The Crab Woman by WENZELL BROWN

THE saint MAGAZINE

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SEVEN of INTREX

An Exciting New COUNTER-SPY Story by

MICHAEL AVALLONE

Author of THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

Also

NIGEL MORLAND

ALLEN KIM LANG

LESLIE CHARTERIS

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

JAMES MICHAEL ULLMAN

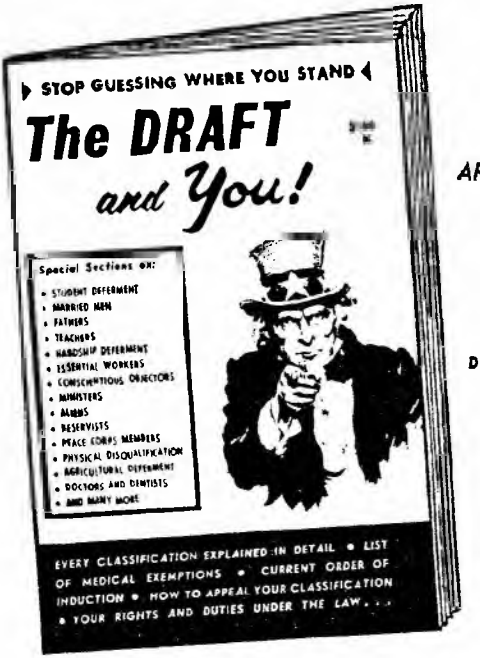
There have been innocent people who have met me in person and have had the impression (the word has come back to me) that I am bashful. The reason for this is that they misinterpret my reluctance to talk about myself or my work. But the truth is not that I am excessively modest, but simply that the subject bores me. When I get away from my typewriter, and the chores of being a writer or editor, and escape into purely social gatherings, I want to leave all thoughts and reminders of my jobs behind me. I want to talk about anything else, or to other people about their jobs, if they feel so inclined, because I can learn things from them — with the sole exception of other writers, whose "shop" is the same as mine. But most of you who know me only in print would testify that I am about as opinionated a dogmatist as ever punched a typewriter key.

About 33 years ago, I met the late Somerset Maugham at the Long Island home of my American publisher, who was also his publisher, and I formed a similar personal impression of him. I am certain he had never heard of me, and for me to have talked about what writing I had done so far would been sheerly ludicrous. On the other hand, I would have been enthralled to listen to anything he had to say about his own; but it did not seem to occur to him to talk about it, all through the evening, and I felt that it would have been impertinent and ill-mannered of me to try to force the subject.

Therefore I had to wait until January of this year to find out what he really thought about it, in some observations which he made for *Playboy*. I will quote just a few key sentences:

> "I can be severely simple and chastely sensuous, classic and grotesque, subtle and passionate, passing with perfect mastery from love to dialectics . . . I can even be humorous, too. It is probably in this diversity of gifts that the secret of my wide popularity is to be found."
>
> "My serene equipoise of faculty and my supreme artistic sense have enabled me to succeed equally in fiction, drama and essay."
>
> "Every sketch of life which I have written . . . is finished with skill and has the crowning merit of absolute fidelity, accuracy and truth."
>
> "My mind is one of the most fertile of minds. . ."
>
> "I have tried to enlarge the potentialities of language, articulation and expression, as every literary artist does, and in precision, splendor and suggestiveness of phrase I have attempted to stand unapproached."
>
> "I have the prophet's stern simplicity of habit. And I am impelled to utterance by an imperious instinct for truth."

I guess that finally settles any speculations about Maugham's modesty. And it sets me a mark which I fear I may never be able to top.



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instead of the saint—XII

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Some six years ago, I wrote in one of my Introductions to this Magazine:

> On May 31, 1790, the first United States copyright law was signed by President George Washington, and practically nothing has been done since then to detract from its creaky antiquity. The thinking in those days was only about a century removed from the period when writers, like actors, were viewed with vague suspicion as being eccentric at best, probably loose of morals, and potential trouble-makers, therefore only by condescension entitled to some semblance of civil rights. As for the product of their talents, entertaining as it might be, it was not to be considered as any more real and durable a property than the antics of a clown.
>
> America today is about the only country of any importance where a man's writings are not automatically his copyright simply because he wrote them, wherever he wrote them, whether published or not, or wherever published, without filing, fee-paying, or any superfluous formality.
>
> America is also about the only country of importance where a man's copyright in his own creation, no matter how formally protected, can expire before he does, if he starts young and survives to a reasonable old age, so that even in his own lifetime he can see his own work pass into what is delightfully called "the public domain", and be reprinted by anyone without fee or royalty, while he may be reduced to panhandling for a cup of coffee.

(For readers who may have had no reason to concern themselves with such matters, I should perhaps have explained that the present law in America grants copyright for 28 years from first publication, which is renewable by certain persons for a further 28 years, resulting in a maximum period of 56 years.)

These remarks were subsequently brought to the attention of Mr. Abraham L. Kaminstein, the Register of Copyrights, who informed me that since 1955 the Copyright Office had been engaged in a series of studies and legislative drafting directed towards a revision of the law, and who sent me his 1961 *Report on the General Revision of the US Copyright Law*, which contained detailed recommendations for a revised statute, on which he invited my comments. These, after studying this by no means light-weight volume, I eventually gave him—not too sympathetically, because the proposals, while they offered some improvements on the present situation, still evaded what in my opinion is the heart of the issue: why such an iniquitous concept as "the public domain" should be perpetuated at all.

Since then I have been on the mailing list for several pounds of further reports and supplementary reports, containing verbatim records of all the hearings and discussions which followed and led up to an actual copyright law revision bill which was introduced to both houses of Congress in 1964, followed by more hearings and discussions which resulted in the substitution of an amended bill in 1965, which is still in committee.

A leaflet accompanying the latest tome says that "Comments on the provisions of the bill may be sent to the chairmen of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees or to the Copyright Office." But this time they will have to get along without my advice, because in some 2000 closely printed pages of previous testimony my own earlier suggestions were apparently not found worthy of presentation, and I have better things to do with my time than to waste it where it will obviously do no good.

The reason why my observations would make no impression is easy to find. In all the verbiage which has been poured out on the subject, the "experts" seem to be devoted only to sorting out technical confusions in the ways in which words and music may be exploited by their merchandisers; the "interests" whose voices are heard are those of the exploiters, who are concerned only with what protection they can get for their physical product; the creators on whom they all depend for a living, the writers, artists, and com-

posers, and the spokesmen for their guilds and societies, are obsequiously scrounging for crumbs, obviously ready to roll over and squirm with gratitude for any little favor, just as obviously fawning and afraid to speak out for what should be their rights, for fear of offending someone and ending up with nothing. Seldom have I had to be nauseated by such an emetic display of craven spinelessness.

If ever there was a time for an organization of creative artists to call the basic swindle by its proper name, loud and clear, as I did, this was their opportunity. As one lone writer, I could be stuffed away in a file and conveniently forgotten: an organized choir of creators could not have been silenced so easily, and these hearings were a forum where they could not have been refused audience, and where these supposedly articulate people, if they had dared to say anything worth the breath, could have made headlines with it. Instead of which, I doubt if a single member of the general public was even reminded of their existence. And 95% of the same public is probably still unaware that this law is already in its 12th year of review.

Aside from all the complexities, reservations, and small print, the intrinsic worth of this proposed new law rests in one clause alone, and one only, which would increase the term of copyright to the life of the author plus 50 years. Since this is already the term in most other civilized countries, it represents no advance whatever, but is merely catching up with an already bad precedent. Because after that, the work would still fall into that "public domain", without paying a cent to the heirs or assigns of the creator.

