led to the capital. He watched intently, waiting for the first sign of the troops.

He watched the peasants, too.

They stood before the Unthrifty Place the same as they had stood for twelve days now, silent, waiting. None attempted to enter.

An hour passed and no soldiers arrived.

But the foreign visitors had not arrived, either, and Bardo still hoped that his nose had found the scent in time.

Another hour went by. The moon swam from behind a cloud like a golden ship and lighted the road and the Unthrifty Place and the dark figures of the waiting people.

And then the hunter's eyes saw something, a small procession down the road, approaching from the direction of the city.

At first Bardo thought it was the troops.

But he was wrong.

It was the foreigners.

They came on slowly and, amazingly, they headed directly for this broken structure that was called the Unthrifty Place. There was no demonstration of any kind.

The peasants remained silent, but they moved aside and let the small procession pass.

Bardo began to run forward, fighting his way through the ranks of the peasants. He was almost to the door of the Unthrifty Place when an iron hand clutched his shoulder and brought him to a halt. It was the giant, bearded peasant who stopped Bardo, and Bardo could not wriggle free.

For a moment the moon shone full on the faces of the foreigners who were entering the Unthrifty Place and Bardo cried out in sheer astonishment.

From the crowd a voice asked, "Who is it? Who speaks?"

The bearded peasant chuckled good-naturedly. "It is the Ro-

man," he called. "The Roman spy who seeks the Maccabees among us."

"Why are they here?" Bardo demanded shrilly. "Why do such men come to a place like this?"

"They have only come to see a Child," the bearded peasant answered. "A Child that is twelve days old."

"But these are no ordinary men!" Bardo protested. "These are not mere State officials! These men are Kings! They are Three Kings from mighty lands across the border!"

The bearded peasant shrugged.

"Kings or shepherds, what difference?" he asked. "We have followed the same bright star."

THE BACKGROUND

The genesis of this story is, of course, the remarkable similarity between Palestine, under the domination of Rome at the time of Christ, and any of the small Iron Curtain Nations under the domination of Russia today. History offers no more striking parallel between eras 19 centuries apart in time.

Octavian, the first Augustus and surviving member of the Triumvirate ruling after the assassination of Caesar, "opened" Rome to foreign potentates who came and signed treaties the Roman Empire constantly violated.

The Secret Police and espionage systems of Roman provinces compare to those of Russia today. The Roman puppet governments of Herod and others compare to the Communist system of today. The ring of Roman spears was as formidable an Iron Curtain as the ring of Russian guns.

The Jews' great warriors, the Maccabees, went underground during Roman occupation although the last Maccabean king had been slain by Herod's father. Their resistance movement was as efficient as that of the Ukrainians and Czechs today.

The description of Christ's birthplace is drawn directly from John of Hildesheim's account of the Three Kings. This 14th Century monk claimed he based his story on contemporary documents. In the account, John of Hildesheim describes the birthplace of Christ in detail as a ruined dwelling concealing a cave. He says indolent residents of Bethlehem used the place to store lumber and shelter livestock instead of building structures of their own, and that for this reason it was known locally as the "Unthrifty Place."

The Twelve Astronomers on the Hill of Vaus, to whom there is an oblique reference in the story, were the ancient astrologers whose reckonings marked the Star that guided the Three Kings to the Manger twelve days after the Child was born. The Kings had been received by Herod in Jerusalem, a fact that irritated his masters, the Romans.

—David Alexander

wanton fate

by . . . C. S. Forester

He didn't have a chance. Marwitz caught him unawares out on the edge of the crevasse, waiting, laughing, as he died.

IN TELLING this story, the first picture I have in my mind's eye is one which I have never seen in actuality. It is the edge of the great icecap that covers the interior of Greenland; in the north this vast shield of ice, hundreds of feet thick, extends to the very edge of the land and even beyond, far out to sea. The snow which falls there both in winter and summer turns to ice under the steady pressure of its own vast weight, and this ice, continually renewed in the center, spreads out so that its edges in the sea continually break off, forming the icebergs which drift south to their ultimate fate in the warmer waters of the North Atlantic. In summer it is eternally day, if you can call it that, where skies are leaden gray and excruciating winds sweep over the icy surface.

Captured German records which, in my capacity as naval historian, I was allowed to consult, show that it was here, immediately after the German conquest of Norway in the spring of 1940, that two Germans named Marwitz and Diepholz

C. S. Forester, while better known for his novels about Admiral Hornblower, to many a personification of the British one-time "sense of destiny," is also the author of many other works including this grim little vignette of justice reaching out her hand, high up in the frozen North.

brought their ski-equipped plane to a landing. This is the place where much of the weather of the world originates, and the German High Command, with its plans for the conquest of France and the invasion of England, needed for its weather forecasts the data that Greenland could supply. German scientists had devised ingenious automatic apparatus, weatherproof and coldproof. Once installed, each unit at regular intervals would emit a radio signal giving the barometric pressure—a feeble enough signal, but strong enough for a German submarine lurking off the coast to be able to pick it up and relay it to Germany.

It was the duty of Marwitz and Diepholz to install one of these self-recording, automatic broadcasting barometers and to see that it was functioning properly before they left. They did the job thoroughly enough; at Ballestrand, Norway, the Germans had a Naval Air Arm base, and the newspapers published there for several months during 1940 carried notes of the instrument's broadcasts being received. But Marwitz was the only one of the two who returned to Norway.

I have read with my own eyes Marwitz' explanation of Diepholz' disappearance. Marwitz reported that Diepholz fell down a crevasse—an easy enough thing to do on the seaward edge of the Greenland icecap. For here the ice is widely seamed; the slowly advancing ice sheet curls over lofty cliffs and, in its curling over, cracks wide open in crevasses a hundred feet deep which close again when the ice levels itself out on the surface of the sea.

Judging by his notes, the Gestapo spy at Ballestrand had no doubt that Marwitz had pushed Diepholz into the crevasse, but nothing could be proved. Two men had gone out and one had returned.

The Gestapo spy knew there had been causes of enmity between the two men—no unusual thing in Germany where standing in the Party was often a matter of life and death. But when I interviewed Marwitz in his padded cell in a prison hospital, at Clayton, Ohio, he said many things the spy never knew.

It was a sufficiently revolting story. There was a Norwegian girl—or rather there *had been* a Norwegian girl until the moment of her death—over whom Marwitz and Diepholz had quarreled. A nasty story, and one which reflected no credit whatever on either Marwitz or Diepholz.

The men had not quarreled during their two or three days on the Greenland ice, although heaven knows (and the Gestapo spy hinted) that it would be easy enough for two men to quarrel

in that bleak, gray, frozen hell. But Marwitz, I know from his own lips, murdered Diepholz, caught him unawares on the edge of a crevasse and pushed him down.

The fall did not kill Diepholz. He lay there at the bottom of the crevasse, crying up to Marwitz for mercy until at last hunger and cold combined with his injuries to kill him. But just before the end he left off crying for mercy and feebly screamed threats of retribution, threats at which Marwitz could well afford to smile as he stood on the lip of the crevasse with the snow-laden wind blowing round him and waited for the end. Then Marwitz climbed back into the plane and took off on his flight back to Norway.

The records show that soon after his return to Ballestrand, Marwitz was transferred to new duties—he undoubtedly left Ballestrand under a cloud as a result of the scandal about Diepholz' disappearance. At this time the German U-boat attack was expanding gigantically and so were the German U-boat losses.

Good submarine officers, always hard to find, were growing scarcer, and Marwitz was put into the U-boat service, based on the French coast at La Rochelle, where he was given a boat of his own, U-295, and the rank of *Kapitän-Leutnant.*

The Ballestrand and La Rochelle records told me much about Marwitz, as did a petty officer who had served under him and whom I was fortunate enough to be able to trace to a prisoner-of-war camp in California. As I had seen for myself, Marwitz was a bulky silent man, with slightly protuberant gray eyes, and the petty officer made it plain that he was also a cold man, with a certain lust for cruelty.

He was, therefore, feared and hated in the U-295, but that hardly mattered to the German Naval Command as long as he maintained a fair record of sinkings. And he did go out repeatedly from the spring of 1941 to the spring of 1944; they had some narrow escapes, but they did not meet with disaster for three years—four years after Diepholz had met his death in the crevasse.

They were after the North Atlantic convoy in May, 1944. With the invasion of France in the immediate future every German submarine available was given the same task. But the convoy they attacked was heavily guarded by ships manned with experienced veterans. U-295 was detected below the surface and attacked repeatedly by depth charges. The petty officer's round blue eyes grew wide with terror as he told me about the awful ordeal of that hunt—the constant rain of depth charges, the explosions which flung them about in-

side the flimsy hull, the leaks which developed and the machinery which broke down. Marwitz had kept his head—the petty officer gave me a neat word picture of him standing in the control room giving his orders—and at the very last second, U-295 had escaped from her tormentors.

They were compelled to surface, because of the leaks; in fact the submarine was in a bad way, with holes in her hull, and her fuel tanks leaking so that she left a long trail of oil behind her. But her Diesels were unharmed and on the surface she could still make twenty knots, as Marwitz ordered when he came out on the bridge. The weather was as thick as North Atlantic weather usually is, and he was momentarily out of sight of the pursuing escort vessels which for the last thirty-six hours had hounded him remorselessly away from the convoy. Twenty knots and thick weather still gave them a chance for safety. With her engines at full throttle she went roaring over the gray sea.

My petty officer informant was up on the bridge with Marwitz. He told me, still wide-eyed, about that mad chase, the freezing spray bursting over them from the bows of the submarine, the wreaths of fog now concealing, now revealing them to their pursuers. Marwitz, still cool, saw a thicker patch of fog on the horizon and headed for it.

Five seconds later it happened. That fog was the mist which almost always surrounds an iceberg. They saw the glassy vertical surface gleam coldly through the mist, and then they crashed against it, not head on but a diagonal glancing blow which ripped open the bottom of the fleeing U-boat.

It could not have been for very long that they hung against the wall of ice—not more than two or three seconds—but it was long enough. The petty officer's thick lips trembled and his hands gesticulated wildly as he told me about it: There beside them, clearly visible through the glassy ice, entombed a yard deep within the iceberg, stood the body of a man.

"What was he wearing?" I asked.

"A flying suit," replied the petty officer.

"Of what country?"

To this question the petty officer hesitated to reply, and I was obliged to prod him with allusions to the powerful secret government department which I represented and which would stick at nothing when in quest of information.

"A German officer's flying suit," he said at length.

"Did you recognize him?"

"No, I did not," said the petty officer.

"And what did the *Kapitän-Leutnant* say?"

A longer pause this time. Maybe if the petty officer had not heard about the methods of the Nazis for extracting information and imagined me to be versed in the same sort of procedure he would not have answered at all.

"What did the *Kapitän-Leutnant* say?" I repeated.

"He said 'Diepholz! Diepholz!' But I don't know what that means."

I knew what it meant.

In the four years since 1940 the ice on the edge of the Greenland icecap had progressed far enough to sea to break off, and an iceberg enclosing Diepholz' body had started on its southward voyage, to a rendezvous with U-295.

Maybe it was a chance, or maybe a wanton fate had arranged it.

MURDER IN JULY

Anton Zaadeh, a leader of the Syrian National Socialist Party, has been killed. His members swear swift vengeance.

Riad es Solh, pro-Western former Prime Minister of Lebanon and noted for his moderate views, has been spending a few days with King Abdullah at Amman. Politics, even their common concern over the ambition of Farouk, has not been allowed to cloud the meeting of the two old friends. The King of Jordan is famous for his hospitality, for the quality of the wines served, for the wonderful food and the even more wonderful dancing shared with his guests.

It is hot and humid, that day in July of 1953. Understandably, Riad es Solh is reluctant to return to the problems facing him at home, and half shows it as the car rushes through the deserted streets. One of Abdullah's guards turns to him and murmurs something about how he hopes that His Excellency will have a pleasant trip home. His Excellency smiles rather wryly. He has so much to do when he returns, he replies. "Wherever one looks one sees the ugly face of trouble."

Minutes afterwards, another and equally powerful car is passing the King's Mercedes Benz. A passenger in the other car opens a violin case and calmly points a machine gun at the King's car. Riad es Solh is killed immediately.

The guards in the Mercedes fire back. One of the assassins is recognized as Mohammed Adib es Salah, Arab legionnaire and veteran of the war against Israel. Cornered, Mohammed es Salah shoots himself.

The following Friday, King Abdullah is shot as he is entering the Mosque of the Rock in Old Jerusalem to pray for the soul of his murdered friend.

bad and dangerous

by . . . Hal Ellson

Earning a living and fooling around never did mix, particularly when you fooled around with friendly girls like Milly.

IT WAS eleven in the morning when John got out of bed, the house quiet. He dressed quickly, went into the kitchen and found Moms sitting in her rocker, the big coffee put steaming on the stove.

"Yeah, you finally got to open your eyes, Johnny-boy?" Moms said. "I figured you was good till tomorrow morning."

John scratched his head and stared at his mother. "Something biting on you?" he asked. "I was riding late last night, you know that."

"Yeah, you and that taxi, but if it wasn't for me you'd naturally starve to death. As for riding late, that don't mean you was running around looking for fares."

"Yeah, what was I looking for then?"

"The same stuff you always looking for, and some day you going to get yourself in a heap of trouble."

John laughed. He was a big amiable fellow in his late thirties, the last of Moms' sons, with her disposition and his long-dead

If you play with evil, at least be "proper" while you're doing so! Hal Ellson, whose novel DUKE *sold well over a million copies, again examines the urge to violence that is so near the surface in the lives of most people, in this story of mounting tension as two people flirt with danger.*

father's weakness for the opposite sex.

"Yeah, it sounds like you don't trust me," he said.

"Heck, it ain't that. I just don't trust nature. If you got yourself married, maybe you'd be better off."

"And who'd take care of you?"

Moms smiled, for she'd managed to take care of herself these many years without anyone's assistance, and John's idea that he helped was more fiction than fact. Still, it was pleasant to know that he meant well. That was all that mattered to Moms, so she didn't confront him with the fact that he was actually a burden.

"Yeah, now you ain't talking," he said. "If I took up and left, you'd be in a real predicament."

"All right, I'd be in that, but we been through this before and it ain't never changed you, so get your coffee and sit down."

Thinking he'd convinced the old woman, John went to the window, moved the curtain aside, looked out, then picked up the pot from the stove and poured himself a cup of coffee.

The trip to the window had not been lost on Moms, but she said nothing and watched him now.

In two gulps, he downed the coffee and got up quickly from the table.

"You sure in a hurry this morning," Moms remarked now. "You going cabbing?"

"That's right. I got to run down a couple of quick dollars."

"Then don't let me hold you, son."

"Nobody does when I'm after the money. Take it easy and I'll be back."

John hurried out of the house, and Moms sighed and rocked herself in the chair till the sound of his footsteps faded in the hall below. She stopped rocking abruptly then, got up, went to the window and looked across the courtyard to another window. This was where Milly lived, a pretty girl who'd moved in a month ago with her husband, Lester.

Moms had nothing against Lester or Milly, but she'd immediately recognized Milly for what she was, a woman with a roving eye for men. That, of course, was Milly's business, but Moms knew her son and she'd already noticed signs that told her John was not unaware of Milly's attractions.

Turning from the window, Moms sighed again and sat down. She'd have to talk to John. As if that'll do any good, she thought, stirring her coffee. Tell a man not to go in the water and he'll jump in headfirst just to see what's there.

An hour later Moms was still sitting in the kitchen when John returned. His round face was doleful, but this was pretense, Moms knew.

"You made yourself some of that quick money?" she asked.

John shook his head and sat down. "No, nobody was in the streets. I burned up gas and rubber for mostly nothing."

But Moms wasn't satisfied with this answer. Something told her John was lying to her.

"John, you ain't been after cab fares," she said. "You know you wasn't."

"I wasn't?"

"That's right. You been after Milly. You think I ain't got eyes to see? That woman's been looking at you cross-eyed, and you so stupid you forget she got a husband."

John shook his head. "Milly? Hell, she's pretty but I ain't after her, Moms, and she ain't after me. She just the friendly type."

"Yeah, I know that kind of friendly type. Married woman ain't got the right to be that friendly. You don't watch yourself, you're going to get yourself dead."

John laughed, and footsteps in the hall ended the conversation. Moms turned, and Nettie walked into the kitchen. Nettie was a long-time friend of Moms, a stick-thin woman with a longish nose and pale skin.

Greeting Moms and John, she found a chair and glanced at the coffee pot.

"You want coffee, help yourself," said Moms. "Cause my old bones ache and I ain't getting up for nobody."

Nettie helped herself to coffee. While she was doing this, John took the opportunity to leave the house again.

"You kind of late this morning," Moms said, noting the look on Nettie's face. "But you got something on your mind, so you better spill it 'fore you bust."

"I ain't got nothing special on my mind," Nettie answered, stirring her coffee.

"Yeah, don't hand me that. I can close my eyes and know with you. That long tongue of yours is ready to fall out with gossip."

Nettie smiled. "Nothing unusual this morning that I got to say, Moms."

"All right, but you got something bothering your brain."

Nettie tasted her coffee and put down the cup. There was no sense in wasting time.

"Nothing's new," she said. "But I bumped into Milly on the way up. Now that's a real pretty girl."

"Too pretty for her good," Moms retorted. "But coming from me, that sounds like an old bat's jealousy."

"She got a pretty face and a pretty shape, but do you see them kind of clothes she got on?"

"What kind is that?"

"Well, they kind of tight-like and self-revealing. Pretty clothes, but the men get to see everything, and it's like she don't care."

"The men don't care a hoot neither," Moms said dryly.

"Yeah, who don't know that? But something going to happen one of these days, cause that girl's like to run up against the wrong kind of man. Either that, or her husband going to forget he married her and slam her head off."

Moms shook her head. "If Lester didn't do it yet, he ain't apt to do it in the near future. That's the way I look at it, cause, big as he is, she got the Indian sign on him."

"Maybe so, Moms," said Nettie, beginning to pick at her ear with a hairpin. "But it gets to a point where a man can take just so much and then he's got to bust out. Now a man like Lester, slow as he is, is the kind you got to watch. He kind of quiet and all that, but that's the one that jump with two feet when he jump. He's apt to split her head one of these fine days."

"What happens, happens," Moms replied, "and there's nothing anybody can do about it. I don't blame Milly, and I would not blame him. Neither of them is bad, but that ain't saying they are angels, either. In seventy years I ain't got to see nobody yet with wings. You get them things when you die. That is if you're lucky to get to Heaven."

Nettie stopped picking her ear and said, "I guess I ain't ever going to have wings myself."

"I don't imagine you will, 'less you grows them yourself. As for me, I don't think I'd care to have 'em cause I never did like anything sticking out of my back."

"With the way she carries on, that Milly might get them sooner than she's expecting."

Moms shrugged. "Whatever happens is all for the best, I always say. People are born fools, and they don't learn any more as they get older."

"But I always thought Milly was nice and respectable," said Nettie.

"Well, who said she aint'?"

"That's a loose woman. You can always tell that kind," Nettie answered, and suddenly Moms leaned forward in her chair. Her hand came down hard on the table.

"That's enough," she said. "You don't know nothing to talk. Besides, I don't want to hear that kind of stuff around here."

"But . . ."

"But nothing. You can get and I mean it. You better get fast, Nettie Sloan or I'll run you out."

A glance at Moms told Nettie of her anger. In the next second she stood up and beat a hasty retreat to the door. When she was gone, Moms shook her head.

"Some people got to be pecking on others all the time and seeing the bad," she said aloud. "Too many people like that today, but nobody's all bad, and nobody's all good. Especially

me," she added, and she smiled to herself and began to rock herself in the chair.

Hours later Moms was still sitting in the kitchen and napping lightly. Her eyes opened and her head came up with a jerk at the sound of John's first footfall in the hall.

John entered the kitchen smiling, but Moms greeted him with a stern look and he knew immediately that something was wrong.

"You feeling sick?" he asked.

"No, I ain't feeling sick. Matter of fact, I ain't felt healthier in a dog's age, lover-boy."

"Lover-boy? Hey, what's that supposed to mean?"

"You don't know? Don't look at me so innocent when you know what I'm talking."

"I don't know what you're talking. You better let me know."

"Yeah, you can't be earning a living and fooling around. Them two things don't mix, and in this world they ain't ever going to."

"Heck, I was out sweating blood," John protested. "What you talking like that for? Here, look at this."

From under his jacket John produced a bag and held it up.

"What's that?" Mom said, eyeing the bag suspiciously.

"Ice cream. I had a good run. It's a whole quart just for you."

"To get me fatter than I am?" Moms said in mock anger. Then she smiled, for her special weakness was ice cream and John's thoughtfulness had won her over.

He put the bag on the table now and said, "Better start on it before that big-mouth Nettie comes along."

But Moms shook her head. "Put it in the ice-box. I ain't up to it now."

John shrugged, did as he was told, and Moms watched him. "You must have done a lot of cabbing today," she observed.

"Yeah, and the tips was raining down," John answered. But this was a lie. He'd hit the numbers and spent most of the afternoon in a poolroom with his friends.

His eyes went to the window now and he walked to it and looked out. In the next second, Moms was on her feet and behind him. She, too, looked out across the courtyard, but there was nothing to see other than the windows across the way.

"What you got over there?" she asked.

"Over where?"

"You know where I mean. There must be something. You just ain't looking for nothing."

John laughed. "Moms, you getting to have the wrong ideas about me. That's kind of bad when I can't look out at the weather."

"Weather, my eye. You're looking for something special."

John ignored the remark and

sat down, lit a cigarette. Seconds later, he got up, went to his room and brought back his portable radio.

"You going to bother me with that when it's time for me to be getting set for supper?" Moms asked. "Better take it away or I'll drop it in with the garbage."

John shook his head and lifted the radio, then glanced at the window.

Moms didn't miss this.

"It ain't no good looking," she said, and he laughed, realizing she'd caught him.

"I ain't looking at nothing," he protested. "What's got into you?"

"Nothing got into me, but you just be careful."

"Of what?"

"You know what better than me, Johnny boy. Play around once too often and you going to get real burned."

"How do you mean, Moms?"

"Well, you want me to spell it, so I will. I'm talking about that Milly girl across the courtyard. She got that roving eye and the rest to go with it. That's one thing, but she got a husband, too, and that's another. He got another kind of eye with red in it, so it's best to beware. You ought to know that. You sure old enough for me not to be telling you such stuff, but I see you ain't got the sense."

"You finished, Moms?"

"That's all I got to say for now, and I dont' believe it'll do a lick of good."

"Then why you winding up like that?"

"Cause you're a fool, big as you are, and I don't want nothing to hurt you."

"Nothing going to hurt me, Moms. I can take care of myself."

"That's to be seen, but I said my piece. Now you going to be around long enough to eat some supper?"

"What you got?"

"Better than you buy in them restaurants you always running to."

John laughed, picked up the portable and took it back to his room.

Late the next morning after John had his coffee he went to the kitchen window and looked across the courtyard. When he turned around, Moms noticed his gloomy face and smiled.

"Bad weather out?" she said.

"It ain't good and it ain't bad."

"That's best for working then, and you stay out of trouble."

"Yeah, but all work is trouble."

"You ain't had but a small dose of it yet," said Moms. "Wait till you get to be my age and you going to know a thing or two about work."

"Yeah, I know," said John, and he put on his cap and started

for the door. "See you later, Moms," he called over his shoulder.

Then he went through the hall, opened the door and closed it behind him. Halfway down the stairs he stopped when he heard a door open and close behind him.

Steps sounded on the landing above and he looked up.

A pair of legs appeared first. Then he saw the rest of Milly. She hesitated when she noticed him waiting below and finally started down the stairs.

"Hey, baby," he said.

"Ssch, what's wrong with you? You want somebody to hear?"

"Nobody but you, darling."

"John, you better shut," said Milly, and she attempted to pass him, but he blocked the way.

"Better get down off that big high horse you're riding cause I'm holding tight."

"Then hold tight."

"Hey, baby, what's wrong?"

"You don't know where we are?"

"I ain't meaning that. You been playing cold to me lately. What happened?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing, hell. You ain't been making the arrangements. I been watching the window hard for two days running and I don't see the signal no more."

"You want me to signal you in when Lester's home?"

"He ain't working?"

"He ain't doing nothing but sleeping and eating, and we can't talk here. It ain't the place."

"Right now it is, baby," said John, and he leaned toward her, blew in her ear.

Milly put her hands against his chest, then smiled and in a low seductive voice said, "You real bad, John. Bad and dangerous."

"I'm badder than that," he answered, and this time his lips sought her throat, but before they could reach it a door opened somewhere above. With a violent motion, Milly pushed him away and hurried down the stairs.

John followed her at a leisurely pace and when he reached the street she was nowhere in sight. But his cab was at the curb. He stared at it, then walked reluctantly toward it, but his mind was far from work.

Ten minutes after John's cab left the curb, Milly came out of the grocery store, her arms full of packages. She went back to the house, started up the stairs and walked into Moms.

"You shopping early this morning, I see," Moms said, smiling.

"That's right, Mrs. Jackson. When there's nothing in the house, you got to get out early."

"And the mens got to eat," Moms said pointedly. "That husband of yours is a big fellow. I

bet he got the appetite to go with the size."

"Yeah, you can say that twice."

"Well, you feed him good. Taking care of a man is like taking care of yourself. Don't treat him right and sooner or later he'll turn on you."

Milly caught the sly suggestion in Moms' apparently innocent words and nodded quickly.

"That's right," she said. "And I better get upstairs fast and get him something to eat."

Moms had been blocking the stairs with her bulk, but now she smiled and made room for Milly to pass. Milly ran up the steps and her door slammed behind her as she entered her apartment. When Moms heard the sound she nodded and went on her way to the stores.

Later, when she returned to the house, she found Nettie waiting for her in the kitchen.

"You here kind of early," she remarked. "You ain't got nothing to do at home?"

"I got everything done," Nettie answered.

"Yeah, I'd like to believe that. When you got a house to take care of, nothing's ever done."

"That sounds like you don't believe me, Moms."

"Well, it's a question of believing you, or believing myself. I only got one choice and I knows which one it is."

Nettie laughed but she knew Moms was serious and it was best to divert her attention from the subject.

"You don't mind I dropped in," she said. "Being as the door was wide open, I kind of figured you was here."

"You know I don't mind, Nettie. I see you got the coffee on. I could go another cup after climbing them stairs. Seems like they getting steeper all the time."

"You ought to send John to the stores for you," Nettie suggested. "It wouldn't do him no harm and it might take some of the fat off him."

Moms found her rocker and sat down. "It might but it won't," she answered. "With all the running around he does, he ought to be thin as a stick but he ain't. I figure he was just born to be fat. As for sending him to do any buying, that'd be real calamity-like. Why he couldn't fetch the right flavor for a stick of chewing gum, and anyway, buying ain't a man's job."

Nettie agreed by shaking her head, then leaned forward. "I heard you talking in the hall back a minute, didn't I?"

"That's right."

"Didn't I hear Milly's voice?"

"If you was listening, I guess you did. She was just coming from the store."

"You didn't say nothing to her?"

"Nothing special. We passed the time of day and went our way."

Nettie seemed disappointed, for she knew there'd been more to the conversation. But she was quick to recover and now she smiled as she looked at Moms.

"You know what?" she said, indicating by her manner that she had something momentous to reveal.

"What?" said Moms, accustomed to Nettie's way of approaching revelations.

"I seen John and Milly in the hall before. I guess you was still in here."

"So you saw them in the hall," said Moms. "So what you getting at?"

Moms' tone and manner were ominous now. Nettie realized this and decided to keep her gossip to herself. But Moms refused to drop the subject.

"I ain't saying who," she remarked, "but some people is always listening and looking when they should be minding their own business. Minding other people's business is a sin. That's what I was taught."

Properly put in her place, Nettie had no answer and stared at the stove. The coffee was boiling.

"You ready for your cup now, Moms?" she asked.

"Yeah, pour me mine. I'm too tired to get up from this old rocker."

Late in the day John came home. As usual Moms was in her rocker. She didn't smile and he noticed that immediately but didn't say anything. Still, it wasn't necessary for him to speak. Moms had been waiting all day for this moment.

"Sit down," she said. "I want a word with you."

"What about?" John asked, remaining on his feet. "Something biting at you?"

"That's right, something been biting hard at me all day. You don't know what it is that you've done?"

"Don't tell me you going to bring up that Milly business some more, cause there ain't nothing between us but plain friendliness."

"Friendliness or otherwise, I want you to listen."

"Okay, I'm all ears."

"Then listen good. If you going to play with evil, the least you can do is be a little proper about it."

"I don't catch what you're talking, Moms. You better explain deeper."

"Well, doing stuff is one thing, getting seen is another."

"Getting seen?"

"That's right. According to the source of information, you and Milly was playing around in the hall this morning. Halls have ears and eyes in case you don't know. But more than that, you got to have some respect for yourself if you ain't got it for nobody else."

"Your source of information was Nettie?"

"Most naturally, and when she catches on to something to talk about, next thing the whole neighborhood going to know, not to mention me."

"Hell, nothing was happening," John said laughing. "What could in a public hall?"

"Lots of things happen in public halls. Like husbands finding their wives with other men and blowing their heads off."

"Yeah, that ain't ever going to happen to me."

"Anyhow," said Moms, "stay out of the hall with her. I don't like having the news of your doings shoved down my throat."

"Yeah, that Nettie she nothing but mouth."

"That's right, and you ought to know better than to be fooling around in the wrong places at the wrong times."

"All right, Moms. You ain't getting no more reports on me. From now on I'm just a small mouse nobody sees."

Moms looked at John, shook her head and sighed. She knew him too well. For a while he might take her advice, but sooner or later he'd grow careless, as he always did, and something would happen. But it was Milly's husband that bothered her most.

He's a soft-talker and all that, but he got that look in his eye you can't trust, she thought, and John stood up.

Moms watched him go to the window and look out. When he turned around, she said, "What's all this rubbering at the window you been doing lately? Something over there?"

"You wouldn't understand," John said, smiling.

"Maybe I don't, but I figure you got some arrangement with Milly."

"That could be."

"What does she do, wave when the coast is clear?"

John shook his head. "Wrong guess. It ain't nothing like that. You want to try again?"

"No, I ain't got time for guessing games and all your foolishness with supper coming up. So you better get out from under while I get the stuff set."

"It's all yours, Moms. You can call me when you're ready."

"Call you? Where you expect to be?"

"I'm going to hit the bed for a little shut-eye. I had a long day."

"All right, but don't expect me to bust my lungs, cause you know how you are when you go off. You don't ever want to get up."

"When I'm hungry I do," said John, and he walked out of the kitchen.

A half hour later Moms had the meal ready and the plates set. She called John and he didn't answer. But that was to be expected. It was always necessary

to shake him out of bed, and she went to his room.

But John wasn't there. Obviously, he'd slipped out of the house. Which meant but one thing to Moms. He was seeing Milly again.

That was why he'd gone to the window. Probably they'd arranged a signal of some sort.

Moms shook her head. Only bad would come out of this, she thought, and she was right.

Next morning Nettie arrived with the news, but Moms had heard everything already. Lester had caught her son and Milly together. Though she'd expected this, Moms was shocked. Still, she tried to hold her chin up and ignore Nettie's excited chatter. Finally Nettie said, "Didn't I always tell you that Milly was no good?"

"Just cause that happened?" Moms snapped back. "Not that I'm defending her, cause I ain't."

"It sound that way."

Moms shook her head. "It wasn't a respectable thing to do. But it seem to me all respectability these days is what you can get away with without anybody finding out. That's about the size of it. Why, if people knowed half of what was going on, nobody'd think nothing of anybody."

"But I always had an idea something was going on with that one. Just looking at her I could tell."

"Yeah, your trouble is you always got that long nose where it don't belong. Me, I feel sorry for her. As for Lester, if he had any sense, he'd give her a slap in the face, or a kick in the rump, go back to her and forget about it, cause he's no little tin God himself."

"You ain't telling me, Moms. You know, he's actually made advances. If I'd ever given him half a chance . . ."

"Go on, you bag of bones," Moms cried, slapping her thighs and laughing. "All somebody has to do is accidentally look at you and, right off, you think he's gone on you. So don't give me none of that."

"Well, he did make advances. It's the honest truth. He . . ."

"Go on, it's one man or another everytime you come here. But you got the itch yourself. That's your trouble, and you can't do nothing but talk about it."

"Well, anyway," said Nettie, and she paused to look at the coffee pot. The top was beginning to lift under pressure. "It's about done, Moms. You sit and I'll pour."

She stood up and filled both their cups, put one teaspoon of sugar in Moms' cup, three in her own and sat down again.

"There's nothing like a good cup of coffee, that's what I always said," she remarked.

"That's the truth. But I can't figure what you going to do if

I ever kick the bucket. You never going to have nothing but water at your own house."

"I just don't seem to know how to make it, Moms," Nettie replied as she probed her ear with a hairpin.

"Know how? It ain't knowing how. You just got to throw enough coffee in and restrict the water," said Moms, and then she noticed Nettie picking at her ear again.

"Will you stop that," she said. "You fool, one of these days you going to put a hole right through your ear-drum and bust it."

Nettie desisted and sighed. "It's a habit I got, Moms. Don't know why I do it except I got wax in my ears."

"Maybe if you tried washing them once in a while, you'd get rid of the wax."

"But I do wash them."

"All right, then you do."

Nettie looked at Moms, sipped her coffee, then put down her cup and said, "What do you think going to happen with Lester and Milly?"

Moms appeared disinterested now but she began again. "I don't blame it on no one," she said. "Them things got a way of happening. I guess it's just life. People gets into hot water every day in the week."

"You think Lester really walked out on Milly?"

"So I heard. But I'll bet it ain't the first time, and he'll probably be back again. Men is the biggest fools ever was born."

"You know where he's staying?"

"Now that's a damned fool question. You think I'm a detective or somebody? For all I knows or cares, he could be sleeping in an ashcan."

"It's a wonder he didn't kick her out and keep the apartment for himself. If I was the man, that's what I'd do."

"Yeah, you'd surely look good in a pair of pants."

"I guess he'll get himself a divorce, huh, Moms?"

"Poor people don't get such things. Get that through your thick skull."

"I just thought," said Nettie, sipping her coffee again.

"There won't be no divorce. Anyhow, what good would one do him? He'd just turn around, get married all over again and, like as not, the same thing'd happen. What's to prevent it?"

"Yeah, that's true. What's to prevent it? A man never can tell what he's got till he gets it, and then it's too late."

Nettie leaned forward now. "But did anything happen?" she asked. "I mean between Lester and John?"