The mealy-mouthed sanctimonious defense of this motion is that intellectual creations should be disseminated as freely as possible for the benefit of the community at large. But I have yet to hear that any publishers reduced the price of Sherlock Holmes books when they no longer had to pay royalties to the Conan Doyle estate, or that seats are cheaper in a theater offering Sir Lawrence Olivier in Shakespeare than in something modern.

I wonder how bland and "realistic" a landlord would be if it were proposed that his theater should be turned over to the State 50 years after his death, or a publisher if his plant and business and goodwill were destined to be arbitrarily confiscated from his heirs in a couple of generations?

The plain truth is that because copyright is an intangible thing, and therefore hard for the simple bricks-and-machinery millionaire to comprehend, it is regarded as of airy and probably ephemeral

value. Culture has only been with us long enough for some of us to realize that a poem could be more durable than any buggy-whip factory that was built in the same epoch. This political purblindness —eagerly encouraged by those who have the most to gain from it— is the reason why creative minds are as underprivileged today as any medieval serf. And they themselves, who are the first claimants to the gift of self-expression, have always been the most gutless mumblers when it came to asserting themselves in matters affecting their professional rights instead of individual kookie Causes.

Because a bad law is whiskered with ancient sanctions is no justification for prolonging it into an indefinite future. We have long since stopped hanging people for stealing—and, in some places, for much worse things. But even the world-leading United States is still bumbling with a law which gives some people a license to steal brains. This kind of progress I can do without.

As I write this, the American Press is rumbling with alarums about the threat of inflation, and echoing alleged "fears" of the Administration that it may be necessary to raise taxes in order to head it off.

I can understand part of this governmental dilemma. This being an election year in the United States, a bigger tax bill is not exactly the love potion which any politician dreams of bringing to the voters. On the other hand, taxes are the fertilizer of the politician's garden, for without millions to scatter on his pet projects in magnificent largesse he would be just another poor scrabbling shmoe like the rest of us. It is only in politics that a man who couldn't run a successful haberdashery can get to bandy figures which would make J. Paul Getty turn pale.

I can even understand why politicians, who usually go to the polls with great promises of prosperity if their policies are adopted, might view prosperity with alarm if it does come, because this could find them running short of problems to propose remedies for, and a country without problems could get along with a mere skeleton force of government bureaus and politicians.

What does mystify my simple mind is the logic by which increased taxes are assumed to be the remedy for a rising cost of

living: in other words, if steak is getting too expensive, you should take more money away from the people in taxes, so that they find it even harder to afford steak. Or, to put it another way, you charge the butcher more taxes, so he has to raise the price of steak again in order to pay his taxes and still have enough left to buy potatoes, which the produce dealers are charging more for in order to pay their taxes and still have enough left to buy beer, which the brewers have to charge more for in order to pay their taxes and still have enough left to buy a steak. This is known as the inflationary spiral; but the part which nobody explains is why rising taxes are miraculously exempt from the charge of contributing to it.

The most sinister feature I detect in this ploy is the pre-emptive assumption that taxes will have to be raised as if that were an axiom known to everyone except congenital idiots, so that any discussion of the principle can be dispensed with and the debate need only concentrate on the questions of how soon and how much. It is the same technique as assuming that it is proper and desirable for a creative artist's rights to be eventually confiscated by the community, leaving the only discussion to revolve around the question of how soon that should be. It is exactly the same trick as was used to foist the Marshall Plan on a bemused public: the assumption was made that a rich nation was obligated to scatter its wealth broadcast among the poorer nations, with no strings attached, and suddenly the monster of Foreign Aid was alive and breathing and full-grown in our midst, as if it had been there from the beginning of history, and nobody was allowed to stop and ask how it got there or what proof there was of our need to nourish it. The campaign took off from the presupposition that we had got to hand out, and the only points to settle were how big the dole should be and who should get it.

I feel especially bitter about this because of having just paid a tax bill which I thought was quite big enough already. I think a creative artist has more reason than anyone else to be bitter about taxation, because no other vocation is discriminated against in the same way as his: he needs all the money he can save, to put into other investments, if he would like to leave an estate to his grandchildren and their children, since his own natural income property will be snatched away by a timed grab that will start ticking at the moment he dies.

As I wrote in my next Introduction after the one I first quoted:

> Unlike the farmer, no writer is guaranteed any minimum

price for his product, nor does any Department of Culture buy up all the words he is unable to sell in the open market and store them in vast tax-subsidized libraries, nor does the Government try to stave off a glut of literature by offering to pay writers not to write so much. Unlike the owner of an oil well, who is permitted to deduct a "depletion allowance" from his taxable profits, on the theory that the biggest gusher must eventually run dry, no writer is allowed any deduction for the exhaustion of his mental resources, on the assumption that everyone should have an endless supply of new ideas.

If this assumption is correct, then any writer should be allowed to earn, up to any age, more than the miserable maximum which would disqualify him from drawing his old age pension; yet he is forced to pay the same contribution to this fund as anyone else, though he has less chance than anyone of ever getting any of it back.

An inventor who sells a patent outright is allowed the tax advantage of treating the sale as a capital gain: but a writer who sells his movie rights, television rights, or even an entire copyright, is taxed on the proceeds as simple income. A publisher, producer, or speculator who buys these rights can thereafter treat them and trade in them as property, and make capital gains from them; but the creator of the property is specially and specifically excluded from this privilege.

These complaints are as valid today as they were when I wrote them more than six years ago, and no one has yet proposed to do anything about them. Which is why I thought it was about time to repeat them.

They were even more poignantly recalled to me when I remembered that both President Kennedy and President Johnson have been credited with making public noises about a need for some federal encouragement for the Arts. I can visualize what form that would take: another Bureau, with a politically appointed boss at a salary which a majority of working artists would envy, a top echelon of aides at only slightly smaller emoluments, and hundreds growing to thousands of other civil service employees for filing, computerizing, analyzing, and reporting, the whole project costing multiple millions in overhead before even a few psychodelic boondoggles trickled through to the waiting artists.

I can tell any President or politician (who will never get re-elected on this platform) how to give encouragement to the Arts, if

he really honestly wants to. Just make all sales, royalties, or payment for performing rights in any literary, artistic, or musical property, only if paid to the author of that property, completely exempt from income tax.

The loss to the Internal Revenue would, I am certain, be less than the cost of a Department of Culture, and the benefits would go directly and immediately to the working artists. And I guarantee that this would encourage them like an overdose of adrenalin.

Of course I am under no delusion that any politician who is even forced to read this would do anything but shrug it off with a benign and patronizing smile as either "humorous" or "utopian". This is the time-tested fail-safe statesmanlike technique for disposing of inconvenient ideas which actually make sense, when there are no built-in votes or perquisites in them.

Since I seem to have become so involved with politicians this month, I might as well keep on and give them the rest of this department.

It seemed to me a long time ago that there was a basic weakness in an electoral system which forced one candidate to pitch his personality against another's, on a purely oratorical basis, so that the impressive-looking fellow with the glib tongue would have it all over on a homely genius with an impediment in his speech who might nevertheless be the most intellectually qualified to guide and govern. This premium on the superficial talents of the snake-oil merchant multiplied by the hundred thousand by the advent of television, which projected a candidate's showing at the hustings into every home in the land, requiring primarily that he should be able to look and talk like a potential movie star, regardless of what he had to say.

However, since there were still newspapers and speeches had to be available for quotation, American efficiency was led to discover that there were needy and unambitious professional writers around who could turn a much better phrase than most aspirants to office, even if they themselves had no personal ability or desire to declaim it, so that by the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt the hired speech-writer was an established institution, from whom even the polite veil of anonymity was gradually removed, until in later ad-

ministrations certain practitioners of the art and even their assistants acquired wide renown as the authors of presidential utterances.