"Not that I know about," Moms answered, shaking her head. "Nobody got shot, if that's what you mean. They mixed a few words, that's about all. Of course, it takes two to make a

party, but if the woman says no and means it, that's where it ends. If she don't say no, then the fault is hers. Milly was letting John in all the time, and I guess Lester couldn't blame him for accepting the invitation."

"Men usually see it that way," Nettie remarked.

"Still, I ain't even blaming Milly," Moms went on. "Cause what she done was her own business and nobody else's. If she felt like carrying on, that was up to her. She knew what she was doing."

"I guess there was others she was carrying on with besides your John."

"It takes only one," said Moms. "How many other she might have been playing round with don't mean a thing. But, like I said, that's her business."

"Well, if I was her husband, I'd of shot her," said Nettie. "I'd of got a gun and shot her dead."

"Well, Lester showed more sense than that. If he shot her, he'd get nothing out of it but twenty years up the river, when she ain't worth no more than five minutes and a sob. He just walked out on her, which I call good horse-sense. But, like I said before, he'll probably be back with her again and asking for more. That's the way the men is. They don't never learn better."

Nodding agreement, Nettie leaned forward and in a confidential voice said, "But did Lester really catch them? You know what I mean. Did he . . . ?"

"Yeah, I figured you was coming to that sooner or later. You don't miss a trick, do you? Well, nothing of the kind happened at all."

"Then how'd he catch them?"

Moms finished her coffee and wiped her mouth before she answered. "Well," she explained, "everytime Lester went out and Milly got the itch, she'd hang a pair of Lester's socks on the line. That was the signal. John'd look out the window, see the coast was clear and hop on over."

"A pair of Lester's socks? Now ain't that something?"

"Yeah, I got a laugh out of that myself. But like I said, it didn't have to happen at all. I mean the two of them getting caught."

"How you figure that, Moms?"

"Well, Milly was too damned lazy to wash Lester's socks, so what did he do but wash a pair for himself and hang 'em on the line. Soon as my John saw 'em, he got on his horse and galloped over there. The door was open, so he walked in on her without her knowing and grabbed her in his arms. Next second, out pops Lester from the next room and that was it. Anyhow, that's how John said it happened and he wouldn't lie to me. Leastways, not about a thing like that."

Satisfied now that she had the

whole story, Nettie finished her coffee, put down her cup and said, "Well, all I got to say is that Milly sure must be a lazy slob if she don't wash Lester's socks."

"Yeah, don't talk cause you don't wash your old man's socks yourself. Now pour me another cup of that coffee and don't start picking your ear with that hairpin if you know what's good for you."

A half hour later Nettie left and Moms was alone again. She began to rock herself and finally started to doze when loud and angry voices in the hall startled her. Recognizing them as John's and Lester's, she started up from chair, hurried to the door and pulled it open.

The hall was silent now, shadowed. A dim figure stood at the stairway leading to the second floor, another lay prone and quiet on the landing with a knife in his chest.

Moms screamed her son's name, but he didn't move. Neither did Lester. Instead, he let out a terrible groan and watched Moms as she stooped over John and touched his cheek with her trembling hand.

---

nine-finger jack

by . . . Anthony Boucher

His wife was quite matter-of-fact. They would kill most people, perhaps, once concealment was no longer needed.

JOHN SMITH is an unexciting name to possess, and there was, of course, no way for him to know until the end of his career that he would be forever famous among connoisseurs of murder as Nine-Finger Jack. But he did not mind the drabness of Smith; he felt that what was good enough for the great George Joseph was good enough for him.

Not only did John Smith happily share his surname with George Joseph; he was proud to follow the celebrated G. J. in profession and even in method. For an attractive and plausible man of a certain age, there are few more satisfactory sources of income than frequent and systematic widowerhood; and of all the practitioners who have acted upon this practical principle, none has improved upon George Joseph Smith's sensible and unpatented Brides - in - the - Bath method.

John Smith's marriage to his ninth bride, Hester Pringle, took place on the morning of May the thirty-first. On the evening of May the thirty-first John Smith, having spent much of the after-

While purists may feel that John Smith doesn't exactly belong within the pages of a detective magazine, there is a precedent. The story, regarded by Tony Boucher, former President, Mystery Writers of America, as "one of my best," appeared in the MWA *Anthology,* 20 GREAT TALES OF MURDER *(Random House).*

Reprinted from *Esquire*, May, 1951.

noon pointing out to friends how much the wedding had excited Hester and how much he feared the effect on her notoriously weak heart, entered the bathroom and, with the careless ease of the practiced professional, employed five of his fingers to seize Hester's ankles and jerk her legs out of the tub while the other five fingers gently pressed her face just below water level.

So far all had proceeded in the conventional manner of any other wedding night, but the ensuing departure from ritual was such as to upset even John Smith's professional bathside manner. The moment that Hester's face and neck were submerged below water, she opened her gills.

In his amazement, John released his grasp upon both ends of his bride. Her legs descended into the water and her face rose above it. As she passed from the element of water to that of air, her gills closed and her mouth opened.

"I suppose," she observed, "that in the intimacy of a long marriage you would eventually have discovered in any case that I am a Venusian. It is perhaps as well that the knowledge has come early, so that we may lay a solid basis for understanding."

"Do you mean," John asked, for he was a precise man, "that you are a native of the planet Venus?"

"I do," she said. "You would be astonished to know how many of us there are already among you."

"I am sufficiently astonished," said John, "to learn of one. Would you mind convincing me that I did indeed see what I thought I saw?"

Obligingly Hester lowered her head beneath the water. Her gills opened and her breath bubbled merrily. "The nature of our planet," she explained when she emerged, "has bred as its dominant race our species of amphibian mammals, in all other respects practically identical with *homo sapiens*. You will find it all but impossible to recognize any of us, save perhaps by noticing those who, to avoid accidental opening of the gills, refuse to swim. Such concealment will, of course, be unnecessary soon, when *we* take over complete control of your planet."

"And what do you propose to do with the race that already controls it?"

"Kill most of them, I suppose," said Hester, "and might I trouble you for that towel?"

"That," pronounced John, with any hand-craftsman's abhorrence of mass production, "is monstrous. I see my duty to my race: I must reveal all."

"I am afraid," Hester observed as she dried herself, "that you will not. In the first place, no one will believe you. In the second place, I shall then be forced

to present to the authorities the complete dossier which I have gathered on the cumulatively interesting deaths of your first eight wives, together with my direct evidence as to your attempt this evening."

John Smith, being a reasonable man, pressed the point no further. "In view of this attempt," he said, "I imagine you would like either a divorce or an annulment."

"Indeed I should not," said Hester. "There is no better cover for my activities than marriage to a member of the native race. In fact, should you so much as mention divorce again, I shall be forced to return to the topic of that dossier. And now, if you will hand me that robe, I intend to do a little telephoning. Some of my better-placed colleagues will need to know my new name and address."

As John Smith heard her ask the long-distance operator for Washington, D. C., he realized with regretful resignation that he would be forced to depart from the methods of the immortal George Joseph.

Through the failure of the knife, John Smith learned that Venusian blood has extraordinary quick-clotting powers and Venusian organs possess an amazingly rapid system of self-regeneration. And the bullet taught him a further peculiarity of the blood: that it dissolves and in fact thrives upon lead.

His skill as a cook was quite sufficient to disguise any of the commoner poisons from human taste; but the Venusian palate not only detected but relished most of them. Hester was particularly taken with his tomato aspic *à l'arsenic* and insisted on his preparing it in quantity for a dinner of her friends, along with his *sole amandine* to which the prussic acid lent so distinctively intensified a flavor and aroma.

While the faintest murmur of divorce, even after a year of marriage, evoked from Hester a frowning murmur of "Dossier," the attempts at murder seemed merely to amuse her, so that finally John Smith was driven to seek out Professor Gillingsworth at the State University, recognized as the ultimate authority (on this planet) on life on other planets.

The Professor found the query of much theoretical interest. "From what we are able to hypothesize of the nature of Venusian organisms," he announced, "I can almost assure you of their destruction by the forced ingestion of the best Beluga caviar, in doses of no less than one-half pound *per diem*."

Three weeks of the suggested treatment found John Smith's bank account seriously depleted and his wife in perfect health.

"That dear Gilly!" she laugh-

ed one evening. "It was so nice of him to tell you how to kill me; it's the first time I've had enough caviar since I came to earth. It's so dreadfully expensive."

"You mean," John demanded, "that Professor Gillingsworth is . . ."

She nodded.

"And all that money!" John protested. "You do not realize, Hester, how unjust you are to me. You have deprived me of my regular income and I have no other source."

"Dossier," said Hester through a mouthful of caviar.

America's greatest physiologist took a profound interest in John Smith's problem. "I should advise," he said gravely, "the use of crystallized carbon placed directly in contact with the sensitive gill area."

"In other words," John Smith asked, "a diamond necklace?"

"Yes," said America's greatest physiologist, and John Smith seized the water carafe from his desk, hurled its contents at his neck and watched the physiologist's gills open.

The next day John entered a magic shop and purchased one of those lapel flowers through which water may be squirted—an article which he thenceforth found invaluable for purposes of identification.

The use of this flower proved to be a somewhat awkward method of starting a conversation and, indeed, often led the conversation into quite unintended paths; but it did establish a certain clarity in relations.

It was after John had observed the opening of the gills of a leading criminal psychiatrist that he realized where he might find the people who could really help him.

From then on, whenever he could find time to be unobserved while Hester was engaged in her activities preparatory to world conquest, he visited insane asylums, announced that he was a free-lance feature writer, and asked if they had any inmates who believed that there were Venusians at large upon earth and planning to take it over.

In this manner he met many interesting and attractive people, all of whom wished him godspeed in his venture, but pointed out that they would hardly be where they were if all of their own plans (some of them conceived upon the highest level of creative imagination) for killing Venusians had not miscarried as hopelessly as his.

From one of these friends, who had learned more than most because his Venusian wife had made the error of falling in love with him (an error which led to her eventual removal from human society), John Smith ascertained that Venusians may be

harmed and even killed by many substances on their own planet, but seemingly by nothing on ours —though the wife had once dropped a hint that one thing alone on earth could prove fatal to the Venusian system.

At last John Smith visited an asylum whose director said, "People who think there are Venusians at large? No, but we do have a man who thinks he's a Venusian."

When the director had left them alone, a single squirt of the lapel flower through the bars of the cell verified the claimant's identity.

"I am a member of the Conciliationist Party," he explained, "the only member who has ever reached this earth. We believe that Earthmen and Venusians can live at peace as all men should, and I shall be glad to help you destroy all members of the opposition party.

"There is one substance on this earth," he continued, while John took careful notes, "which is deadly poison to any Venusian. Since in preparing and serving the dish best suited to its administration you must be careful to wear gloves, you should begin your campaign by adopting the mannerism of wearing gloves at all meals . . ."

This mannerism Hester seemed willing to tolerate for the security afforded her by her marriage and even more particularly for the delights of John's skilled preparation of such dishes as *spaghetti all aglio ed all'arsenico* in which the allied odors so exquisitely reinforce each other, and which is so rarely to be had in the average restaurant.

Two weeks later John finally prepared the indicated dish: oxtail according to the richly imaginative recipe of Simon Templar. A dash of deadly nightshade —one of the poisons relished by the Venusian palate—was added to the other herbs specified by the Saint. Hester had praised the recipe, devoured two helpings, expressed some wonder as to the possibility of gills in its creator, whom she had never met, and was just nibbling at the smallest and most delicate bones when, as the Conciliationist had correctly foretold, she dropped dead.

Intent upon accomplishing his objective, John had forgotten the dossier, and never suspected that it was in the hands of a gilled lawyer who had instructions to pass it on in the exceedingly unlikely event of Hester's death.

Even though that death was certified as natural, John rapidly found himself facing trial for murder, with seven other states vying with each other for the privilege of the next opportunity should this trial fail to end in a conviction.

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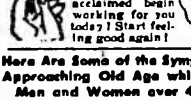

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a quiet resumption of his accustomed profession, John Smith bared his knowledge and acquired his immortal nickname. The immediate result was a brief period of intense prosperity among the manufacturers of squirting lapel-flowers, bringing about the successful identification and exposure of the gilled masqueraders.

But inducing them, even by force, to ingest the substance poisonous to them was more difficult. The problem of supply and demand was an acute one, in view of the unsuspectedly large number of the Venusians and the extremely small proportion of members of the human race willing to perform the sacrifice made by Nine-Finger Jack.

It was that great professional widower and amateur chef himself who solved the problem by proclaiming in his death cell his intention to bequeath his body to the official eradication of Venusians, thereby pursuing even after death the race which had ruined his career.

The noteworthy proportion of human beings who promptly followed his example in their wills has assured us of permanent protection against future invasions, since so small a quantity of the poison is necessary in each individual case; after all, one finger sufficed for Hester.

For as long as it has been a fashionable playground for the wealthy, the Riviera has been a natural hunting ground for equally cosmopolitan thieves. In such company, the Saint was bound to find his own niche.

THE BETTER MOUSETRAP,

a new Saint story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the next SAINT

three men in a car

by . . . Lewis H. Kilpatrick

The robbers were known to be heading for the mountain town. They were well dressed, slick talkers, and deadly.

"THERE just never is any peace in these Kaintucky hills!" Sheriff Clint Hawkins slammed the receiver back on the wall telephone. He scowled across the office toward his deputy. "It's bad enough that I've got to fix my tax books and the governor's coming tomorrow. That'll gray my hair and mustache. But now, Dave, the State Police have give me more trouble."

Deputy Dave Arnett, lean and grizzled, joined him at his roll-top desk. Clint sagged into the swivel chair and pushed back his slouch hat.

"What did the State Police say?" Dave asked. "I couldn't make much sense from your grunts."

Clint heaved a moment. "Three men in a car held up a bank in a little town near Lexington this noon. They shot and killed the cashier and another feller. Then, coming through Lexington, the men left their car and stole a big new one. The police, allow, as far as they've trailed 'em, that they're headed this way into the mountains."

Dave Arnett leaned against the

Sheriff Hawkins of Crag County first appeared in these pages in July in Lewis Kilpatrick's ONE WHITE SHEEP. *The author, himself a Kentuckian, six feet plus in height, who has traveled widely, has returned to writing after several years spent in social service and government work.*

desk and spat tobacco juice into a nearby box of sawdust.

"I always did hold these new roads wouldn't do Crag County no good," he drawled. "They mostly bring in furriners and trouble-makers. But—" he shrugged—"them outlaws ain't likely to come through here."

"I'm not so sure." The sheriff nibbled the tips of his blond mustache. "They've got a record of dodging the cities and preying on the little banks. The State Police looked 'em up—and they'd killed a banker in Ohio of late and even the Federals are after 'em. One's kind of an old feller, and all three are well-dressed and slick talking. They carry enough guns in their car to start a feud war."

Clint reached to a peg above his desk and took down a cartridge belt with a .38 special. He buckled the belt about his thick waist. Dave had on his revolver, but he glanced at a wall rack holding two Winchester repeaters. It was late winter and mid-afternoon.

"If they do come, Clint, when do you reckon it'll be?"

Clint shook his head. "I don't know much about city outlaws except what I read. But, by common sense, they won't try any more daytime devilment. They'll likely take to the side roads, which ain't guarded, and hide out 'til dark. Then when they think us country folks are asleep, they'll sneak into town."

Dave nodded over his cud of tobacco. He squinted at a pile of ledgers on the desk.

"Wish I had enough learning to help balance them tax books. Are you shore nobody but you can look after Governor Holt tomorrow?"

Clint exploded again: "Just who else is there? Judge Combs is off at a lawyers' meeting in Louisville. The road engineer's got the measles, like a kid, and the commissioners wouldn't even know how to shake the Governor's hand proper. It's me or nobody to go with him to inspect the new State road. I never laid eyes on him, either."

"I seen him once," Dave said. "Me and some of the boys went down to Frankfort last year when he was swore in. Folks claim he's a right kindly, common sort, but he wants to see things for himself."

"He's not what's worrying me now." Clint took a checkbook from a desk drawer and rose. "You stand outside the courthouse door, Dave, and watch the street. I'm going over to the bank."

With most Crag County folk still living by barter and trade, he knew that the town's one bank kept only a few thousand dollars in cash. That was why no modern safe and vault had ever been installed.

"Will you give me the worth of this check, Albert?" he asked,

pushing the slip of paper across the counter.

"Certainly, Clint, certainly," the young cashier smiled. "Going to shoot a few craps or buy yourself a jug of moonshine?"

"Aw," Clint lied, "I'm just running down to the Blue Grass for a spell to give my badge a rest."

Several men were loafing about the bank's small lobby, whittling and gossiping. Clint knew them all, but he was taking no chances. As the cashier counted out ten one-dollar bills, he whispered:

"Albert, you wait a minute and then follow me into the back room. I want speech with you."

No, declared the cashier when they were alone; he hadn't noticed any strangers about recently. That is, none who, motoring through, didn't have legitimate business. He occasionally cashed a traveler's check or made change for such persons. Yes, he'd keep what the sheriff told him strictly to himself.

Clint remained in the back room, with the door open, until the bank closed at four o'clock. Nothing unusual happened.

"Don't be uneasy, Albert," he said when they parted at dusk. "I'll be over in my office tonight and Dave will hide behind your building. You sleep sound."