I do not know to what extent this development may have spread to Britain, where it is at any rate not yet generally admitted. I am sure that Winston Churchill would never have needed nor permitted anyone to write his speeches, but it will surely not be long before the system appeals to one of his successors, if it has not done so already.

I therefore propose that in order to prevent deception of the electorate, candidates for public office should be required by law to announce their appearances something like this:

Hear

WILLIAM Q. WINDBAG

in a speech on

"The Need for Socialized Medicine on the Moon"

by

GEORGE G. GHOST

Even better (and automatically to be dismissed as even funnier and more utopian) would be:

Vote for

GEORGE G. GHOST

(speeches read by William Q. Windbag)

Well, I can dream, can't I?

seven of intrex

by Michael Avallone

As HEAD of the Manhattan Division of International Trade Experts, Miss Samantha Follet was no alarmist. She was not a woman to reach for or push all sorts of panic buttons. In the vast honeycomb of elevators, offices and departments which made up the unique organization known as *Intrex,* there were a thousand buttons at her disposal.

Five of these were immediately available in Miss Follet's private office. One orange, one red, one gold, one blue, one yellow. An orderly row of enamel communicators, at her polished fingertips, which could send an agent winging off to Tibet or order a cup of bouillion from the commissary. Only Miss Follet herself could say which color button could perform which magic.

Miss Follet felt like pushing a button now. She was thirty-seven, as beautiful as a movie star and as highly-polished as a model from the pages of *Vogue,* but she was also a woman responsible for the safety and well-being of more than twenty-five

As we said last month, "the little foxes" had not escaped from a Walt Disney movie! Far from it! They were a freelance spy outfit — selling their information to the highest bidder — and right now they were a menace to International Trade Experts! Michael Avallone, author of the best-selling THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. and of the Ed Noon novels, tells the first story in a new series about the formidable Mr. David Seven ....

men. Impatiently, she thumbed the blue button on her desk.

There was a metallic lisp of sound and a smooth, unhurried female voice spoke with all the clarity of nearness and presence though no one stood in the office that overlooked the Queens shoreline from the East Twenties of Manhattan.

"Personnel. Yes, Miss Follet?"

"Has Seven reported in yet?"

"No, Miss Follet. The Prime Minister's plane is scheduled for take-off within five minutes. Mr. Seven is not expected back at Headquarters until one thirty at the earliest."

"Yes, we were to provide security for the Prime Minister's departure from the country. Can you contact Seven?"

"Yes. He is equipped with the homing range finder in the event of unforeseen mishaps at the airport."

"Good." Miss Follet's intelligent eyes narrowed. "Instruct him to stop by Mr. Farmer's flat to pick him up. Our Indian friend is overdue for his briefing session. He should have been here an hour ago and all attempts to reach him have failed. Clear?"

"Yes, Miss Follet. Is that all?"

"Yes, thank you."

She thumbed the blue button again and relaxed. The smooth sheen of her face lost the furrows of worry. She could never eradicate a certain sense of guilt if ever she failed to deliver to any agent or officer of *Intrex*, the maximum security potential of her office. Plus which she bore an inescapable fondness for her two favorite agents, David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer. Love had nothing to do with it. Miss Follet had buried her dream of love forever when the Communists had killed her husband and daughter in the Tomsk purge of '59.

She selected a gold-plated cigarette case from the center drawer of her desk. She placed one between her lips and stared at her fingertips. Her brows were knit in a scowl.

It wasn't like Miles Running Bear Farmer to be late for any Headquarters matter.

Not like him at all.

David Seven watched the Boeing 707 thrum powerfully along Runway 14 and decided to have a cigarette. He reached into his inner pocket, producing a square, gold mesh holder and thumbed the lid. He spoke softly into the pack. All about him, a host of friends, relatives and well-wishers thronged the heavy gauge wire bordering the concrete runways of Kennedy Airport. The 707, tail up, jets thrusting, was soaring into the blue sky above the field. Reporters, television camera trucks and policemen

were creating a mob scene.

"Our English friend is off and running into the wild blue yonder," Seven said, holding the cigarette pack as a man might to check his supply of smokes. The pack was in reality the zenith in two-way radio technology.

"Good," the radio answered back. "You are to return to Headquarters. Pick up Mr. Farmer. Miss Follet says he is long overdue. See about it."

"And Farmer was late, huh? Will do. Perhaps he had a charming lady friend stay over."

"Perhaps. Will you attend to this at once?"

"Roger."

He pocketed the cigarette radio pack and headed toward the turmoil surrounding the Administration Building. He had been surprised when Farmer had not been drafted along with himself to provide safe escort for the Prime Minister of England. It had developed that nothing had deterred the most important man in the United Kingdom. All fears for his safety in America had been groundless. The CIA agents on the plane could carry the ball now. Seven turned once more, to watch the Boeing jet thunder across the field. Mission accomplished.

He headed quickly for the terminal and taxi gate. His tall, lithe figure, executive grey flannels and easy grace, marked him for the rising-young-man brigade. In actuality, he was one of the finest legal minds in the world. In truth, he was the chief exterminator for the organization known as *Intrex*.

He found a yellow and blue taxicab waiting and gave the driver the address of Miles Running Bear Farmer's apartment. He tried not to worry. But that too—like killing—was an occupational hazard.

The door to Farmer's flat was unlocked.

Seven kicked the door in gently, body to one side of the barrier. Light spilled from the room but there was no answering burst of gunfire. He eased himself inside, with a deft plunge to the floor, his right arm raised, hand pointed to the interior. All he had to do was make a fist and the hidden automatic strapped to his forearm would go off. The reflex of tendons and muscles would trip the trigger, wired to the signet ring on his pinky finger.

Something was radically wrong. Farmer's modest apartment of sitting room, bedroom and tiny kitchenette, was as empty as a ballpark in winter. But all the lights were on. The butterfly chair near the imitation fireplace was over-turned, as if it had been knocked over in a struggle.

Seven stiffened, his senses alert. His mild brown eyes raced around the rooms.

There was a small white square of writing paper propped on the hearth, in plain sight, where it couldn't be missed by anyone entering the room.

Seven scooped it up, rapidly.

The writing on the paper was brief and very much to the point:

FARMER'S IN OUR DELL. YOU GET HIM BACK WHEN YOU SEND COMPLETE REPORT ON PRIME MINISTER'S CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT AS OF MARCH 19th. LEAVE REPORT IN LOCKER 75, PENNSYLVANIA STATION BEFORE MIDNIGHT.

THE LITTLE FOXES

"So they got Farmer," Miss Follet said.

David Seven nodded forlornly, his eyes riveted on the smooth chrome model of a woman behind *Intrex's* top desk.

"It would seem so," he agreed. "Now, how do we get him back and why did they pick him up? I thought I was the only one to see Lord Bowler-Hat off."

Miss Follet allowed herself to glare at him stonily.

"Farmer was covering you. It wasn't necessary for you to know. This is typical of The Little Foxes. We were so concerned with the Prime Minister that we neglected our own backyard. So now they have one of our best men and they intend to use him as a wedge for what they want. After all, the Prime Minister is not so important as his *report.* In a manner of speaking."

Seven, who had never permitted himself to indulge in fantasies involving the unattainable Miss Follet, laughed harshly.

"Do we know what that report is?"

"Yes, we do. I have a copy of it in my files. The Man sent it on, wanting to keep us posted. But naturally it will stay in my files. I have no intention of bargaining with The Little Foxes."

"So what's our next move?"

Her eyes sharpened. "You will rescue Farmer, of course. That I leave to your own particular abilities."

Seven nodded, thinking fast, his mind on a thousand possibilities. "This report have anything to do with Project Crosshair?"

"Of course. You know how Great Britain and this country are trying to consolidate their atomic energy resources. Do you wonder that the Foxes want that report? They could sell it for millions on the open market—and as you know, there would be more than one buyer."