He and his deputy took turns going home for supper. The business section of the village was blocked around the courthouse square. A scattering of incandescent bulbs with metal reflectors, on poles, lighted the streets.

"Lem," Sheriff Hawkins instructed the jailer, "you bed yourself in a cell tonight—but keep your Winchester handy. You'll be 'roused by plenty of racket if we have trouble. Then Dave and me will need you and need you quick."

Lem Wilson, unshaven and stooped, was the only person beside his deputy and the cashier to whom he confided his fears. The jail was an annex to the courthouse, its entrance at the end of the main hall on which opened the sheriff's office. The building was of hewn native freestone, the cells at the rear separated by double steel doors from the corridor.

By nine o'clock, according to the town's unwritten curfew, the last store was darkened and practically every citizen was at home. Dave Arnett, with revolver and rifle, was in the blackness behind the bank. Clint, wearing his holstered belt, sat hunched at his desk, working over the tax ledgers. He had left the double front doors of the courthouse open for a quick exit. A single incandescent glowed above the entrance.

Ten o'clock—and he heard Lem snoring loudly down the corridor. A 'coon dog howled dismally at the far end of town. Another hound answered. A clat-

ter of hoofs on the paved highway was muffled as a late horseman turned off onto one of the muddy streets. Somewhere in the distance sounded the wail of a sick child.

Clint Hawkins threw down his pen, reared back in his chair, stretched his arms above his head and yawned.

"It's 'way past my bedtime," he growled, blinking. "Those figgers are jumping into my eyes. I can't stay up all night and be any account tomorrow.

"Reckon I was foolish to get uneasy about them rogues. But Dave don't sleep much anyhow. He's like a owl. I'll wait a spell longer, then lock the office and leave him to stay out the night."

Another hour dragged by. It was after eleven-thirty. The hounds were silent and the sick child had hushed its crying. The village was asleep.

Clint got up from the desk and put on his slouch hat. He stretched and yawned again. As he reached into his pocket for his keys, he heard the low hum of an approaching motor.

He listened. It wasn't a truck, he knew, and it was unlikely that any tourist would be passing through at this time of night. The hum grew louder. The car had entered the village and was slowing down. Within a minute it stopped in the street outside, its motor cut.

Clint grabbed the remaining rifle from the rack. He examined its loaded chamber, switched off the light and started for the door.

Out in the hall, he peered cautiously around the front entrance. He saw a large car at the curb. Muffled voices sounded inside. The rear door, next the courthouse, opened.

"Yes, this is the place," came in an undertone. "I've been here before, you know. Easy, boys, or we'll wake up the whole town. Didn't I see a light in the courthouse a moment ago?"

"Yes, mister, you certainly did! And now you're going right inside the courthouse!" Clint, dodging quickly under the dim bulb, was beside the opened car door. "One—two— Yes, you're them. Put up your hands! Get out, fast!"

Three gasps answered his command and the threatening muzzle of his Winchester.

"Why—why— What does this mean?" stammered a second voice from the car.

"You don't understand, sir."

"Man, you can't do this—!"

Clint snapped: "Shut up and come out of there! I'm Clinton Hawkins, high sheriff of Crag County."

An elderly man, well dressed and urbane, was the first to step from the car.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr. Hawkins," he said pleasantly. "Meet Mr. Gorman. This is my son—"

"Shut up!"

The second man on the rear seat had his hands raised. The younger one, at the wheel, followed him to the ground, swearing.

"You hick cop! We'll fix you for this—!"

"I'll fix *you!*" Clint punched him in the stomach with the rifle muzzle. "Line up. Climb them steps and march down the hall. I've been expecting you all," he grinned. "Thought us folks would be asleep, did you?"

"We did get here sooner—" began the elderly man.

Clint's boot ended that sentence, too.

"Umph!" Then the man recovered himself, lifted his hands and laughed.

"Come on in, boys," he said. "It's no use to resist. This time I lose."

"It's an outrage!" muttered Gorman as they filed down the hall, Clint and his rifle behind them.

"Oh, our jail-house ain't so bad," he taunted. "Just wait 'til you all sit in the electric chair. You'll wish then you were back here.

"Lem, search 'em careful. Don't miss even a jackknife. They're mean killers for all their fancy clothes and slick talk."

With the men lined up facing the steel door, Lem found three pocketknives but only one gun. It was an automatic, carried by the youngest man.

"I reckon the rest of their weapons are with their burglar tools in the car," Clint surmised. "I'll get them after we lock 'em up. Open the doors, Lem."

"But, Mr. Hawkins—" the boy again tried to protest.

"Keep quiet, lad," cautioned the older man. "These mountaineers are mighty nervous with their triggers."

Three steel doors creaked open. Clint still covered his prisoners while Lem pushed each into a separate call. As his key turned in the last lock, a rifle shot ripped the stillness outside.

Clint started. Two more shots banged. An interval—and he heard Dave Arnett yell:

"Clint—! Clint Hawkins, come and help me!"

The sheriff wheeled in the cell block toward the inner door. "Open this, Lem. Hurry! What in hell has that Dave scared up!"

He gripped his Winchester, finger on the trigger, and strode back down the corridor. Reaching the street, he saw that citizens living nearby were arousing. The bank cashier, apparently unable to sleep, already was out of his house with a revolver.

"Dave—! Dave, what's the matter?" Clint bellowed. "Who are you shooting at? I've already got them outlaws, safe. I never before knew you to lose your head!"

Deputy Arnett bent over a writhing form in front of the bank. Another figure lay groaning and cursing under a street light. A large car was parked up the block, and through its open left window hung the limp head of a third man.

"Look after that feller in the automobile," Dave urged. "I got the other two just in the legs, but he tried to drive away. I'm afraid he's bad hurt.

Clint, his Winchester still at ready, ordered:

"Go fetch Doc Hardin, Albert, You, Harry," to another half-dressed citizen, "help Mart get this feller into the jail-house. Jake, take that one and follow. He's bleeding but he can walk."

He turned, panting, to his deputy:

"Gosh Almighty, are all the outlaws in the country picking on this one poor little bank? I can't figger it out, myself. Dave, I hope you're sure these were trying to break in, too. You messed 'em up considerable."

"They were trying for a fact," Dave vowed as he and the sheriff started toward the courthouse. "I seen 'em when they drove up, easylike. One stayed in the automobile. The other two, contrary to what we 'lowed, went to the front door. With three against me, I just couldn't take no chance."

"Well," Clint chuckled, "three apiece is a purty good night's hunting. Now, after tomorrow, maybe I can get back to my tax books."

They went down the corridor to the jail. There Lem Wilson and the other citizens were searching the wounded prisoners.

"Clint, are them the rogues you caught?" Dave looked into the occupied cells.

"Yes—and I almost had to do a little shooting, myself. They talked mighty sassy and come near putting up a fight. If it hadn't been for the old cuss there—"

The elderly man behind the bars laughed. "You surely did your duty as you saw it, Mr. Hawkins. I wish we had peace officers like you in every part of the State."

Dave Arnett stared at him and gaped. He jerked off his hat. Then he turned with awe to the sheriff.

"Clint Hawkins, do you know what you've gone and done?" he exclaimed. "You're arrested and jailed the Governor of all Kaintucky!"

THE saint's RATINGS

Toujour gai, old feline publersher, toujour gai

is our motto. We are not too interested in the technical details of the publishing business when the main question is whether the stuff they put out is literature or not. Some times when our reviewer gets gloomy over too many pitchforks, he tells us he just takes an hour off and thinks how much better this world is than hell. Of course, it won't cheer you up if you expect to go there anyway, anymore than too many bad books will entertain you if you have to read them.

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ashcan

THE GIRL IN THE BELFREY,
by J. H. Jackson & L. G. Offord (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Non-fictional documentary of one of America's most famous murder cases. Fascinating and horrifying. Powerfully told with the years that have passed, since it was committed, subtly erased.

FIRE IN THE FLESH, by David Goodis (Gold Medal, 25¢)

An odd absorbing story told with feeling and terrific suspense. The best reason for spending 25¢ we have come across in a long time.

MURDER IN MAJORCA, by Michael Bryan (Dell, 25¢)

Well written. Fast-paced and more convincing than the run-of-the-mill writing of this school.

THE SHORT NIGHT, by Russell Turner (Hillman Book, 25¢)

Imaginative and original plot that will carry you along long after you should have turned out the light.

WALK WITH EVIL, by Robert Wilder (Crest Book, 25¢)

Mr. Wilder knows his Florida, knows how to write and obviously knows what his fans like to read.

MURDER IN THE RAW, by Bruno Fischer (Gold Medal, 25¢)

In spite of quite a few murders, naked bodies tripping here and there, sex rearing its lovely head, Mr. Fischer has written a brisk and very readable mystery.

KILLERS ARE MY MEAT, by Stephen Marlowe (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Lively reading sure to please old Chester Drum friends. For those who meet him for the first time, an entertaining introduction.

DEATH FOR SALE, by Henry Kane (Dell, 25¢)

Don't buy it.

body in the bathroom

by . . . Dave Leigh

Take a murder in a Fifth Ave. duplex, add assorted guys and dolls, a sorrowing widow, and a much too confident murderer.

I HARDLY knew Tony Walsh, much less Homer and Myra Cunningham, so I couldn't figure it at all when Walsh phoned and invited me to a surprise party he and Homer were throwing to welcome Myra home from Haiti or some such place. "It's going to be a real surprise when she sees me," I said. "She doesn't know me from Jack's hatband."

"So what," Walsh laughed, "it's going to be a hell of a party." He paused for a second and then continued in what was intended to be a man-to-man sort of tone: "Listen, I'll level with you—we're short of guys. Homer thinks every man who has ever so much as smiled at Myra was trying to get her into the sack, so it isn't easy to find guys that he'll sit still for."

"Nice guy," I said. "Sounds like a lovely evening."

"C'mon, Mitch, it's not going to kill you. There'll be plenty of good looking dames. Homer's taking care of *them*."

"Sounds like a typical, heart-warming American marriage."

"Jez," Walsh said, "why do you always have to be such a

Dave Leigh, one of the editors, under another name, of a leading men's magazine, makes a first appearance in THE SAINT *with this fast-paced story introducing Mitchell A. Stoner, a somewhat less than modest private eye. Leigh has appeared regularly in various men's magazines,* Manhunt, *etc.*

cynical bastard? See you around quarter to nine. Her boat docks at nine, and that'll give you a chance to loosen up before she gets here. Okay?"

Before I could come up with some bright answer, the phone went dead. I sat there looking at it for a minute or two and then wheeled around in my chair, propped my feet up on the window sill, and looked out at my exclusive, unobstructed view of the rear of a Chinese restaurant.

I had seen Walsh around here and there, and once he had hired me to help him worm out of a divorce case in which he had been named as correspondent, but I didn't know him socially. His crowd was a little rich for my blood, particularly the Cunninghams.

One way or another, Homer and Myra wound up in the newspapers about ten times a year; you could set your calendar by them. Once it was because, in the middle of a week-end at their country place, they decided it would be amusing to go to Rio and Homer chartered a yacht and bundled everybody on board and actually started off. They thought better of it the next morning and put in down in South Carolina someplace and chartered another plane to fly everyone back, but that was enough to make the columns. Once they hit the front pages when Myra ran off with a Brazilian racing car driver, and again when Homer smashed up his Lincoln and killed the stripper who was riding with him. There was an attempted suicide or two and a couple of damage suits, and so on. A real fun-loving pair.

But, other than the fact that anybody was obviously nuts to get within seven furlongs of either one of the Cunningham's, there was nothing to keep me from accepting Walsh's invitation. It sure wasn't the press of business that would keep me from going; I hadn't had a decent case in almost six weeks. Maybe some private detectives spend all their time tracking down missing fortunes in jewels and fighting off beautiful nymphomaniacs, but the biggest assignment I'd had in the past month was tailing a guy in a divorce case. It turned out that there wasn't another dame at all—he was just sick of his wife—and there wasn't much I could do about *that*. All I got out of that little thriller was my $100 advance, which, considering that I spent two weeks on the job, boiled down to somewhat less than the average wage of a mediocre shoe clerk.

So I decided to take in the Cunninghams' little soiree. What the hell, maybe some of all that dough would rub off on me. I got up and turned off the lights and locked the office door and went on back to my room. I shaved, put on a clean shirt,

pulled out my other pair of pants from under the mattress, and took a bus up to their place.

Homer and Myra Cunningham camped out in a duplex apartment on the top two floors of a residential hotel on upper Fifth, between 85th and 86th. The kind of place that has a doorman with a British accent and a lobby that would make the main lounge of the *Ile de France* look like the forward hold of a tramp steamer. The doorman looked down his nose at me as I pushed past him and went on back to the oak-panelled elevator. Then the elevator man looked down *his* nose at me and I told him I was going to the Cunningham's and he sighed condescendingly and we started up. It's always been a mystery to me why flunkies who work for the so-called upper classes think they're better than anybody who isn't worth a few million bucks, but that's one of the curious little facts of life.

When we got to the right floor I said "Thanks, son" and flipped him a dime. "Tell your grandchildren that you once rode with John D. Rockefeller," I added as he closed the door. Then I mushed my way down the foot-thick carpet and pushed the Cunninghams' doorbell. I hadn't known the number, but it sounded like somebody was removing the appendix from a live elephant behind that door, so I figured this was the place.

Tony Walsh opened the door. "Mitch!" he yelled, "glad you could make it. Grab a blonde and make yourself comfortable."

That's the rich for you. Always full of clever dialog. I pushed my way in and looked around. It looked for all the world like an Elks Convention—there were dozens of people talking and singing and dancing and drinking and making love or trying to. I grabbed myself a drink and started on a safari to find my host, but he didn't seem to be anywhere. Which wasn't so surprising; look how long it took Stanley to dig up Livingston. I decided I'd trip over him sooner or later, so when I spotted an empty seat on a couch next to a dark-eyed girl who didn't look like she belonged here any more than I did, I went over and sat down.

"You look normal," I said. "What are you doing at this little get-together?"

She started to act annoyed and then grinned. "You don't look like one of the four hundred yourself."

"I always enjoy watching the privileged enjoying their privileges."

She grinned again. She was kind of cute, and I began enjoying myself. "Who are you, anyway?" she asked.

"Mitchell A. Stoner," I said. "I am what is laughingly referred to in the paperbacks as a

private eye. Tonight I am being public."

She looked wide-eyed for a moment. "Goodness, am I safe with you?"

"I sincerely hope not," I said, "but you're probably as safe with me as you would be with the rest of these hyenas. Which reminds me, have you seen Cunningham?"

She shrugged. "I wouldn't know him if I fell over him. Tony said they needed some extra girls, so I came over."

"In the words of little Alice," I said, "this gets curiouser and curiouser. He told me they were short of men."

"This is exciting," she laughed. "Just like a murder mystery."

"That's a detective's life for you. I can hardly get up in the morning without tripping over a body." Just then I spotted Walsh across the room, so I told her to sit tight for a minute and I elbowed my way over and asked him where Cunningham was.

"I don't know," he said. "It's the damnedest thing. He called me last night and said Myra was coming home tonight, and he was giving a party. Wanted me to help him. I got here around eight, but no Homer."

"Did you look upstairs? Maybe he's passed out."

Walsh nodded. "I called out a couple of times and then I went up and looked in both their bedrooms, but no sign of him. I figured he'd gone out for something." He scowled. "I think it's pretty lousy of him, leaving me to take care of this whole bunch."

"Don't worry," I said, "I'm sure they'll find some way to amuse themselves."

Just then dark-eyes came up and slipped her arm through mine, and Tony wandered off. "Want to take my case?" she asked. "I'm being followed." I looked over her shoulder and saw an overfed Princeton-type in a red cummerbund peering owlishly at her.

"I get $25 a day and expenses," I said. "Come out on the terrace and we can talk business." She wrinkled her nose at me and we went outside. It was pretty cold but there wasn't any smoke, and things were more or less quiet. "If you're going to be my client," I said, "I'll need to know your name."

"Liz. Liz Brown. My stage name is Lisbeth Lane, but you've never heard of it."

"You're on the stage?"

"You private detectives can figure out *anything*," she smiled. "But you're only half-right this time. My acting has all been on radio. The producers say I don't project sex in person."

"Meaning you don't project it to them."

She laughed again. "I guess I'm just a square."

"You look fairly round to me," I observed, sliding my free

arm around her waist. She didn't seem to mind so I was just about to live up to my reputation as a private eye when the door opened and a tall, thin gazebo in his fifties came out and said, "Everybody inside. The great lady is on her way."

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"I'm afraid so," he said, shutting the door behind him. "Cunningham will throw a fit if everybody doesn't make a fuss over Myra. He may have slept with every dame he could find while she was gone, but his passionate love for her money will make him put on the big act when she gets back."

"You know," I said, "this place seems to be filled with people who either don't know Cunningham, or who hate his guts."

"That pretty well describes the whole world," he said drily. "Come on, let's get it over with."

The next twenty minutes were pretty confused. The lights had been turned off so everybody just stood around muttering or giggling and waited for the sound of the elevator. Finally it came and we heard a key in the lock and we saw her silhouetted in the light from the hall, and then everybody started yelling "surprise!" and jumping around and kissing her and so on like she was Lindbergh just landing in Paris. I got trampled in the rush and then decided that there wasn't much point in my going over anyway, and went and poured myself another drink. The next time I saw her she was starting upstairs. "I'll be right down, everybody," she trilled. "Just go on having fun."

"I guess that means we can get out of here," I said to Liz. "That's the most fun I can think of."

"Shh!" she whispered. "We can't do that. Mr. Cunningham was nice enough to ask us; we can't leave until we've found him."

Just about then Myra came back to the top of the stairs and looked nervously around until she'd spotted Tony, and beckoned for him. He went over and they whispered back and forth for a minute, and then he started fast up the stairs behind her. I hot-footed across the room after them, and arrived at the top of the stairs to see them standing outside of the bathroom door. "Maybe it just locked accidentally," Tony was saying.

"No," she said in a tense, frightened voice, "I *know* he's in there. He always locked it behind him."

Walsh looked at me and started to explain and I said I thought I got the picture. Myra said, "I'll call the police."

"It's only a locked door," Tony said. "You can't call them over that."

I walked over and tested the door—it was fairly light, the

kind that will go down with a couple of good pokes. "We might as well find out," I said, and threw my shoulder against it. There was a cracking sound but it didn't give, so I slammed into it again and this time the wood around the lock splintered and it swung in. The first thing I saw was Homer Cunningham. He was lying on the tile floor, looking very dead.

Then Myra started to scream. It sliced through all the racket in that apartment like a bread-knife and bounced off the walls and shook the glasses on the table. I jerked her hands away from her face and slapped her hard and she stopped abruptly, looked at me in a dazed way for a second, and then ran and threw herself across the bed and let loose. I preferred the screams.

"Good Lord, he's killed himself," Tony said in a low, awed voice. "I should have guessed. I should have looked up here. Poor Myra . . ."

"Poor Myra, hell," I snapped. "Homer's the one who's dead. Go tell that mob downstairs to stay put, and then call the cops."

He looked up. "But . . . can't we keep this quiet? The scandal . . ."

"What do you think we're going to do with the body," I said impatiently, "stick it in the deep freeze?" He looked blank for a minute and then blinked and went out and asked Myra if there was anything he could do and she shook her head without looking up and then he went on about half-way downstairs, to where everybody was jamming up, and told them what had happened. The buzz started all over again and I went into the bathroom and wrapped a handkerchief around the knob and pulled the door shut behind me.

Cunningham was lying in a crumpled heap on the floor next to the wash basin. He was wearing shoes and socks and trousers, but he was naked from the waist up. The sink was half-full of water, and there was a tube of shaving cream and a brush standing on the edge. The razor was on the floor, near Cunningham's left hand, but he hadn't killed himself with that. Other than a slight cut near his mouth, there wasn't a mark on him.

I straightened up and looked around for some way he could have done it, and spotted a glass of some dark liquid on the table next to the basin. I leaned over and smelled it—cognac, and good stuff. Nothing but the best for good old Homer.

I knelt down again and felt Cunningham's body; it was still fairly limp, but colder than hell. There didn't seem to be anything else to see, so I opened the door again and stepped out into the bedroom, pulling it shut behind me. It wouldn't stay shut, so I stuck a matchbox into the crack,

near the top, and pulled it until it held.

Myra was gone, but I could hear a babble of sympathy coming from downstairs. I went to the top of the stairs and waved at Liz and beckoned for her to come up. Her face was white. "What is it, Mitch? I was outside."

"Cunningham's dead."

"Oh, God," she gasped, biting her knuckle. "What . . . ?"

"Heart attack, maybe. Maybe poison. We'll have to wait for the cops. Did you see anybody try to leave?"

She shook her head. I put my hands on her shoulders and spoke as calmly as I could. "I want you to stay in this room. The bathroom door's shut, so you won't have to look at him. Just don't let anybody in there."

She looked up, her eyes frightened, and then she threw herself against me. She was shivering all over. My arms slid around her and I kissed her hair. "I won't be long, Liz," I said.

She started to move away, her body still stiff with terror, and I pulled her to me again and smiled. "I'm not in that much of a hurry," I said, and she looked up and I kissed her. For the next couple of seconds I didn't give a hoot in hell what had happened to Cunningham.

"Thanks," she said finally, "I'm all right now."

"Now *I'm* shaky."

She pushed me back, smiling weakly. "You go on now, Sherlock. I'll be okay." She still looked a little white but she had control of herself, so I patted her on the arm and went downstairs.

Everybody stopped talking at once and looked up at me and I told them just to take it easy for awhile and went over and poured myself another drink. I had been drinking quite a bit, but I wasn't feeling it at all. That's the way it goes sometimes.

The bereaved widow was sitting on the couch, surrounded by sympathizers, and looking like she was getting quite a boot out of the whole thing. After a second or two Tony showed up at my elbow and said, "I should have known he'd do something like this. He was terribly depressed last night."

"So he decided to throw a party?"

"This wasn't his idea," he admitted. "I lied to you before. I thought this might help ease things over between him and Myra."

"Suppose you fill me in," I said. "I don't keep up with the doings of society the way a good citizen should."

"She and Homer had been on bad terms for nearly a year. She went on this cruise alone so she could think things over. While she was gone, Homer convinced himself that it was all over. He

thought he knew what she was going to tell him when she got back, and he was scared as hell of seeing her. I thought that if there were a lot of people around it would be easier for him."

"It seems to me," I said, "that this was one time when they should have been alone."

He gulped down about a gallon of brandy, shuddered, and said, "Well, it doesn't matter now. I just wish I'd gone up there earlier and checked. I could have saved her that shock."

I looked over at the couch. "She seems to have recovered."

"God, she's brave," he said. "I don't know how she does it."

My next comment, which would probably have earned me a belt in the jaw, was cut off by the arrival of the police in the person of one Lieutenant Herbert Kelso. A pudgy little fussbudget of a man, he scurried through the crowd telling everyone that there was nothing to worry about, and was just starting up the stairs when he spotted me. "Stoner!" he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Just having a quiet little evening with the upper classes, Kelso," I said. "Glad you could make it—things were getting a little dead."

He scowled and glanced upstairs. "What do you know about this?"

"I know that Homer Cunningham is no longer in the land of the living," I said. "What else did you have in mind?"

"You're really funny," he growled. "Come on upstairs where I can keep an eye on you."

"Always glad to help," I said, and followed him up.

"Who's this?" Kelso said, eyeing Liz on the edge of the bed.

"My old aunt from Fort Dodge," I said. "She—"

"Shut up, Stoner," he said, turning to one of his men. "Keep an eye on them. If they try anything funny—shoot!"

I grinned at the cop and jabbed my hand toward my left shoulder and he grabbed for his gun and I scratched my left ear and sat down on the bed next to Liz. After a couple of minutes of shoulder rubbing Kelso came back out. "Looks like he poisoned himself," he said, "probably with that drink. It was brandy," he added.

"No," I said.

"Knock it off, will you, Stoner?" he said in a tired voice. "Can you just tell me, without any of that lovely humor, what happened here tonight?"

So I did, beginning with Walsh's phone call that afternoon and right up to the present. Kelso jotted down notes in a small black book as I talked, and another officer took photographs in the bathroom while another dusted everything for prints. After a few more minutes the

coroner arrived and looked Cunningham over briefly and then ordered the body removed to the morgue.

As the coroner was packing up, Kelso ordered one of the detectives to pour the brandy in a vial and take it down to the lab for analysis. "That's where the poison is," he told the coroner, who grunted but didn't answer. "Call me here as soon as you're through," Kelso said. The coroner nodded and left.

Kelso coughed and frowned and said he guessed we'd learned about all we could and let's go downstairs. "I'd send those shaving things down for analysis if I were you," I said.

He whirled around, his face angry and impatient, and then his expression changed and he snapped, "Of course, just what I was going to do. When I need your advice, Stoner, I'll ask for it."

"Just a taxpayer doing his duty," I said. Kelso began talking in low tones to one of his plainclothesmen, and I steered Liz back downstairs. Everybody was sitting quietly around the room, mostly on chairs but some on the floor, and a detective was taking down their names and addresses. Liz and I went back to the bar and I mixed us a couple of stiff ones and led the way out to the terrace.

"Oh, Mitch," she said after the door was closed behind us, "it was awful. Why would a man like that take his own life?"

I put my arm around her. "Maybe he didn't."

She looked up. "Somebody killed him? But—the door was locked."

"Myra says he always locked it behind him. Anyway, why would a man commit suicide while he was in the middle of shaving? His beard couldn't have been all that tough."

She shivered. "You certainly have an odd sense of humor."

"If I didn't, I couldn't stand this business," I said. Just then Kelso opened the door to the terrace and told us to come inside. We went in and stood against the wall and Kelso went over to the stairs and walked about half way up and called for everybody's attention. He didn't need to worry, he had it.

"As you probably know by now," he began, "Homer Cunningham is dead. He either died accidentally, committed suicide . . . or was murdered."

"Or was run over by a glacier," I whispered to Liz and she giggled nervously and Kelso frowned at me and I shut up.

"Until I've had a report from headquarters," he went on, "I'd like you all to stay here. You can move around and continue the party, if you like. It'll be an hour or so before I need you again."

Nobody moved for a minute or

two and then the tall gazebo got up and fixed himself a drink and that broke the ice. Pretty soon everybody was babbling to everybody else and things seemed pretty much normal, so I deposited Liz in a chair and told her to stay out of trouble and went to find Kelso. He was talking to Myra Cunningham, who was looking about five hundred percent more tragic than she had been about ten minutes before. "Why don't you just go on upstairs and get some rest," Kelso was saying. "Do you have a sleeping pill?"

She nodded gratefully and Kelso said, "Is there an empty room down here that I can use?"

She gestured toward a door on the far side of the living room. "In there . . . it's H—Homer's den." Then she went all soggy-eyed and Kelso thanked her and she stumbled upstairs. Kelso pushed across toward the den and I stuck to his heels. He tried to shut me out but I slid on through and closed the door behind me. "Got it all figured out, Kelso?"

"There's nothing to figure out," he said. "Cunningham killed himself. And not too long ago, either. His body hasn't begun to stiffen."

"Maybe it had got over being stiff. Rigor mortis wears off in about twenty-four hours, you know."

"Okay," he said irritably, "so he could have killed himself last night. So what? Who cares when he did it?"

"*If* he did it."

"What do you mean, if? He'd been brooding and upset for weeks. He was breaking up with his wife and he was depressed about it. He didn't want to face the truth, so he killed himself."

"Very neat," I said.

"Okay, what's your theory?"

"I don't have one," I admitted, "but it's the funniest goddamn suicide I ever saw."

"I'm glad that it amuses you," he said drily. "And now if you'll excuse me, I've got work to do." He picked up the phone extension and started dialling, and I went on back outside to look for Liz. A nervous little birdlike woman flittered up to me and asked, "What's happening now?"

"Kelso's getting ready to shoot himself," I said. "He finally realized I was smarter than he was."

"OOh!" she cried.

"He's just trying to be funny, Cora," a man told her, glaring at me. I grinned boyishly at her, just like I was only a big harmless moron, and drifted off.

About a half hour later, the phone rang. I started back toward the den and then realized that the ring had come from the opposite direction, and ducked out toward the kitchen and found another phone on the wall in the pantry. When I lifted it off the hook Kelso was saying, "Strych-

nine, eh? I knew I smelled poison in the brandy."

"Wasn't in the brandy," the coroner's voice said. "No poison in his stomach at all. In the bloodstream. Been dead since last night, about a half hour after he ate."

"Not in his stomach?" Kelso cried. "But it's got to be!"

"Well, it isn't."

There was a moment's pause and then Kelso spoke again. "Where's the lab report on the shaving stuff?"

"How in hell do I know? I'm not in the lab."

Kelso coughed and mumbled something and hung up. I pulled down the hook so the connection would be broken, waited about fifteen seconds, and then eased up on it again. This time he was talking to the lab man, but he wasn't getting anywhere. Apparently the lab man had been out to dinner when the stuff arrived, and he was only just getting started. I hung up on Kelso's complaining and ducked back into the living room where I'd intercept Kelso coming out of the den.

About five minutes later he came barreling out, making a bee-line toward the stairs. "What's up?" I asked, stepping in front of him.

"Get out of my way!"

"You look like a man who's just figured everything out," I said, falling in step behind him as he shot by me. He didn't answer. I saw he was heading for Myra Cunningham's room so I caught up and grabbed his arm. "What are you going to do?"

He turned and glared at me. "It's none of your goddamn business, but I'm arresting her for murder."

"Aren't you taking quite a lot for granted?"

He shook himself loose and continued to Myra's bedroom and jerked the door open. She sat up suddenly on the bed as he clicked the light on, and looked at us out of glazed, uncomprehending eyes. "What is it?" she mumbled. "What's happened?"

"I think you know," Kelso said.

She blinked at us and then fumbled around her wrist and looked at her watch. "Can't seem to see," she said. "What time is it?"

"Twelve o'clock and all's well," I said.

Kelso shot a warning glance at me and turned back to Mrs. Cunningham. "I've just realized how you killed your husband."

That woke her up. "You're out of your mind!" she screamed, reaching for the telephone beside her bed. That place had more phones than a horse parlor. "I won't say another word until my lawyer gets here!"

"It's no use," Kelso continued, firing out his words. "I know you were on that ship when he

died, but you'd left a time bomb behind you. You'd soaked his shaving equipment in strychnine. You knew that the first time he cut himself the poison would enter his bloodstream and he'd die instantly. And you'd have the perfect alibi . . . or so you thought." He leaned back, obviously pleased with himself.

Her back still toward us, she spoke a few rapid words into the phone and then hung up. "That's the most insane thing I've ever heard," she said, turning and looking evenly at Kelso.

"Stick around," I said. "He's just getting warmed up."

"When I get through with you," she went on, "you'll be lucky if they let you take little children across the street."

"We'll see about that," Kelso said. "Right now you have just fifteen minutes to get dressed, and we're—" He was cut off by the ringing of the phone. He reached for it, but Mrs. Cunningham got it first. She listened a second and then looked sour and dropped it on the bed. "It's your laboratory," she said, walking rapidly across the room. I watched her go; a very tasty looking girl, I realized. Very nice, indeed.

"Ah," Kelso said, smiling contentedly as he cradled the receiver next to his ear. "Kelso speaking. What's the report?"

What happened next was something to see; Kelso blinked twice, his mouth dropped open a foot, and he croaked hoarsely: "Nothing?"

He nodded numbly a couple more times and then put the phone down without saying another word. "I hate to sound smug," I said, "but you can't say I didn't warn you."

"C'mon, Rosenthal," Kelso said to the patrolman who had come in and was standing in the doorway.

"Give me a ride downtown?" I asked.

"I wouldn't give you a ride to your own funeral."

"But this is *your* funeral," I said, "and I wouldn't miss it for the world."

Myra Cunningham said: "You will be hearing from my lawyer in the morning."

"That's not the only person he'll be hearing from," I said, and he snorted and left the room. I walked out into Cunningham's bedroom and looked thoughtfully at the officer he'd stationed to guard the bathroom. Now that I had a moment to think, I realized that there was something that we'd all forgotten. It was something simple, because it had to be simple. The murder weapon had been in that bathroom when we broke in, and it had to be small and obvious or somebody would have noticed it. Just before he died Cunningham had . . . and then it hit me. Suddenly I knew how he had been killed.

I walked rapidly toward the bathroom door and said I'd be just a second and the guard nodded and I went inside and shut the door. Then I dropped to my knees and began looking everywhere on the floor it could have rolled to. Under the sink, behind the toilet, behind the clothes hamper . . . everywhere. But it was gone.

It had to be there, but it wasn't. I stood up slowly. I had to be right. There wasn't any other explanation. I went outside and asked the guard, "Anybody been in here?"

He shook his head. "Are you sure?" I insisted.

"Well," he said, "it's the only one in the joint, so a couple people had to use it, but—"

"Thanks!" I yipped, slapping him on the back and taking off downstairs. Kelso was just telling everybody that they could go home. "Hold it!" I yelled. "Don't let anybody leave!"

Kelso whirled around and glared at me. "Since when were you appointed to the force?"

"Give me five minutes and I'll hand over your killer," I said. "Come on, Kelso. What have you got to lose?"

He grumbled a minute and then ordered everyone back into the living room. I winked at Liz, poured myself a quick one, and went over and stood next to the piano while everybody settled down.

I felt like Philo Vance or somebody, collecting all the suspects in one room and trapping a murderer. I was beginning to enjoy myself.

"To begin with," I started off, "it didn't figure to be any of the guests." That made a big hit, and I had to wait for everybody to smile at each other and take deep breaths before I could get their attention again. "Cunningham has been dead since last night—before any of the invitations went out. Now, suppose it was one of the guests. First, he'd have figured that the party would be called off once the body was discovered. And even if nobody had opened up that bathroom door, why show up anyway? He would not have called any attention to himself by refusing the invitation, and he might have tipped the whole show if he'd come. It didn't make sense.

"And it probably wasn't his wife, either." I snapped a look at Kelso and he frowned but didn't speak. "In the first place, if she had been the one who planted the poison, she'd have waited until she'd been notified of his death before coming back. That would have been the big gimmick in the alibi she'd figured out. But the main reason why I knew it wasn't Mrs. Cunningham was that the murder weapon just wasn't the kind of thing a woman would have thought of."

"Murder weapon?" Kelso yelped. "You've found it?"

"I'm coming to that," I said. "The killer planted this weapon in the bathroom after Cunningham's wife left on her cruise. Then he started checking in every day to see if he'd died, and this morning he learned that he had. But one thing went wrong—Cunningham had followed his usual habit of locking the door behind him. There was no way for the killer to get the incriminating weapon back.