"The world we live in." Seven shifted. The Little Foxes, a nameless faceless group of agents

whose sole *raison d'être* was being the middlemen in the cold wars. Pitting one country ahead of another merely by selling priceless information to the nation that paid the most. The United States had never bargained with them but—they had never been able to put them out of business either.

Miss Follet's extremely out-of-place face, shining beautifully immaculate from the environs of the glass top desk, was bleak. Her crisp voice, however, had lost none of its down-to-brass-tacks ice pack quality.

"Mr. Seven, I suggest you get moving."

David Seven shrugged. "Pennsylvania Station?"

"Pennsylvania Station. Set it up anyway you can. Keep in touch. But get Farmer out of it. If you need help, take whom you want out of the Personnel Pool. I wish I could make this an all-out effort but we can't afford it." She eyed him closely. "Agents are expendable. Rules of the game. But I shouldn't have to tell you that."

He stood up and smiled. "No, you shouldn't. But you did anyway. However, I feel we owe a great deal to the American Indian, don't you?"

Miss Follet allowed herself to wince.

"In that case, you won't mind playing The Lone Ranger, will you?"

He relaxed. He had that coming. He knew better than anyone else how Miss Follet felt about losing highly-trained, top agents like Miles Running Bear Farmer.

"Sorry. I'll report in as soon as possible." Long, easy strides took him to the door of Miss Follet's stronghold. He activated the third button of his Ivy League coat jacket and a steel door slid smoothly open. The dark corridor beyond glowed with a faint luminous light. "Shouldn't take too long to see what the score is."

"Mr. Seven."

"Yes, Miss Follet?"

"If you have need to call me directly, today's code word is *xylophone*. Anyone could imitate your voice on a phone and fool me."

"Zactly," he said. "Be talking to you."

The steel door slid shut. He made his way down the dim corridor, found the steel cage that shuttled him to the ground floor of the International Trade Experts front offices. When he emerged into the bright, fluorescent lighted universe of filing cabinets, grey desks and busy secretaries, he walked quickly to the reception room.

From her typewriter, electrically humming and swift, Cathy Darrow looked up. Violet eyes, auburn hair and matchless smile

warmed him. The slender fingers paused.

"David, your brief is ready on the Wilstach Foundation matter."

"File them until tomorrow morning, Cathy. I'll be on the street all day." He lit a cigarette and sat on one corner of her desk. "Have to track down some witnesses."

"Any chance for dinner?"

"Better not count on it. Give me a raincheck."

For Cathy Darrow, David Seven was a bright young man whose legal reputation should have made him a much older man. Cathy didn't know that she was working for *Intrex*. She merely thought she had one of the best secretarial jobs in town. To protect her, David Seven had never told her otherwise. It was always better to leave the beautiful things to smell the flowers.

"David," she murmured. "Why don't you marry me and take me away from all this?"

He tried to smile, his mind still full of Miles Farmer and his troubles. "And ruin a perfect relationship? No dice. See you later and don't pick up any stray cats."

With that, he was gone. Cathy Darrow stared after him and sighed. Whatever it took to make a girl like her breathe hard, David Seven had it in spades. . . .

At ten o'clock that evening, a tall man in a tweed coat and snap-brim fedora, paused before Locker 75 in Pennsylvania Station. He placed a coin in the slot, turned the key. After that, he inserted a thick, 8X10 manila envelope, sealed and closed with red wax, in the compartment. Following that, the tall man wiped his hands, as though closing a matter to his satisfaction and departed.

He did not wait around for twelve o'clock midnight. He took the nearest stairway ramp to the street level, left the terminal and climbed into a '65 Buick on East 33rd Street. There, he lit a cigarette and waited. He did one more thing before he settled back to enjoy his smoke. The glove compartment of the vehicle was a cleverly-fashioned radar-type board. The man adjusted the button on the hinged door. He sat back and relaxed. The street was fairly deserted, thanks to the lateness of the hour. Eighth Avenue winked with lights of passing taxis and cars.

The man waited an hour.

Suddenly, a *beeping* sound filled the interior of the car. A curious whistle of noise, electronically gaited, to pop at intermittent levels. The man's attention went to the glove compartment. He turned the door down. In the darkness of the car, the back of the door glowed luminously, revealing a lighted map of the city of New York. A red dot

of light on the map was blinking steadily. It began to rove off its position. Slowly and surely. The man gunned the motor of the Buick. He waited two minutes more before he set the car in motion, moving toward the West End Highway. The red light on the door map *beeped* steadily.

For the next quarter of an hour, the Buick joined the stream of fast running cars on the highway, nosing towards the George Washington Bridge. The interior of the car was alive with the *beep-beep* of the lighted map. The red dot moved slowly but firmly North on the board.

David Seven kept his eyes alert.

He didn't expect the Little Foxes to be firsts of May in the espionage department. The entire surface of the manila envelope he had placed in Locker 75 was coated with the Lab's newest technological wonder. A powdered, invisible, undetectable layer of granulated P119 which served as a 'homing' device, triangulated by the board on the back of the glove compartment door. Range up to fifty miles. Whoever had picked up the manila envelope was taking it back to the folks who wanted it so badly. Seven had known how foolish it would have been to wait around in person to follow the man. He would have been spotted in an instant. The envelope contained twenty thin sheets of onionskin, typed in an easy code that any spy worth his training could crack within an hour. An hour was all Seven needed. Just to find out where Miles Farmer was. To hell with the Little Foxes.

Grimly, he wondered if they would be interested in the first ten stanzas of Kipling's *Gunga Din*. When the typewritten sheets were decoded, that's what they would come up with.

Meanwhile, he weaved through the darkened stretches of the West End Highway, heading for the Bronx, knowing that the car that was guiding him via the specially-prepared manila envelope, seemed to be running for the Bronx.

It had to be. For the red light, still blinking, right-angled from the George Washington Bridge, seeking the Cross Bronx Expressway.

Seven lit a cigarette, and thumbed the cigarette pack radio in his pocket.

"Personnel here?" The voice was female, as always.

"Seven. Miss Follet, please."

A tick of time and her cool, clear voice answered.

"We have you zeroed in. What's the good word?"

"Xylophone."

"Good enough. Progress?"

"Just keeping the lines up. Still moving East from Manhattan.

Any more developments or messages?"

"None. Obviously our foxy friends are satisfied so far. I've alerted some nearby friends of ours. Call in if you need help."

"Will do. Out."

He bit down on the cigarette end and peered into the night. From far off, the lights of the bridge connecting Manhattan and the Bronx twinkled in the darkness.

The red light on the board *beeped* interminably.

Miles Running Bear Farmer surveyed his close surroundings with acute disagreement. The damp stone walls of a basement and an out-of-use boiler and furnace chilled him. Moss and ancient lichen creeped down the walls. Scattered refuse and scraps of newspaper that might have been read twenty years before lay across the dirty stone floor. The hurricane lamp set some fifty feet from his chair glowed fitfully from the far end of the room. Miles Running Bear had made only one calculation when his head had cleared and the powers to reason had returned to him. A basement so large was no mere foundation of an apartment house. He was obviously in the basement of a factory of some kind.

He tested the thick ropes girdling his ankles and wrists. The plain metal chair he was lashed to was light enough but he couldn't even have hobbled around the room with it strapped to his body. He cleared his mind and wondered what was up. He kicked himself mentally for answering the door of his apartment for a Western Union telegram. He'd got the message all right. The kid in the uniform standing in the door had squirted a flow of gas from the mechanical pencil he was handing over for Farmer to sign the form with. But why had he been snatched? The only thing he'd been working on was the Prime Minister deal and old Bowler Hat had gotten safely off as far as he knew. Dave was on that, too. Dave. Miles Running Bear winced. For all his college education and eminent degrees and his habitual stoicness of manner, in private he was wont to let himself go. He did now. He hated to be a dummy where David Seven was concerned. "Great heavens," Dave would have said. "Falling for that old chestnut. A fake telegram? What were you thinking of, Chief?"