"Then he got the bright idea of filling this place with people, and discovering the locked door by accident. He could even discover the body, plant the suicide theory, and nobody would ever suspect him. He'd get Mrs. Cunningham and all her dough, and—"

"Come on," Kelso said. "Get to it!"

"Now about that murder weapon." I paused and let my eyes wander around the room. Everybody was watching me, nobody was moving. "It's still in this apartment—probably right in this room. The murderer couldn't retrieve it until the bathroom door had been broken down. It's probably in his pocket right now!"

At that second Tony Walsh leaped out of his chair and headed for the terrace. I cut across and, just as he was jerking the door open, I dived and hit him around the ankles. His head crashed into the glass doors and he went limp. "What the hell . . . ?" Kelso gasped.

I dragged Tony over to the couch, wrapped a handkerchief around my hand, and started going through his pockets. The murder weapon was in his inside coat pocket; a small, innocent-looking red tube that looked like an automatic pencil. I sniffed it—it was poisoned, all right. "Just a simple little styptic pencil," I said.

"The first time Cunningham cut himself shaving, he rubbed the poison right into his own bloodstream. Walsh figured to get the pencil back before anyone else discovered the body. That way nobody would even discover how Cunningham died, much less put the finger on his killer. He couldn't get it earlier, so he just took a normal little trip to the bathroom and stuck it in his pocket. If he'd been really smart he'd have dumped it somewhere, but he was too sure of himself." I grinned at Kelso. "Just like all amateurs."

I rolled up the handkerchief and pencil and handed it to Kelso. "You'll find two sets of prints, Cunningham's and Tony's. That ought to wrap it up." He nodded glumly and stuffed it into his pocket. "Be sure and get that handkerchief cleaned before you send it back," I said.

He struggled a few seconds and then said, "Thanks, Stoner."

"Always glad to help out a pal," I said, "and wipe off that worried look; I don't want any credit. This is your baby. Just remember what a fine, high-type fellow I am the next time we get a chance to work together."

It was an effort, but he came up with a smile. "Okay," he said, "now get out of here and let us clean this job up."

"With pleasure," I grinned back. Then I hustled over and slid my arm around Liz. "Let me take you away from all this."

She smiled. "That's an original line."

"Nothing is original," I said, "but sin. And while we're on the subject, do you want to go to my place or yours?"

"I knew I wasn't safe with you," she said.

"How right you are, honey," I said as we left. "How right you are."

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts, novels that you will wish to relax with, and others that will make you wonder.

THERE was a wide-spread sense of personal loss when the news came that Craig Rice had died, not only among those of us who knew her, but among the many for whom John J. Malone was a tremendously real and alive person.

Craig Rice was perhaps an anachronism in these days when hen-pecked husbands and flat-chested young men translate their frustrations into material of the sex-cum-sadism genre, making a panting public pay for these so-called mysteries.

It has been said that the "guys and dolls" in Craig Rice's novels, even in this last book, KNOCKED FOR A LOOP (Simon & Schuster, $2.95), are unreal.

This is debatable.

A numbers racketeer with a taste for Chivas Regal would be unreal to the gentler sections of Main Street, and equally so many of John J. Malone's more picturesque friends must be unreal —but tantalizingly interesting— to many readers. Her last novel, KNOCKED FOR A LOOP, is characteristic Craig Rice, filled with slightly mad people (including

Possibly influenced by the brevity of our friend over on The Saint's Ratings *desk, here are terser reports on recent excursions into the lethal arts after a tribute to Craig Rice. Here are some novels that you will find pleasant winter reading, and which you will agree are, in their way, portraits of our times.*

John J. himself) and assorted good looking gals, and reflecting much of the author's breathless interest in life. Is it a masterpiece? Craig Rice would have been the first to shudder at the thought, but it *is* an enjoyable illustration of why there is this feeling of personal loss in the realization that Craig Rice—and John J. Malone— are no longer with us, except for perhaps a final—still unpublished—report on the little lawyer's career.

Tommy Hambledon continues to be one of the urbaner (if increasingly Peter Wimseyish) representatives of the British Foreign Office's intelligence service. Manning Coles' pleasant DEATH OF AN AMBASSADOR (Doubleday, $2.95) reports on the distressing *finis* put to the career of a somewhat less than dedicated diplomat.

Henri Catalan's SOEUR ANGELE AND THE BELL RINGER'S NIECE (Sheed and Ward, $2.50) is Soeur Angele's third, and immeasurably better translated, recorded brush with mayhem. It is also a beautiful study of the impact, upon the mores of a small French community, of visions which—if genuine—can bring distinction and wealth to many.

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF The Saint Detective Magazine, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1957.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

H. LAWRENCE HERBERT,
(Signature of Publisher)

[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1957.
WALTER S. COOPER,
Notary Public.

State of New York. Qualified in New York County. No. 31-5811250. Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. Clks. & Term Expires March 30, 1958.

pastoral blackmail

by . . . Peter Cheyney

BELIEVE it or not, there is, not many miles from London, a hamlet rejoicing in the name of Mogador. The place took its name from the fact that, at one time, a Prince of Mogador, which your atlas has already told you is on the Moroccan coast, lived there; although why anyone having at his beck and call, so to speak, the atmospherics, glamour and other romantic benefits usually associated with Morocco, should choose to live in an English country hamlet is more than I can say.

But our interest in Mogador is due only to the fact that it was from an even smaller hamlet in the vicinity; from a cottage with an address "near Mogador," that my friend Eustace de Salen received a letter of invitation from Etienne Laroq—a letter written by him in one of his odd moods of self-satisfaction, asking De Salen to stay with him for a long week-end. Eustace supposed that Laroq wanted as usual to tell him the story of how he had brought off one of those nasty sinister coups in which he specialized.

Laroq had wandered around the world, earning an honest penny as a spy or agent provocateur for whoever'd pay the most.

Some years ago, in quieter days, Peter Cheyney, better known as "an exponent of crime through fact and fiction" (Daily Sketch) *wrote a series of pastels around the interest in crime of the ageless Mr. Krasinsky. Here is another of these stories whose charm "lies in the way they are told"* (Tatler).

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Etienne said in his letter that he expected satisfactorily to conclude during the next week or so the business which had brought him to England, and that in spite of the last unfortunate affair in which he and De Salen had been associated, and over which he bore Eustace no ill-will, it might be amusing for them to spend a few days together in the heart of the country.

De Salen had reason to remember the peculiar characteristics in which Etienne Laroq rejoiced. He remembered him as a tall, slim and much too good-looking specimen of humanity of some thirty-six years of age, and his experiences during the early days of the Russian Revolution—he escaped from Petrograd in 1918 at the age of sixteen—had stamped upon him certain characteristics which were entirely bad.

Since these days Laroq had wandered about the world making an honest—or dishonest—penny here and there by such means as suggested themselves to his somewhat elastic nature. He had worked as an *agent* or spy for at least four different Governments and his services were always at the disposal of the highest bidder.

De Salen had always regarded Etienne as a subject worthy of the study of anyone who considered himself interested in the vagaries of human nature, and, although on the occasion of their last meeting Eustace had—with a certain amount of pleasure—handed over Etienne to a country policeman, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he was cooling his heels in a cell for a few days on a charge which my friend had very successfully managed to trump up against him, yet it was quite obvious from his letter that he had arranged in his own mind to forget this business and was prepared to be friendly again if Eustace so desired.

Having nothing very much better to do at the time, being somewhat bored with life, and considering that some more "close-ups" of Etienne might be useful, De Salen packed a few things and drove off in the direction of Mogador.

It was a beautiful summer's evening, and Eustace was so deep in contented thought that he failed to notice the fact that he was doing forty-five miles an hour in a restricted area until a glance in his driving mirror showed him a suspicious-looking car some hundred yards behind him. This, his guilty conscience assured him, must be a police car. He took a bend in the road, slowed down, and seeing an open gate with a bridle path big enough to take the car, running across some fields, he swung the car in. Ten yards down the path there were some trees. De Salen pulled up behind this clump and

got out of the car. Looking through the hedge he was able to see that his surmise about the road police was quite incorrect. The car contained an apparently innocent family probably on its way to Brighton.

He got back into the car, lit a cigarette and prepared to back on to the main road. Just as he was about to shift the gear-lever he observed, leaning up against a tree, an individual in a shepherd's plaid suit, smoking a small cigar and regarding him with a certain interest.

"Good evening," said the stranger pleasantly. "It is a beautiful evening."

De Salen agreed. There was something rather attractive about this loudly clad individual whose large watch-chain fascinated him.

"My name is Krasinsky," the stranger continued. "I hope that you will not consider me impertinent, Sir, but I have noticed that people—especially in England—are very anxious to do the right thing on every conceivable occasion. The idea of doing something which might appear to be a little incongruous, something not entirely indicated, seldom enters the scheme of life in this charming island."

De Salen sat back in the driving seat and lit a cigarette. Krasinsky was smiling at him most attractively. He waited.

"For instance," continued Krasinsky, "your idea at the moment is to get back on to the main road. The idea seems good to you because it is the habit of people to drive motor cars along roads and *not* across the countryside. I have noticed that the English people seldom drive cars across the countryside—except when inebriated. The Irish, on the other hand, often do things like that, which is one of the reasons why the Irish are such a supreme, poetic, gallant and entirely idiotic race who spend their whole lifetime endeavoring to obtain something which they do not want and with which they do not know what to do when they have got it."

"I follow your reasoning," said De Salen. "But may I ask what all this has to do with me?"

"Nothing at all, Sir," said Krasinsky. "Nothing at all. Except that I realize that you, being you, *must* of necessity drive your car back on to the road, that you have not sufficient romance, sense of adventure and *je ne sais quoi* to continue driving across the fields here merely so that you may find out what is over the other side of the hill."

He puffed at his cigar.

"No Englishman ever wants to find out what is on the other side of the hill," he said cheerfully. "And I wish you good-evening, Sir."

He took off his hat, with a little bow walked away and was lost to sight in a moment.

De Salen smoked his cigarette. The fat gentleman in the odd suit intrigued him. He began to believe that there was something in what Krasinsky said. After all it is quite true that English people seldom drive their cars along bridle tracks and across fields. Quite suddenly the idea of driving straight across the countryside appealed to Eustace immensely. It seemed that this was one of the things that he had always wanted to do, although the truth of the matter was, I suppose, that Krasinsky had intrigued him into doing something which, in ordinary circumstances, he would have considered insane.

Anyhow he thought he would try it. He started off and drove carefully along the rough path, avoiding odd pieces of flint which spelled potential punctures. After a hundred yards the path diverged into an even narrower one, which he could see ran through a little wood. Eustace was annoyed because it seemed that he must either turn round and go back on to the main road again, or drive through the wood as best he could in the hope of finding a roadway on the other side.

Just then it decided to rain. A few large drops fell. De Salen's car was an open touring car, and he had now to decide as to whether he would put the top up or chance the rain. He decided to take the latter course and to get on to a road as soon as possible.

He had just concluded these ruminations when he saw ahead a sight which, to say the least of it, was surprising.

Standing under a tree some forty yards away was a woman, and whilst it is not unusual for women to stand under trees when it is beginning to rain, there were certain factors about this woman which aroused his interest, curiosity and admiration.

Obviously she was wearing an evening gown. It was of some black sheathlike shimmering stuff, and it had a train, although why a woman should wear a full-dress evening frock in the heart of a wood had yet to be discovered. She was wearing a short fur shoulder cloak, and as Eustace rattled and bumped towards her he could see that the amazing titian red of her hair made the whiteness of her complexion even more intense.

Altogether a very interesting situation, made even more interesting by the fact that she appeared to be crying!

De Salen negotiated the car in her direction as well as he could. He bumped over small hillocks, gulleys, fallen branches and all sorts of weird obstacles until he arrived in the little clearing where she was standing. Having done this he walked over to her and got under the tree just as the storm broke in earnest.

"Good evening," he said. "Is there anything I can do for you? Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

She had dried her tears and when she looked at him Eustace saw that she was very beautiful. She had a small straight nose, a most desirable mouth and blue eyes. Her eyes were large and conveyed rightly or wrongly an expression of extremely injured innocence. Her figure was slim and very graceful. It was difficult for Eustace to guess her age. He put it down to somewhere between twenty-five and thirty.

When she spoke it was in good careful English, a language obviously not her own.

"There is nothing you can do for me, thank you," she said. "Why should there be?"

De Salen smiled.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "It isn't usual to find ladies in evening frocks standing under trees in the rain in the middle of the countryside at seven-thirty at night. I thought possibly something was wrong, that you might want a lift."

"Thank you, no," she said. "I am quite happy. I don't want a lift. I should be obliged if you would go away."

"Certainly," he said. "With the greatest of pleasure."

Eustace thought she was unnecessarily brusque. He was annoyed. Any man would be annoyed in like circumstances, mainly because his curiosity had been aroused and there seemed no chance of satisfying it.

"Well, I hope it keeps fine for you, Madam," he said. "This storm will soon be over. It is just a little summer rain, you know."

He got back into the car, drove through the clearing and along an open space between the trees. In front of him, about thirty yards ahead, he could see a narrow road. He pulled the car on to this and lit another cigarette.

De Salen was curious about the woman. After all, he reasoned, a woman doesn't stand under a tree in the middle of a little wood in some place near Mogador in an evening gown just to pass the time. Obviously she was waiting for somebody. A thought struck him.

He wondered if she could possibly be waiting for Etienne Laroq.

I should point out to you at this stage that my friend had never known Laroq to be in any part of the world very long without finding at least two or three attractive women somewhere in the neighborhood. Laroq had a peculiar attraction for women. Eustace had never discovered what it was, or what particular brand of sex-appeal his was, but he told me that many members of the fair sex had been greatly concerned about Etienne to their eventual cost, because Etienne was the most untrustworthy per-

son where women were concerned.

And it was this idea which made De Salen drive a little way along the road and then stop at a place where, shielded by some bushes, he could look back through the wood and see the mysterious lady. She was still standing there holding up her skirts with her left hand and smoking a cigarette. Eustace thought that, whoever he was, the male for whom she was waiting must be a lucky man. There weren't many women as beautiful as she who would condescend to wait for anybody—especially in a wood in the rain.

Eustace had just made up his mind to move on when he heard the sound of a car which seemed to be coming in his direction. Suddenly the noise ceased. Quite obviously it had stopped round a bend in the road on which he was waiting. A couple of minutes afterwards he saw a man walking through the trees towards the woman. He smiled to himself. It was Etienne all right.

Eustace realized what a lucky thing it was that he had met the fat fellow in the Shepherd's plaid suit. Krasinsky had been right about the Irish. The Irish had something even if they did drive cars across the countryside on occasion.

As he drove along the narrow roadway Eustace wondered what devilment Etienne was at. He knew that there must be something financial attached to this business in some shape or form. Laroq, he knew, would not inconvenience himself by going out into the rain to meet a woman —no matter how attractive she was—merely for the fun of the thing.

He made up his mind to find out just what was going on, and, if he could, to throw a spanner into Etienne's machinery. Eustace was aware of, and disliked, Etienne's superb arrogance, his absolute lack of morals, his disloyalty to anybody or anything once they had served his purpose.

Half a mile down the road he found the cottage. It was an antique building, consisting of two or three old-time cottages knocked into one. It had been nicely retiled and repainted, and the garden that surrounded it made a splash of color against the green trees, the coppices and thickets which grew in its rear behind a well-kept lawn. A white palisade fence ran round the place with a wide gate, and a driveway up to the door.

He drove in and rang the bell. As he expected the door was opened by Mavison, whose chilly countenance broke into a half-smile as he recognized De Salen.

"Good evening, Sir," he said. "We thought you'd be down. Dinner is at nine o'clock, so per-

haps you will change now? I expect Mr. Laroq back at any minute now."

As he followed Mavison upstairs Eustace wondered just how much the old scoundrel knew about what was going on. Mavison—he was certain that was not his name—had been in Etienne's employ for ten years to his knowledge, and a good many years before that, he imagined. Eustace had an idea that Mavison had committed some sort of crime in England, and then, rather than face the consequences, had gone off to Marseilles and joined the French Foreign Legion.

De Salen was also fairly certain that Laroq, who had served as an officer in the Legion for nearly three years, had picked Mavison up there, and probably arranged for his release before his time was up. At that time Etienne was very strong with the French Government, for whom he was working in some secret capacity — probably as *agent provocateur,* at which peculiar and dirty business he had no equal anywhere in the world—which would account for his being able to get the man out.

Mavison was a character. He was tall and thin and gloomy. He was an excellent servant and knew how to handle underlings. Also he had an extraordinary affection for Laroq and a loyalty to him that surpassed my friend's understanding. If ever a man disproved the proverb that no man is a hero to his valet it was Mavison, because knowing Etienne intimately, seeing him day by day, watching him at the peculiar and often nasty bits of business in which he specialized, and being able still to retain his affection for his master, was something which De Salen said he would never be able to understand.

As he splashed in his bath Eustace made up his mind as to how he would begin operations. The first thing to be done was to find out who was the mysterious woman in the wood — the haughty and titian-haired beauty who waited about under oak trees in rain-storms for Laroq.

He realized too, that it would be a very good thing to find this out, if possible, before Laroq returned. He got out of the bath, wrapped himself in a bath-robe and rang the bell. When Mavison appeared he asked him to bring him a cocktail and when he returned with the Martini Eustace opened the ball by asking a few questions.

"How does Mr. Laroq like this part of the world, Mavison?" he asked, as the man was about to leave the bathroom with his tray.

Mavison paused with his hand on the door knob.

"Very well, I believe, Sir," he said. "I have never known Mr. Laroq to be so well. He is in the

pink of condition if I may use that expression."

"Isn't it a bit lonely about here?" asked De Salen. "I noticed on my way here that there are few houses or cottages in this part of the world. But possibly there is a village behind the wood?"

"No, Sir," said Mavison. "There is no village nearer than Bevaston on the one side and Mogador hamlet right over in the other direction. Bevaston isn't very far away, and between it and this place there are a few houses straggling about the countryside."

"I used to know a Mrs. Vresey who lived in these parts," De Salen volunteered. "She had a house near here, I believe. Strangely enough, on my way down I thought I saw Mr. Laroq and her, walking along one of the bridle paths. I very nearly pulled up and waved to them, but I thought I might have made a mistake, so I didn't bother."

Mavison pondered. De Salen lit a cigarette casually, wondering whether he would fall into the trap he had laid.

He did.

"I don't think there's any Mrs. Vresey about here, Sir," said Mavison. "I think it possible that you might have seen Mr. Laroq on the bridle path, but if you did I think the lady would have been the Italian lady—the Countess. She is the only lady who has been here since we have been down in the country."

"Oh, yes," said De Salen glibly. "Of course, the Contessa —the Italian who lives over at the house towards Mogador?"

"No, Sir," said Mavison. "She lives at Bevaston, at the Grange House quite close to the Rectory, and she has only been in residence there for a few months."

"Oh well," said De Salen, "it doesn't matter."

He sent Mavison off for another Martini, feeling rather pleased that he had, at least, identified the woman.

And he had been just in time, for as Mavison disappeared De Salen heard Etienne's key in the front door.

It was quite obvious to De Salen that Laroq was very pleased with himself.

During dinner his conversation took a light and airy tone which indicated that life was good. They discussed everything, and Laroq related with his usual self-satisfaction his adventures since Eustace had seen him last. Apparently he had been getting into and out of trouble in three different countries, but as each time his operations had been financially successful, the trouble had been worth while.

Looking at him as he sat at the other end of the table with the candlelight playing on his white skin and long sensitive nose—he

liked dining by candlelight and although it was still quite light outside Mavison had drawn the heavy curtains—Eustace thought that the situation of the world of today was made for people like Etienne.

Wars and rumors of wars, depressions, national and international troubles, created situations which, for him, were ideal. He was the supreme opportunist in mischief. Quite ruthless, he regarded people as so many oranges to be sucked dry.

De Salen wondered how he was going to start work on Etienne. He was perfectly certain that Etienne's meeting with the woman in the wood was part of some scheme, probably some evil scheme. He was also quite decided that Etienne had selected her as his next victim.

He remembered her big blue innocent eyes which had looked with apprehension at him when he had spoken to her. Such a woman would be fair game for Etienne.

Yet at the same time he realized the necessity for caution. Laroq had a brain that worked like lightning, and once he had a suspicion that Eustace was trying to upset his apple cart he would take good means to protect himself. However, he had to start somewhere, so De Salen took the bull by the horns. After Mavison had brought in the port and had gone he said airily:

"I hope you had a satisfactory interview in the wood, Etienne. I think she is very nice. I would not have guessed that you had such attractive neighbors in these parts."

Laroq looked at Eustace across the table, his eyebrows slightly raised, one a little more than the other, a trick he had when professing surprise.

"Really, my dear Eustace," he said with a smile, "now how did you manage to see that? Surely you didn't come that way? You must have been right off the road."

"I was," De Salen confessed. "I got off the main road on the other side of Mogador. I'd been doing a little speeding and thought I was being followed by a police car. As I already have two convictions I thought I might try and miss a third, so I drove across a wide bridle path and managed by some good luck to get the car across that wood. When I got to the road on the other side I saw you going through the trees. Naturally I was intrigued to see you meeting such an attractive woman in such a charming frock in a rainstorm. Is she very nice?"

Etienne smiled.

"Quite charming, Eustace," he said. "Quite charming, but luckily not too brainy. She seems to possess all the feminine instincts for starting something that she can't finish as you would say, for

which she must"—a mock dramatic note came into his voice—"pay the price."

"I see," said De Salen. "At your old blackmailing tricks again, eh, Etienne? You know one of these fine days you'll find yourself in prison."

"Possibly," Laroq replied, "but up to the moment, beyond one or two short incarcerations for so-called political offenses in different countries, I have managed to keep out of durance vile. May I trouble you for the port?"

De Salen realized that as far as Laroq was concerned the conversation was at an end. He was surprised at this, because one of the main reasons for Etienne liking him about the place was so that he might boast of his successful adventures. The fact that he was disinclined to talk about this most recent conquest showed De Salen that there was something quite important afoot, something about which he wished Eustace to know nothing.

"What was your idea in getting me down here?" Eustace asked Laroq as he passed the decanter round the table.

"Oh, I don't know," said Etienne. "You know, Eustace," he continued with a slow sarcastic smile, "I have always regarded you as a somewhat unintelligent Doctor Watson. You are, I know, discreet, and beyond the fact that I believe on one or two occasions you have done your best to upset little schemes of mine and failed dismally in the process, I like talking to you about my operations. I suppose this is one of the failings of the near-criminal," he went on with a grin.

De Salen said nothing. He realized with an inward smile that he'd upset more of Etienne's schemes than that worthy would ever know of.

"I see," he said as they lit their cigarettes. "So you believe that you are going to bring off a *coup;* some delicate operations are to be brought to a successful conclusion, and then when they're all over and finished you're going to tell me all about it. Is that it?"

"Something like that," said Laroq. "Now what about some billiards? I always think better when I'm playing billiards."

They finished their game about a quarter past eleven, and Eustace paid Etienne the £1 that he had won. He thought it was rather clever of him to allow Etienne to win the £1—he could beat him at billiards any day in the week—but he did so because he thought it might put Laroq into a nice open frame of mind, in which he'd do a little talking. It did nothing of the sort.

A few minutes afterwards Laroq said that he was going to bed; that they would probably meet at breakfast, and off he

went. Eustace told him that he would soon follow him, but as the night was fine he thought he might take a walk before turning in.

Once outside the house De Salen lit his pipe, walked on down the road to the cross roads where there was a signpost, and began almost automatically to walk towards Bevaston. At the back of his mind there was some idea of calling on the mysterious Contessa, of warning her generally against the machinations of Etienne and endeavoring to find out what was afoot.

Despite the lateness of the hour he thought that he might have a chance of catching her, because—and he was rather proud of this deduction—he reasoned that no woman was going to put on an evening gown for the purpose of meeting Laroq under a tree, and that the possibility was that she had intended going up to town to dine or to the theater.

If his idea were correct then Eustace imagined she would be on her way back now and might arrive at The Grange about the same time as he did, the signpost having informed him that Bevaston was three-quarters of a mile away.

It was a lovely night. The short but intense rainstorm of the earlier evening had freshened the countryside after the heat. There was a good moon, and walking along the road on which the rain had successfully laid the dust, puffing at his pipe, Eustace felt very pleased with himself, almost like a knight errant who was going to the rescue of some beautiful and, of course, innocent lady.

At the same time he realized that he had to be careful in his operations, because if Laroq discovered he was trying to put a spoke in his wheel he would be quite merciless, and Eustace had no doubt would think up something special for him which would get him where it would hurt most.

About ten minutes afterwards, round a bend in the road, standing back in some well-kept grounds, he saw an attractive house. He could see lights in two or three windows where the curtains were not closely drawn, and he came to the conclusion that this would be The Grange.

As he approached nearer De Salen saw that there was a breast-high wall running right round the property, and down on his left towards the back of the house there was a white gate in this wall. He thought it quite possible that this gate would be open, that it would be a short cut for him if it were, so he got off the road, cut across country through the trees towards the gate. He was half-way there when he saw it open, and through it came the Contessa. She was holding her

short fur cloak closely about her and she made off in the direction of a clump of trees. He was most interested. It seemed a habit of this lady's to stand up under trees and wait for people.

Eustace altered his course so that he was walking parallel with her about twenty-five yards on her left, and kept carefully in the shadow of such trees and bushes as came his way. Presently she stopped. She stood under a large oak tree and looked about her. Eustace halted too behind another tree.

The night was quite still and presently he heard the sound of footsteps approaching. He looked round cautiously and saw walking from the direction of the road towards the tree where the Contessa was standing, a tall and well-built man. As he passed through a little patch of moonlight De Salen could see that he was wearing the well-cut uniform of a chauffeur.

And he wore this uniform with an air. His peak cap was set at an angle slightly over one eye, and there was something not unattractive in the thin bronzed lines of his face. Standing there watching him approach the Countess under the oak tree, De Salen wondered what the devil was afoot. He also realized the truth of the proverb that half the world doesn't know what the other half is doing, and he wondered whether Laroq was aware of the fact that the lady who he thought was so stupid was keeping another appointment so soon after his own.

At this moment Eustace heard a discreet cough from somewhere in his vicinity. Apparently these two were not the only actors in the comedy or drama that was being played. He stood quite still and looked cautiously about him. Away on his left, ensconced behind a large bush, his eyes following the moving figure of the chauffeur, was an individual who, to judge by the cut of his waistcoat and collar, was a clergyman.

He was short. He had a round and slightly humorous face, and the absence of any head covering showed a well-shaped pate covered with thin and curly gray hair. In his left hand, shielded by his fingers but with the lighted end towards De Salen, there was a cigarette. Eustace felt rather disgusted with him. He didn't approve of clergymen playing peeping tom on beautiful ladies in forests, especially when he happened to be doing the same sort of thing himself.

By this time the chauffeur had reached the oak tree. Eustace could see that he and the woman were arguing about something. In the moonlight her face was tense. De Salen realized that all this wasn't getting him anywhere, and he thought that he ought to take advantage of the situation

to do something about it. Quite obviously something serious was afoot and as everyone else seemed so concerned he didn't see why he shouldn't take a little more practical interest in these things.

He circled behind some trees and approached the clergyman from the rear. When he got behind him he touched him on the arm.

"Good night," he said, "and how do you do?"

The clergyman turned round and looked at him. He had the most benign face Eustace had ever seen in his life, and he seemed only mildly surprised to see him.

"I am very well, thank you," he said. "My name is Nicholas Houdthwaite-Jones—The Reverend Nicholas Houdthwaite-Jones—and I am the Rector of Bevaston. You're probably wondering what I am doing in this wood at this time of night, but the fact of the matter is I am very interested in the movements of my chauffeur who is over there talking to the lady.

"It is a most extraordinary thing," he went on, "but since he has been in my employ the attendance at the services on Sundays have increased wonderfully. He is a strange young man—an American, very good-looking. On two or three occasions I have watched him leave his quarters over the garage very late at night, and tonight I thought I'd try and find out just what he was at."

"It is very good of you to explain all that," said Eustace. He told the Rector who he was.

"Personally," Eustace went on, "I'm rather more interested in the lady. I have an idea in my head that she is being blackmailed, and I have another idea that we ought to do something about it. Don't you agree?"

As they stood talking behind the bush it occurred to De Salen that there was something vaguely ridiculous in the whole situation. Through a gap in the leaves he could see the chauffeur and the Countess deep in an intense conversation.

"We must certainly do something about it," he continued, and in a few words he told the Rector of the earlier meeting which he had seen between the woman and Laroq. He also gave him his idea of Laroq's character and his impression that he was up to no good. Just as he had finished the Rector put his hand on De Salen's arm.

"Look," he said, "Skendall is going off. Don't you think we ought to tackle him?"

Eustace looked up. The pair under the oak tree had parted. The woman walked towards the white gate in the wall leading to The Grange, and disappeared through it. Skendall, who had walked a few paces with her, stopped and lit a cigarette.

"I think you're right," said Eustace. "Let's tackle him."

They came out from behind the bush and began walking towards the chauffeur, who was standing there inhaling his cigarette with obvious pleasure. When they were a few paces from him he heard them and turned round. He was a very good-looking young man. There was something quite attractive about his face, except that Eustace thought his eyes were a little too close together. He was not at all perturbed to see them.

"Hey, Reverend," he said. "You're out pretty late, ain't you?"

"That's as may be," said the clergyman, "but this gentleman and I think that some explanation is due from you about this meeting with the Countess. You know, Skendall," he went on in the same benign voice, "it isn't usual for chauffeurs to have meetings with countesses at midnight in deserted woods, and it usually means trouble for somebody, and I don't want any trouble at the rectory."

"Don't you worry your head, Reverend," said the chauffeur. "And another thing," he went on, "I ain't the normal type of chauffeur, not by a long chalk, and can I help it if dames go for me in a big way?"

"You mean that the lady is in love with you?" queried De Salen.

"No, I don't, but she was."

Skendall turned to the Rector.

"You know, Reverend," he said, "before I came over here and took this job with you I was working in Rome. I was staff chauffeur at a hotel there.

"O.K. Well, that's where I met this dame and she was dead nuts on some guy over there, some Italian. They was engaged to be married or something. Well, this engagement sort of blows up. I was driving for a family that was living in the same hotel where she was, and I think she sort of fell for me on the rebound. You know what I mean.

"I reckon she was sort of playing around with me in order to forget this other guy.

"Well, to cut a long story short, she writes me a whole lot of letters. Then she goes off and I don't see her any more. O.K. Well, about three months ago I got a letter from some guy called Laroq—Etienne Laroq—and this man says that it's going to be well worth my while to come over here, and not only does he say this but he also sends my fare. He says that when I get over here maybe me and him can do some business together.

"Well, I come over and just at this time you get that ad of yours in the paper for a chauffeur, so I killed two birds with one stone by taking the job with you."

"And what did Laroq want?" asked De Salen.

"Nothing very much," Skendall replied. "He wants to buy them letters she wrote me and I'm goin' to sell 'em to him."

The Rector's mouth opened in astonishment.

"But you can't do that, Skendall," he said. "If this lady has written you some indiscreet letters in circumstances such as you have divulged to us, you couldn't possibly think of selling those letters to anybody else."

"Why not?" he said. "They're my letters, ain't they, and there's nobody can stop me selling them to him. I can do with two hundred and fifty quid."

De Salen turned to the Rector.

"I begin to get the idea," he said. "Laroq wants to buy the letters from Skendall here so that he can blackmail the Countess. Evidently she has got something that he wants."

And in his own mind De Salen was perfectly certain that he was right. He knew Laroq's technique, and he knew that he'd stop at nothing to get what he wanted.

"Look here," he said to the chauffeur, "I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. Mr. Laroq is a rather extraordinary individual. He's simply using you in order to blackmail that unfortunate woman with the foolish letters that she wrote to you. Probably she regrets writing them, probably she regrets the whole thing. You know the law in this country is very tough on blackmailers."

"You're telling me?" said Skendall. "But you boys have got me all wrong. I ain't blackmailing nobody, and it ain't blackmail for me to sell a set of letters that belong to me for £250 to some guy who wants to buy 'em. That's what I have been seeing the Countess about. I told her that if she liked to raise the ante and pay me a bit more I'd sell her the letters back again, but she says she ain't got the money, and anyway she thinks I ought to give the letters back to her, a thing which I am certainly not going to do.

"No," said Skendall, shaking his head quite definitely. "I reckon this job is quite an ordinary bit of business, and I reckon I'm going to sell those letters to the Laroq guy. After all, the Countess made use of me when she wanted to, didn't she, so I reckon this is where I am going to make use of her."

He stood in the moonlight, his uniform cap slightly over one eye, a smile on his handsome face.

"You know, Skendall," said the Rector, "it seems that you are a most unmoral person."

"Maybe," said Skendall, "I don't know what it means, but maybe I am. Anyhow that's the way it is. The point is if anybody

likes to give me £250 for those letters they can have 'em, and if I don't get the dough by tomorrow morning I'm going to sell 'em to Laroq. I reckon I'm tired of this place anyway. I'm going back home. With that dough I could start a frankfurter stand some place, which is a thing I have always wanted to do. Well, good night, Reverend," he said.

He raised one finger to his cap, turned on his heel and walked off.

De Salen and the Rector stood there looking at each other.

"A rather difficult situation," said the Rector.

Eustace nodded.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," he said. "I wish I knew where your chauffeur kept those letters."

"I know that," said the Rector, "I've got them. Some little while ago he gave me a sealed packet which he asked me to keep in the safe. I expect that would be the letters."

"Well, in that case, it's easy, Rector," said De Salen. "We simply destroy them. That settles the whole argument."

"Oh, no, Sir," said the Rector. "Two wrongs don't make a right. The fact that Skendall is misbehaving himself is no reason why I should commit an act which, besides being obviously dishonest, is also to my way of thinking quite immoral. I shall most certainly *not* destroy the letters."

"All right," said De Salen, "if you won't destroy them, you won't."

They walked on in silence. Presently they came to the Bevaston Road and began to walk towards the village. Eustace imagined that they were going in the direction of the Rectory.

"No, Sir," said the Rector firmly. "I could not make it march with my conscience to destroy those letters. It would be wrong. They are the property of Skendall and he is, in fact, entitled to do what he likes with them. At the same time," he continued with a sigh, "I wish I could find some way of reaching his better feelings and getting him voluntarily to return the letters to this unfortunate woman."

"So do I," said Eustace. "Although obviously she's an idiot to have written them to him in the first place. I could spank that woman. She must be an awful fool."