Miles Running Bear Farmer said aloud to the dimness, the stone walls and any mice that might have been listening. *"How?"*

Footsteps thudded from above. Farmer tensed in his chair. Heavy heels clattered on ancient floorboards. A door slammed and the

steps were coming down the short bridge of stairing into the basement. He slumped his head forward, pretending unconsciousness. He could hear the footfalls draw near. Leather made raspy, slithering noises on the damp stones.

"Wake him up," a thin, Continental-accented voice said.

Miles Running Bear Farmer howled in pain. Someone had thrust a sharp object into his forearm. Something like a hatpin. He batted his eyes, to keep the tears back.

"That's better, Tonto," another voice said. Thick, gruff, American. "He'll talk now, Mr. Axel."

"No names please," Farmer gritted. In the light form the hurricane lamp, he saw a short, stocky man and a massive gorilla of a human being standing before him. The short man was bereted and wore a beaver-collar coat but there was nothing funny about him. His face was round and as smooth as dead marble. The eyes shone like stiffened prunes.

"I am Mr. Axel, Mr. Farmer. This is Indigo. Look at him closely. He is the cruellest man you will ever meet."

Farmer looked, and Mr. Axel was no exaggerator. Indigo was all mindless muscle, some two hundred and fifty pounds of coarse animalism, dressed in ill-fitting seersucker suit. His head was a nub of flesh, the face all formless and without pity.

"I see him," Farmer said. "What can I do for you, Mr. Axel?"

Axel smiled. "You have already done it. Thanks to you, we will place our hands on what we want. You will live only long enough to certify that your friends have delivered the goods. But there are exceptions to what I say."

"I'm listening." Indigo glowered down at him, Brutal and impatient. Farmer kept his face blank.

"You have to be killed, Mr. Farmer. All I offer you is alternatives. A quick bullet or possibly I'll let you eat your L pill which I'm sure you American agents carry. If you do not go along with what I ask, you will die horribly.We have pliers to remove your nails one by one. A blowtorch to make a lingering death. Icepicks to poke out your eyes. But why go on? I will not regale you with Indigo's skills as executioner."

"Go on."

"I see you are an agreeable man." Mr. Axel put tiny hands together. Pudgy little fingers contrasting with his portliness of build. His voice took on renewed hope. "You seem to represent some powerful organization here in New York. We do not know exactly what that is but to avoid future headaches in our line of—

ah, endeavor—I should like to know more about your employers. I don't think you are what is loosely termed a government man but you are something and somebody. I want to know what. Tell me and you'll die decently. Don't and—" Mr. Axel shrugged expressively. Indigo fumed silently, knotting and unknotting his powerful hands.

Miles Farmer did not panic. He kept his head and his voice in control.

"How did you latch on to me, Mr. Axel?"

Axel laughed. A tittering laugh that ran around the stone walls like a girl's giggle. "The Little Foxes know much. Therefore, we learn what we must. It came to our attention that a man such as yourself — ostensibly, a famous architect, was paying rather a good deal of attention to the movements and activities of the British Prime Minister. We took our chances and left a message for your friends. As it develops, we were right. I have had word that a parcel was left for us. My man is bringing it now which is the first reason why you are still alive. So you see, we were correct. You have friends in America, Mr. Farmer. I see you are a full-blooded Indian. Cherokee Tribe, I believe. Now, I must know who your friends are. I waste no time with you. Two minutes are all you have to decide. Indigo," he said softly.

The blow when it came was a blasting, savage, slashing punch into the right deltoid of Miles Farmer's shoulder. Aching, thundering agony stiffened like a blazing poker. Farmer groaned and fell against the chair.

"You see?" Mr. Axel said drily. "Why die in degrees? Talk and I assure you a comfortable death."

"Little foxes . . ." Farmer managed a brave laugh. "Dirty little foxes—" His eyes filled with water, in spite of himself.

Mr. Axel checked a forward angry lunge of Indigo.

"Never mind. Reflex action will trigger such remarks. It's only human. Well, Mr. Farmer? What will it be?"

"I'll talk," Miles Farmer whimpered. "Just let me get my breath back. I didn't know we were going up against the Little Foxes."

Mr. Axel beamed. "Bravo. You are sensible. That is good."

Miles Farmer strained against his bonds.

"Can't you untie my feet at least—the circulation is almost gone—I can hardly think straight —"

"Why not? Indigo. Unlash Mr. Farmer's feet. Only his feet."

As Indigo growled and bent to the task, Mr. Axel smiled down at Farmer.

"So. We Little Foxes have a reputation even here in the Unit-

ed States? I expected as much. We have accomplished a great deal in five short years. And when we decide to cast our lot on the obvious winning side—" He was going on and on in that Today-Europe-Tomorrow-The-World vein as Indigo bent at Farmer's ankles. The lashings came away, stout India twine, and Indigo stepped back out of range.

Miles Farmer was very happy about that. He stretched his legs and allowed the blood to flow merrily back into their cramped regions. Mr. Axel stared back at him, mildly. Waiting for what he wanted to hear.

"Well, Mr. Farmer? Begin somewhere please."

"Okay," Miles Running Bear Farmer said, his eyes roving from Mr. Axel to Indigo. He brought his legs together, stretched them again. Indigo watched him warily, growling in his throat.

At that, Miles Farmer put his heels together with a lightning-swift movement, leveling his closed legs at the huge gorilla standing some five feet off.

There was a bursting explosion of noise and a puff of smoke. The noise volleyed like thunder in the low confines of the basement. Mr. Axel jumped like a startled rabbit when a car's headlights outlines it in a sudden glare.

A miraculous thing occurred.

A small round hole blossomed in Indigo's formless face. He cried out in wonder and pain. The hole flowed and Indigo's features vanished in a blur of crimson. He fell backward, crashing to the floor.

Miles Farmer swiveled desperately in the iron chair, trying to aim his legs at the portly and round Mr. Axel. Mr. Axel finally got the idea. He skipped nimbly around the chair, dug into the folds of his beaver-collared coat and produced a Luger.

He whacked Miles Farmer soundly over the head with this, butt first. He hit him twice. The bound man sagged, head falling forward on his chest, limp as a wash rag in the chair. Mr. Axel took a deep breath, muttering as his eyes saw that Indigo had been shot close-range in the face. An amazing shot.

"So," Mr. Axel cursed a foreign oath. "Tricks. Always tricks. Now you shall see what the Little Foxes can do, my dear Mr. Farmer."

He slapped Miles Running Bear Farmer twice in the face, his prune-like eyes shining.

The Intrex man felt nothing.

Mr. Axel went upstairs.

He navigated several stairways in the gloom, without using a light. Within minutes, he had gained a square, box-like room with but one window showing.

There was a wooden deal table and two camp chairs in the room. On the dim window sill, a Tensor lamp was pointed back toward the room, illuminating the table. The strong light bathed a squat mass of knobs and dials and antenna. A short-wave radio set.

Mr. Axel drew a chair toward the set and made himself comfortable. He did not remove his beret or coat.

A red and green light flashed on the set. Mr. Axel picked up a set of earphones coiled on the table.

"We've been waiting for your report, Mr. Axel." A nasal voice sounded fuzzily in the stillness of the room.

"Give me one more hour," Mr. Axel said. "My man has not come yet."

"Is there anything wrong?" The voice was suspicious.

"Negative. I will wind up matters here in exactly one hour. You will have the copy of the required report. Never fear. I know my job."

Electricity hummed. The voice crackled now.