"Most certainly she has been foolish," he said.

He stopped suddenly and looked at De Salen with a brightening eye.

"Look here," he said. "I've an idea. Let's go back to the Rectory and I'll get Skendall to come into the study and we'll talk this thing over again. We'll treat him as an equal—socially and morally. You," he went on, talking

quickly with a certain excitement which had seized him as a result of the dramatic situation in which he found himself involved, "must supply the dramatic element. It must be your business to draw a picture which will reach Skendall's better and more humane instincts. You must show him what awful misery and unhappiness this Laroq can cause the Countess if he obtains possession of the letters.

"Then," continued the Rector, "at the crucial moment, just as Skendall begins to crack—I think that is the word that is usually used—I will make him another offer. I have saved up eighty pounds towards the restoration of the antique carving on the east wall of the Rectory which I regret to say was knocked down and quite ruined last month by a touring car driven by an inebriated Czecho-Slovak. At the crucial moment I will offer Skendall this eighty pounds if he will sell me the letters. Possible he will consent, in which case the matter is at an end and we will return them to this unfortunate young woman."

De Salen considered the suggestion. Eventually:

"Well, Rector, I'll try anything once," he said, "but I can't see it working. This Skendall is as tough as they make them. He just can't see our point of view. He can't see that he is, in effect, making himself a party to a most immoral act. He's simply thinking in terms of two hundred and fifty pounds and a hamburger stand somewhere in his home town, and whether any amount of talk will reach his humane instincts as you call them, is, to my mind, extremely problematical."

The Rector sighed once more.

"We can but try," he said bravely.

It was three o'clock in the morning, and De Salen and the Rector had put in two hours' work on Skendall without any effect whatever.

The night had become sultry, and in spite of the fact that the Rector had opened the French windows of his study they were all uncomfortably hot.

The Rector sat at his desk gazing despairingly at Skendall, who, coatless, his shirt collar unbuttoned, and a glass of the Rector's best port in his hand, lounged on the settee, his long well-shaped legs stretched out in front of him, a picture of poise, indolence and complete nonchalance.

"Say, listen, Reverend, and you too," he said. "Why in the name of heck don't you see that you got this thing all wrong? What's the good of your tellin' me that what I'm doin' is screwy. Them letters belong to me, don't they? O.K. An' when it comes to morals let me tell you some-

thin'. I reckon it wasn't exactly moral for the Countess to go for me in a big way just because she was fed up with this Italian guy she had a shindig with—the guy she now wants to get married to. Another thing, there is a girl in New York who is also nuts about me, an' if I don't show up there pretty soon with enough dough to start up this hamburger proposition, well I reckon that she ain't goin' to sit around waitin'. She's just goin' to take a run-out powder on yours truly an' hitch herself up with a guy who runs a pump an' flat tire business around the block. If I wanta get that girl I gotta get back quick an' I gotta get back with the dough."

He drew in his legs and leaned towards them.

"Listen," he said. "You guys talk about morals. Well, when I was comin' over here I told Lillah about this business an' she says: 'Go on, Tony, you go an' collect an' come back an' maybe I'll make an honest man outa you.' "

He stopped suddenly and a faraway look appeared in his eye. He brisked up as if the thought of the girl in New York had started a new train of thought.

"Look, Reverend," he said, looking down on the incumbent, "you said you'd give me eighty pounds if I sold you those letters, didn't ya? O.K. Well, I reckon you trusts me, don't ya? I reckon you think I'm a good guy. O.K. Well, I'm goin' to show you somethin'. You get that eighty pounds an' you get the letters outa the safe an' bring 'em to me here. But I don't want any more talk or any more wisecracks outa either of you guys. I'm goin' to handle this business in my own way, see?"

The Rector got up.

"Very well, Skendall," he said. "We're in your hands, and I don't know whether I can trust you or not, or what you intend to do, but I'm going to take a chance."

He went out of the room. De Salen lit a cigarette and watched Skendall, who had walked over to the window and was looking out on to the moonlit lawn with a smile playing around his well-carved lips. De Salen didn't like this new phase at all. It seemed to him that Skendall was going to make sure of getting another eighty pounds on the deal and still go through with his original idea; that all their efforts had merely shown this enterprising Yankee chauffeur the strength of his position.

After some minutes the Rector came back. In one hand he held an ordinary foolscap envelope, the flap of which was stuck down with rather soiled stamp-paper edging. In the other he held some banknotes. He held both hands out to Skendall.

"There, Skendall," he said.

"I'm going to trust you. "I'm going to rely on the inherent goodness which, I know, is somewhere in you; the goodness that I thought I recognized when I gave you your job here."

Skendall grinned. He took the packet and the banknotes, placed the packet carefully in his hip pocket and counted the eight ten-pound notes, which he stowed away in his breeches pocket.

"Now," he said, "I reckon we can get down to cases. I reckon that we will all go up an' see this Laroq guy; but I want you two to know that I gotta handle this job in my own way. I got an idea—a big idea—an' maybe, if you two just stick around and keep your traps shut, I can pull it off. Is that O.K. by you?"

"It's O.K. by me," said the Rector. "And I'm certain that it's going to be O.K. by this gentleman too."

De Salen nodded.

"I agree," he said. "I don't see that there's anything else to do."

"All right," said the chauffeur. "Come on, you two, let's get goin'."

De Salen says that he will never forget the scene at the cottage, or the expression on Etienne's face after they had awakened Mavison, gained admission and sent for Laroq.

They grouped themselves like rival armies, Laroq, on one side of the dining-table with Mavison in his rear, regarding De Salen with a baleful eye, for he had already sensed, by the presence of Skendall, that Eustace had been up to something.

On the other side of the table the Rector sat. De Salen leaned up against the bookcase on his right-hand side, whilst Skendall, his coat and shirt collar still unbuttoned, his hands in his breeches pockets, regarded Laroq with his usual cynical smile.

"Now, listen here, Mister Laroq," he said, "an' don't talk until I let you in on the set-up. These two guys—the Reverend and this other one—have been on to me about sellin' you them letters the Countess wrote me. They been tellin' me that the deal's immoral an' that I'm just an ornery durn son of a so-an'-so to let you have 'em because they reckon that you're goin' to blackmail the Countess some way or another with 'em.

"An' they mean what they say. The Reverend here has given me eighty pounds if I won't let you have the letters. He's prepared to do without mendin' the Rectory wall where some guy knocked a coupla dolphins off it when he was all tanked up, providin' the Countess can be O.K.

"All right," he continued, "an' that ain't all. On the way up here this other guy,"—he indicated De Salen with his thumb—"says

he will add another twenty pounds, makin' a total of a hundred in all, if I will not sell you the letters, but will hand 'em over to the Rector. Well, what are you offerin'?"

Laroq smiled. Sitting there, De Salen thought he looked rather like the devil himself, in a crêpe-de-chine dressing-gown.

"My original offer holds good, Skendall," he said softly. "In fact," he went on, "I am prepared to increase it somewhat."

He lit a cigarette carefully.

"I don't know what these two have been telling you, Skendall," he went on, with a malicious look in De Salen's direction, "but I should like you to know that you are perfectly within your legal rights in selling me the letters, and you will be a fool if you do not take advantage of my offer.

"Remember that young woman of yours who is awaiting you in New York—Lillah—isn't that her name? Don't you want to marry her before that other fellow gets her just because she is tired of waiting for the man whom she sent off to England with a brave smile to collect the shekels that will start that hamburger business? You know women, Skendall. Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but it also gives the other fellow the chance he's been waiting for."

Laroq paused artistically to allow the full import of his words to sink in.

"Hand over those letters to me, Skendall," he said, "and I will here and now hand you three hundred pounds—an increase of fifty on my arrangement with you, and," he continued, "I will give you exactly two minutes from the time I stop speaking to make up your mind. Consider, Skendall, I paid your fare over, but if you sell these letters to these two people here I shall certainly not pay your fare back to New York, which I will do if you accept my offer.

"If you take their hundred pounds you will arrive back in New York with about seventy pounds at best, and you cannot start a hamburger business with that. On the other hand if you take mine, I pay your return fare and you land with three hundred.

"Well, what are you going to do? What do you think Lillah would want you to do? You've got two minutes to make up your mind."

They all watched Skendall who, slowly bringing his hands out of his breeches pockets, brought with one of them the Rector's eighty pounds. De Salen's heart sank.

Skendall looked at the Rector, and pushed the notes at him.

"I'm sorry, Reverend," he said. "Maybe you'll think I'm a lousy heel; that I oughta be shot for this. O.K. Well, you'll just have to excuse me for livin', that's all, because this Laroq guy

has just said something that has sorta made up my mind for me. He just said what do I think Lillah would want me to do. Well, I know the answer to that one all right."

He grinned at Laroq.

"Listen you," he said, "hand over that three hundred and another fifty for my fare back home an' I'm goin' to give you these letters!"

Laroq smiled. His smile went from Skendall, on whom it rested pleasantly, then to the Rector, and on to De Salen where it rested for a moment charged with a cynical hatred.

He got up and left the room. Whilst he was away no one spoke, but Mavison—that ex-crook—looked at De Salen with an expression of mild triumph.

When Laroq returned he held the notes in his hand. He counted them out — seven fifty-pound notes—on to the table. Then he pushed them towards Skendall.

Skendall picked up the notes, stowed them away in his breeches pocket and threw on to the table the foolscap envelope. Laroq picked it up.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think our interview is ended."

He turned towards De Salen.

"As for you, Eustace," he said. "You can pack your bag and get out. You thought you were going to upset my plans? Well, it seems that you were not sufficiently intelligent, and, for your especial benefit, you might like to know that before I am through with these,"—he held up the envelope —"I shall make twenty times the sum that I paid Skendall here for them."

Skendall grinned. Then, as Laroq was about to open the envelope, he produced a cigarette from behind his left ear and lit it from one of the candles on the table.

"You won't," he said to Laroq. "You won't make a durn nickel out of 'em."

Laroq was unperturbed.

"And may I ask why not?"

"Sure," said Skendall easily. "I'm on to your game. You know durn well that the Countess has made it up with that Italian guy of hers and they're goin' to be married. I reckon you was goin' to stick to those letters until after she marries him next month an' then—knowin' that he's a rich guy an' that she'll have plenty of dough when she's his wife—you was goin' to work the black on her an' collect plenty outa her; otherwise you was goin' to tell her you'd send him the letters an' let him know that she'd been writing silly love-letters to a chauffeur."

He took a long puff at his cigarette and sent the smoke out through his right nostril most artistically.

"Now, I reckon that I am a straight guy," said Skendall, "an' I am a guy who always keeps his

word, an' when I said I'd sell you them letters for the dough you paid for 'em I meant it, an' I've done it, but you won't use 'em to blackmail that dame."

Laroq was still smiling.

"Why?" he asked pleasantly.

"Looky," said the chauffeur. "All this evenin' I been tryin' to please everybody, an' I think I've done it. The Reverend here and this other guy don't want the Countess to get hurt an' they was prepared to pay for it like good guys. You wanted the letters—well, you got 'em. But all the evenin' I been trying to do what Lillah woulda liked, that is sell the letters so's we could start that hamburger stand and get married, an' at the same time see that you kept your lousy hooks off that Countess dame who is a nice little thing even if she *is* inexperienced."

Skendall stubbed out his cigarette end, helped himself to another from the silver box on the table and lit it from the candle.

De Salen was watching Laroq. He was not looking happy.

"Tonight when we was talkin' over this down at the Rectory," Skendall went on, "I gotta big idea. Now you tell me something," he said to Laroq. "What's the name of the Italian guy that the Countess is goin' to marry?"

"The gentleman is called the Marchese Antonio della Dalda."

"O.K.," said Skendall. "Well, it might interest you to know that my name is Antonio—Antonio Skendall. My pa was an Italian an' his name was Antonio too. So here's the way it goes.

"All them letters are addressed to 'Dearest Antonio,' an' here's the reason why you *ain't* goin' to use 'em to blackmail the Countess. Tomorrow morning, before I leave here, I'm goin' around to see that dame, an' I'm goin' to write her a letter. I'm goin' to say in that letter that the letters you got there *are ones that she wrote to this Marchese guy;* the ones that she gave me to post to him because I was the hotel chauffeur an' it was my job to clear the mailbox. I'm goin' to say that I didn't post 'em, I opened 'em, an' that when I saw the name was the same as mine I kept 'em an' told you they was written to me. Then you bought the letters off me so you could blackmail the Countess by pullin' some phoney story that the letters was written to me, an' that I took the dough just because you are a cheap son of a double-crossin' heel, an' how do you like that?"

There was gorgeous silence. De Salen told me that he had never, in the whole course of his life, seen any face diffused with such sardonic rage as that which appeared on the countenance of Laroq.

He got to his feet, his fists clenched, and for a moment it looked as if he would spring at

Skendall, who, still smiling, merely produced from his pocket a fist on which his eye dwelt lovingly for a moment.

When Laroq spoke his voice was hoarse with rage.

"Get out of here—all of you," he said.

They moved in silent triumph to the door. As they reached it they saw Laroq hold the foolscap envelope in the flame of one of the candles; watched the cartridge paper of the envelope crackle and burn, as he made certain that no one else, at any rate, should have the precious and useless letters for which he had paid three hundred and fifty pounds.

They halted outside the Rectory gates and regarded each other with approval. The Rector seemed tired, as if the strain of the Laroq scene had been a little too much for him.

Skendall, cheerful and unperturbed, produced a cigarette and lit it with a match which he struck cleverly on the seat of his breeches.

"Well, Reverend," he said. "I reckon I'll be scrammin' off in the mornin', but I'll get around an' say so-long before I go. I greased the car today, an' gave her a tune-up, so's she'll be O.K. for the next guy you hire."

The Rector nodded.

"I think you've done very well tonight, Skendall," he said. "Very well indeed, and I want to show you my appreciation."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced the banknotes which Skendall had returned to him.

"Here's the eighty pounds," said the Rector. "That's my contribution to the hamburger emporium which Lillah and you are going to open. Now don't refuse it. I really want you to have it."

Skendall took the money with a grin.

"Gee, Reverend," he said. "This is swell. An' will Lillah be pleased or will she? Well, I'm goin' to hit the hay. Good night, gents."

He disappeared round by the back way towards the garage.

The Rector sighed.

"I think you and I ought to have a little drink," he said to De Salen. "Just a small one to pull us together after all this business. Don't you think?"

Eustace agreed. He wanted a drink badly. He was tired but very pleased with the defeat of Laroq, and was looking forward to seeing Mavison's face when he went back for his things.

As they stood in the study, their whiskey glasses in their hands, the dawn began to break.

"Don't you think, Rector," said De Salen, "that you were rather more than generous to Skendall? After all, he'd had a very good evening's work. I think that the eighty pounds you gave him was almost too much."

"I'm afraid you don't understand," said the Rector. "You see I gave him the extra eighty pounds just now as a sort of sop to my own conscience. I wanted to feel that I had actually done something towards buying the letters from him, because you see I still have them—they're in the safe here, in the Rectory."

De Salen looked at him in amazement.

"But the packet you brought out here; the envelope you gave to Skendall; that he handed over to Laroq; that Laroq paid three hundred and fifty pounds for?" He paused for breath.

"There was only a folded circular in it," said the Rector with a guilty look. "You see when I left you and Skendall here and went to get the letters I wondered if I could really trust Skendall to play the game. When I opened the safe and saw that the letters were in an ordinary foolscap envelope stuck down with a stamp-paper edging I got an idea. So I got another foolscap envelope from my desk, put the circular inside and stuck it down with stamp-paper, making it look as much like the other as possible. Luckily for me no one thought of opening it and looking inside."

It was nearly two minutes before Eustace stopped laughing.

"So you realize, Rector," he said, "that if Skendall hadn't told Laroq the letters would be useless to him, just as he was in the act of opening the envelope, Laroq could have discovered the fraud and kept his money. As it is the silly ass has burned the envelope believing it to contain the real letters. What a marvelous situation!"

The Rector nodded.

"I think we'll burn those letters here and now," he said. "Then, tomorrow, you can call on the Countess and tell her that everything is all right."

He went off, and De Salen stood looking out of the French windows telling himself what a wonderful time he was going to have when he went up and told Etienne the truth. He wanted to see his face when he learned that he had paid three hundred and fifty pounds for a garden seed circular.

The Rector returned. Solemnly, their glasses in their hands, in the flame of a candle that the Rector produced from a drawer, they burned the letters.

Somewhere outside a cock began to crow, and for some reason the sound brought back to De Salen's mind a memory of the portly individual in the shepherd's plaid suit who had intrigued him into driving across country instead of going back to the main road.

He hoped to meet him again one day.

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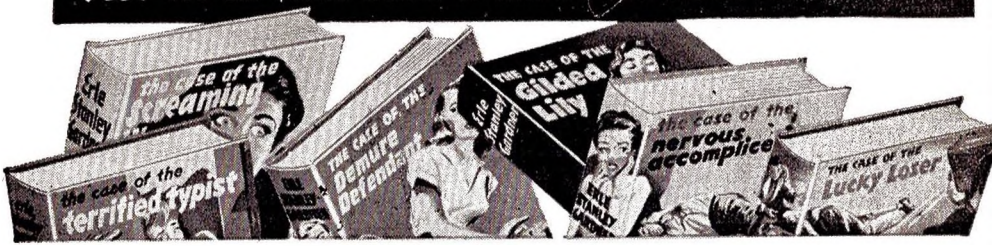

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