"No one is indispensable to the Little Foxes, my dear Axel. Remember that, should you find it necessary to make up alibis for your failure."

"You have no right to talk to me that way, Reynard. I am loyal." Mr. Axel was beginning to sweat.

The voice laughed, rich with sarcasm and power.

"Yes? One hour, then. I shall expect to hear from you then." The set went silent. The red and green light winked out. Mr. Axel removed the head-set from his ears. He was sucking in his breath, as though he found it difficult to breath properly.

He tugged back his sleeve, revealing a platinum watch with small, precise numbers on its dial face. It was twenty minutes to midnight.

The call from Reynard had unsettled him. It was bad enough losing a helpmate like Indigo to a stupid 'heel' gun wielded by the captured agent in the basement. But one did not fail Reynard. The head Fox of the Little Foxes did not tolerate failure. He suffered stupidity even less. He would not like losing Indigo.

Muffled steps sounded on the stairs behind the door. Mr. Axel tensed, drawing his Luger. He remained where he was in the chair, training it on the door he had come through. The steps drew closer, accompanied by a low whistle of sound. The whistle was a tuneful rendition of *The Volga Boatman.* Mr. Axel relaxed. The simple code was foolproof. It could be no one but Stargill, the man he had sent to Pennsylvania Station.

The newcomer knocked on the door. Three light taps, one loud.

More codes and signals. Mr. Alex had often regretted the necessity for such games. But it was a life and death game, at that.

"Come in, Stargill."

A tall man entered quickly. His lean body was swathed in a trenchcoat. A bulky manila envelope was tucked under one arm. Stargill's face showed a peaked nose, cold eyes and a slash of a mouth. Once again, Mr. Axel marveled that a boy of twenty-five could look so old. But all of his attention was hastily focussed on the manila envelope.

"Were you followed?" Mr. Axel barked.

"No," Stargill said in a light mild voice. "I changed direction as much as possible en route. The last few miles to this place are wide open. No one could have followed me without my seeing them."

"And the envelope—" Mr. Axel had already taken it from Stargill's hands.

"In Locker 75, as scheduled. Not a hitch. There wasn't anyone near the lockers. I didn't stop to check it out. You know more about what it is, than I do."

"Capital. You did well, Stargill. Bring over that other chair. If this is what we want, it calls for a celebration. I've a splendid bottle of *Courvoisier* in my bags."

"Brandy?" Stargill made a face though he was smiling. "Count me out. I'll celebrate with hard cash, if you don't mind."

"As you will." Mr. Axel worked off the seals and clasps of the envelope and spread the sheaf of onionskin sheets on the deal table. He had turned the chair so that the Tensor lamp flooded the area of the table. He winced. "Code. Damn code. Well, I suppose it's their way. Still, I wish —" He shrugged. "This may take more than an hour to break."

Stargill leaned back in his chair.

"How're things in the basement?"

"Well enough. Let me get on with this, first. I have had a call from Reynard and he isn't exactly happy about the delay."

"Reynard," Stargill murmured. "Mr. X. Wonder who he really is?"

Mr. Axel shuddered. The dampness on his forehead had not evaporated. "I don't ever want to know," he muttered feelingly. He bent his face toward the typewritten symbols on the top sheet, trying to concentrate.

Stargill took out a cigarette and lit it from a small cigarette lighter. He watched Mr. Axel, his eyes thoughtful. You could always get a rise out of Axel just by mentioning the head Fox.

Neither Stargill or Mr. Axel saw the door behind them ease inward. Nor did they see the small white marble capsule suddenly

drop to the floor of the room. At the last moment, Mr. Axel looked up, a frown of annoyance on his face. "Unless I'm mistaken this is a fake. It's an ordinary—" His eyes widened. To the left of Stargill's camp chair, he could see the small white marble on the floor of the room. It was emitting a curious wisp of smoke, white and milky in texture, rising in a swirling eddy to the heart of the room.

It was then that he saw David Seven standing in the doorway of the room. Seven had no weapon but his right hand was cocked as though it was a gun. Mr. Axel cursed and clawed for his Luger which he had left on the table. Stargill, not knowing what was happening, tried to climb out of his chair.

Mr. Axel never reached the Luger. Suddenly, his eyes rolled and he took the floor in a dead swoon, the beret still clinging to his head. Stargill whirled, bringing up a .38.

Seven shot forward, his left hand cutting in a vicious swipe toward Stargill's stomach. Stargill gasped. The white, milky vapors, now hissing like steam from the ball on the floor, penetrated his lungs. His eyes rolled too and the .38 dropped from his senseless fingers. He slid to the floor in a dead heap.

David Seven, still holding his breath, turned on his heel and closed the door on the sleeping men. It was high time he found out exactly what had happened to Miles Farmer.

Running Bear had to be holed up somewhere in this abandoned factory in Pelham Bay.

He found the basement, located Miles Running Bear Farmer still lashed to the metal chair. Miles needed first aid. His scalp was bleeding badly. Seven put aside his normal feelings of fondness for his Indian crony and set busily to work. He broke a capsule of special concentrate which he held in close to Miles' nose. The stuff worked fast. It could bring a stone idol out of eternal rest. Miles coughed and sputtered but he woke up.

"Steady, Big Fellow," Seven said lightly. "It's old Daddy Warbucks come to rescue the poor orphan. Don't talk just yet. You need mending."

As his fingers probed the ugly wounds, applying sulpha powder and a swab of bandage, he checked the cellar. He wasn't surprised to see Indigo's large corpse sprawled on the basement floor. Nothing that Miles Farmer accomplished ever surprised him. In the blood of Farmer flowed the savagery and skill of the red man on the warpath. Miles had a college education and yards of technical degrees but he could scalp with the best of them.

"Okay, now?"

"Mmm."

"How's the head?"

"Still on, thank you. You see the Beret?"

"Upstairs. Sleeping it off with the guy I followed here. Made a drop in a locker in Penn Station and followed them here."

"What's the scoop?"

David Seven outlined it for him as he helped him up the narrow basement steps. In the gloom, it was tough going. Seven needed his pencil flash. Farmer was coming around, quickly. Another of his main assets was quick recovery and readiness to get back into the thick of things.

"Dave?"

"I didn't go anyplace."

"This is a Little Foxes bit. They mean to sell that Prime Minister stuff to the highest bidder."

"They've got nothing to sell now. We'll take your playmate and his helper back to Headquarters and do a little negotiating on our own. If he's a big fox, they might want him back."

"Don't think it will work. The Foxes aren't famous for caring. And everyone is expendable. They kill all their losers."

"Worth trying though. Come on. I give them about ten more minutes and that gas will wear off."

Back in the square, box of a room, Mr. Axel and Stargill were still sleeping it off. Their crumpled bodies were peaceful on the wooden floor. Miles Running Bear Farmer checked the Tensor lamp as David Seven studied the short-wave radio set.

"Mr. Axel has a pipe-line to his bosses. That's interesting."

Farmer nodded. "He kept leaving me every ten minutes to come up here. Figured he was reporting in to somebody."

Seven frowned. "Hope they don't have a system whereby if he doesn't call in, they'll know something is wrong."

"Too risky," Farmer disagreed. "Every hour maybe but not that close on the time. Too many things could come up. Like having to go to the little boy's room."

Seven smiled. "Well, in that case, we'll let them call us."

"How about Sam?"

"Ooops. You're right. ***Her*** I owe a call." Seven dug out his two-way radio cigarette pack and *beeped* it on. Miss Samantha Follet was many things to many people but she would never know that she was *Sam* to David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer.

The woman never slept. She was still at her fancy desk at the International Trade Experts. Farmer was examining Stargill's pockets.

"Go on, Mr. Seven."

"Farmer is still in their dell but he's okay now. We rounded up a man called Axel and a

stooge named Stargill, according to his cards. There's a short-wave here, too. Any suggestions?"

"Axel and Stargill. I'll process that through Personnel. Yes. Wait one half an hour. If nothing develops, destroy the set and come on in with your catches. If anything is learned about Axel and Stargill that may help you, I'll call back."

"Wilco. Out."

Seven put the cigarette pack away. Farmer was busy watching the sleeping beauties. Mr. Axel was beginning to groan like a frightened child. Stargill's breathing was becoming noticeably louder.

"What did Sam have to say?"

"Kill the set. Take these two back to town. But she gave us a half-hour to think about it."

"Suppose we get a call on the short-wave dingus here?"

"That one we will play by ear. We've bolixed their plans to find out what old Bowler Hat said to the President but they must have some alternate ideas."

It was a sobering thought. Organizations like the Little Foxes, had a thousand arms and legs and much more than one head. What would they have decided to do if Mr. Axel muffed his assignment, as he had so conclusively?

Mr. Axel and Stargill came awake, about one minute apart. The portly little man in the foolish beret sat up on the floor. When he saw Seven and Farmer, he raised his arms, the pudgy hands spread to the ceiling. Stargill rose to his feet, swaying and glaring.

Miles Running Bear Farmer laughed, training Mr. Axel's Luger on Stargill's lean, trench-coated figure. "The little guy's manners are better than yours. Over against the wall and stay there." Stargill muttered something but did as he was told. Mr. Axel, still sitting, roved his eyes from Seven to Farmer in rapid, frightened glances.

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

"Take you for a ride," Seven laughed. He indicated the short-wave set. "How we treat you depends on co-operation. Is there anything about that radio we should know that will ensure your good health?"

"I—I don't know what you mean—"

Seven sighed. "Are you supposed to call back? Are they supposed to call you—"

"Oh—I see—yes. I was to report within the hour when I received the report from Stargill."

"How long ago was that?"

"I—" They could see Mr. Axel trying to think straight. "Ah—by twenty minutes of one they should be hearing from me."

"It's twelve thirty now," Farmer said.

Seven nodded. "Ten minutes then. No reason why you can't call now. Call them."

Mr. Axel blanched. "But what can I say?"

"What they want to hear. You have the report. All is in order. What do they want you to do next?"

"But—"

Miles Farmer's face was stony. "Do it, Mr. Axel or I'll pistol-whip you until you die." The little man scrambled to his feet. Bewildered, frightened and afraid. He came toward the set, wiping his hands nervously on his coat. Stargill, at the wall, cursed loudly. A glower from Farmer silenced him.

David Seven stared at Mr. Axel.

"Do it just like I told you."

The little man nodded, his hands fumbling for the head phones. Seven took the set before he could put it on, motioning him to start. Mr. Axel fingered a knob and a dial. The blue and green light winked on again. A hum of noise filtered from the massive set.

"Report," the nasal voice came in with all of its impatience and scorn intact.

"I have what you wanted," Mr. Axel cleared his throat.

"Go on." The voice still wasn't pleased.

"It all seems to be in order. There are some twenty pages of typewritten notes. In code. The—*E* code—what shall I do now?"

There was a heavy pause. Seven's eyes were narrowed, waiting for the answer. Mr. Axel had made a bad slip.

"Mr. Axel, you are a fool. As such, we no longer have any use for you."

"But I have the report!" There was utter terror in the little man's voice. His pudgy hands sawed at the air, desperately. Across the room, Miles Running Bear Farmer made a small noise in his throat.

"Do you, really? I should say you have a gun held to your head. A perfect *coda* to your song of failure. If you're going to play the game of espionage, dear Mr. Axel get your facts straight. The United States hasn't used the *E* code for anything since the days of World War Two."

"You're wrong! I'm telling the truth—"

The voice crackled. "This is for whoever is holding a fool hostage. Kill him now. You have won this round, whoever you are. But you will be hearing from the Little Foxes again. *Au revoir.*"

Dead air filled the earphones. Seven dropped them, sighing. He shook his head at Mr. Axel.

"You didn't have to dress it up like that. Well, forget it. I didn't expect much anyway. Come on, Miles. Let's dismantle this squawk box and vamoose."

"Roger."

Mr. Axel paled. "You're not going to do what Reynard said, are you? You won't kill me—"

"So that was Reynard the Fox?" Seven marveled. "He's got adenoids. Tell him that if you ever see him again."

"I can't—he'd kill me—"

Stargill spoke up from the wall. His voice was curiously light and thin-edged as though he was walking a wire across Grand Canyon.

"You guys want to hear me out?"

"It talks," Farmer laughed, his eyes hard. "What do you want to say?"

"You're smart operators, both of you. But the Little Foxes are smarter. I say let's get out of this joint fast. You'll notice Reynard wasn't raising a sweat about you being here. That mean anything to you?"

"Yes," Seven said. "We're getting out fast but pray continue."

"I say old Reynard has an out. Probably saved it up for Axel all this time. Five will get you fifty this building is probably the worst place for us to be in longer than the next five minutes."

"He's got a point," Farmer said. "I think so too, Dave."

"Stargill, my boy," Seven said. "You said a mouthful. Mr. Axel, tie your friend's hands behind his back. Use his necktie. I'll handle Axel, Miles. You give the set the works."

For the next few minutes, no one spoke. A trembling Mr. Axel bound Stargill's wrists while Seven in turn did the honors for the man in the beret. Miles Running Bear Farmer, using a small tube of nitro starch, planted that with a timing device in one corner of the knobbed and dialed set.

They left the room rapidly, making their way down halls of gloom and corridors of stone. A damp, dank oppressive stale odor of age clung to the walls. They gained the outer limits of the building, guided by the high lights of the elevated subway tracks some two miles off. The closest boulevard was a broad expanse of blackness stretching back toward the more densely populated areas of the borough. The Bronx was a sleeping giant.

Seven and Farmer walked behind Mr. Axel and Stargill, eyes wary and alert. Seven's Buick and the car that Stargill had come in were two squat shadows on the roadway before the building. They were spaced some fifty yards apart. Seven had parked the Buick directly under the shrouded reaches of a high chestnut tree.

Their footfalls made leathery sounds on asphalt. A night wind fanned across the countryside, washing their faces.

"Coast is clear, looks like," Farmer said.

"Looks like. But let's not count on it."

When it happened it came so fast and so soon that neither of them could prepare for anything. Least of all, Mr. Axel and Stargill. For one careening instant, the world went mad. Farmer was checking his watch to see exactly when his timed explosive, a small enough one, would sound from the depths of the deserted building. Then, like a whizzing phantom of the night, a motor roared nearby and there came a grinding noise of wheels. Seven cried out. flinging Farmer to one side. Stargill tried to run. As did Mr. Alex. Neither of them knew in which way lay safety.

A flying shadow shot by. zooming across the open area of the roadway. And the night came apart with the stuttering, chattering murder music of a machine gun. Orange and red flashed in an accompanying kaleidoscope of light and sound. Images wavered.

Mr. Axel screamed.

Stargill blurted in terror and agony.

Both of them were hammered to the earth, scattered like leaves in a gale, cut down by a withering cross-fire of lead. The dark shadow flashed by, the machine gun still stammering.

Seven and Farmer, from their vantage points on the ground, rose and co-ordinated their fire. Farmer used Mr. Axel's Luger. Seven had aimed his forearm gun. Their shots joined and coalesced in a tribute to training and steady nerves. Up ahead, there was a whine of sound, the machine gun went silent and car brakes screeched like a banshee. A crashing, metal-rending thunder of contact. The flying shadow had plunged head-on into a wide tree lining the asphalt roadway.

David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer had little to say to each other. Mr. Axel and Stargill were mutilated, bloody corpses in the darkness of the road. Drop-outs in the army of underground espionage.

The two men in the smashed car, the driver and the gunner, were unconscious, stunned by the impact of a sudden unscheduled stop.

Miles Farmer holstered the Luger. "We blew that one, Mr. Seven."

"How right you are, Mr. Farmer. Come on. Let's clean this mess up."

A night bird in the dense thickets nearby mocked them with a lilting, piercing whistle.

In the abandoned factory, Miles Running Bear Farmer's explosive device went off. A mushroom of noise and aftermath of gobbling echoes in the deserted confines.

But neither of them were very happy.

Miss Samantha Follet stared at Seven and Farmer from the polished depths of her fancy desk. Her beautiful face was unusually placid. There was even a mild sort of humor in her clear grey eyes.

Seven and Farmer always reminded her of schoolboys reporting to the principal after a prank had been discovered. Their manner, either natural or adopted, was ever one of made-to-behave-like-little-gentlemen. An amusing notion considering how easily and carefully they could kill a man or destroy an entire building.

"I'm satisfied," she said coolly. "The Little Foxes didn't get their precious information. You did your job."

"A bit sloppy though," David Seven argued. "Two prisoners shot right under our noses."

"We'll be more careful next time," Miles Running Bear promised with that straight face of his.

"I'm sure you will." Miss Follet folded her manicured fingers. "I'm also sure it is not the last we will be hearing of the Little Foxes."

David Seven studied the lovely face before him. He was well aware of the extraordinary mental powers of Miss Follet. She had a card index file brain that could recite the vital statistics of every agent in the organization. She also enjoyed a memory so like a sponge. Miss Follet had never forgotten anything that had ever happened within her sphere of influence and interest.

"Yes, Mr. Seven?"

"Nothing. I am expected downtown in court this afternoon. That Wilstach Foundation case. After all, I must keep up my cover."

"Don't let me detain you then, gentlemen. As I said, a fine piece of work. Thank you."

They trooped out of the ultra-modern office. They held their tongues until they were well out of range of the tuned-in corridor walls of the underground maze. They waited until they were beyond the confines of the elevator car which was a one-way closed television circuit.

In the well-lighted halls and byways of the International Trade Experts, they looked at each other. Miles Running Bear Farmer smiled. The white patch of bandage on his head made him look extremely heroic and brave.

"Were you kidding her about that Wilstach thing?"

"Not really. But it will keep another day. I have a bit of unfinished business to attend to."

"This unfinished business. Might it's name be Cathy Darrow?"

"It might. And it is. You know, son, you have the makings of a number one undercover agent. That's good thinking."

"Sure. See you later. I've got some blueprints to look over."

They parted, two young men of Manhattan, going on their separate but eternally allied ways.

Cathy Darrow looked up from her desk. A smudge of carbon shone on one smooth cheek. Her eyes smiled at David Seven.

"Guess what?" David Seven said. "The nice lady gave me the day off and I can take you to dinner. Deal?"

"Deal, Mr. Seven."

David Seven of *Intrex* lit a cigarette and winked.

When the job is sudden death anywhere, anytime, it paid to stop now and then to smell the pretty flowers.

NEXT MONTH —

MUSIC TO MURDER BY
by *Lawrence Treat*

BACKFIRE
by *Philip Ketchum*

THE SAINT IN MODERN ART—IV
by *Leslie Charteris* and *Josephine Scremin Aichner*

THE MYSTERY OF SU CHEN
by *D. K. Findlay*

THE GLASS GRAVESTONE
by *Joseph Commings*

THE TALENTED HUSBAND
by *Leslie Charteris*

and

MANNEQUIN
A New Story by *CORNELL WOOLRICH*

— in the October 1966 *THE SAINT MAGAZINE*

the crab woman

by Wenzell Brown

THAT long-ago summer had been charged with vague terror even before I saw the Crab Woman.

My father's death in the late spring had not affected me deeply in itself. At the age of nine, I regarded him with awe and a certain grudging respect, rather than affection. His dental office had been on the ground floor of our home. At such times as I caught glimpses of him throughout the day, he was a white-clad forbidding figure. the custodian of a chamber of horrors into which only the boldest of adults entered without obviously flinching. Even in his free hours, my image of him would not fade altogether and his occasional fumbling attempts to engage me in play only served to alienate me further.

My mother had been the pivot of my life and her distress weighed more heavily on me than the knowledge of death and the somber ceremony of the funeral. She was a small plump woman with a body that seemed incredibly soft, taffy-colored hair, clear grey eyes and finely chiseled features. Her calm presence had

Wenzell Brown, a frequent contributor to SM and author of more than thirty books, is best known for his novels about life in our cities — about the many groupings of people who are a part of this nation of peoples... SM readers will remember his superb WITNESS TO DEATH (SDM, July 1958) and now of still another study of those lost ones who live in the shadows....

always been my primary source of comfort. But now she was harried, distraught and often on the verge of tears.

To a large extent her worries were financial. Later I was to learn that the house in which we lived was her only asset . All of my father's savings had been absorbed in the payments for its purchase. My mother displayed an unexpectedly practical turn of mind. Our old living quarters were soon rented to a widow with two teen-age daughters, while we set up house-keeping in my father's office. Not even the dental chair with its white basin and festoons of drills was removed, for it was my mother's hope that she could find another dentist who would take over my father's practice and purchase his equipment. Meanwhile, to make ends meet, she took on a job as relief cashier in a down-town restaurant. Her hours were irregular, sometimes starting at noon and often lasting until midnight.

For the first time in my life I experienced loneliness. My days would have been intolerable if it had not been for Tessie Coleman, the younger of the girls who lived upstairs. Tessie was fourteen, dark and sallow, with a gamin's face and the ungainly grace of a colt. At times, she seemed like a woman, but at others she was a child, less mature than myself.

At the far end of our street was an entrance to a park, known locally as The Pines. In the level section of the park was an area given over to games, which included a baseball diamond and tennis courts. Beyond, the land sloped gently upward, shaded with pine, spruce and maple trees, until it reached a clearing. Here stood a ramshackle bandstand which was used only on special occasions, such as the Fourth of July.

Tessie and I spent much of our time together, wandering the park or watching the ball games during the daylight hours. Evenings, when my mother was at work, Tessie would often slip downstairs to add a piece of chocolate cake or a dish of ice cream to the meal which had been set out for me. She would linger on, chatting or telling me stories, until her mother called for her to go to bed. Then she would kiss me lightly before running upstairs.

The bond between Tessie and myself was strong, yet I cannot truly say that we were friends. I resented her as a poor substitute for my mother, while she was jealous of my delicate good looks which tended to emphasize her own lack of beauty.

Tessie's reading favored the macabre, although where she got hold of such books I do not know. With the greatest of gusto, she would recount to me stories

of ogres, werewolves, phantoms and vampires. And all the time her eyes would rest shrewdly upon me, seeking some sign of fear. But, even though I was trembling inside, I was determined not to show it.

I had a revenge of sorts. I knew that she was terrified of the dental chair, especially as it stood outlined in gaunt silhouette against the yellow lamplight that spread in through the bay window. She would not come near the chair and, at night, would not even enter the room where it stood. Sometimes, when we were alone, I would run to the bay window and call to her, pretending to point out something of interest on the street. But I could never entice her beyond the threshold.

She would whisper, "Harry, come back here. Please come, Harry."

I would ignore her and stand listening until I heard the sound of her footsteps retreating up the stairs to her own quarters. As soon as she was gone, I would regret the impulsive act which had driven her away. Yet, mixed with my loneliness, there would be a pride in the knowledge that I was braver than she. And, as though compelled to prove my point, I would remain at the window, hoping against hope for my mother's early return.

It was on such a night as this that I first saw the Crab Woman. Before she came into view, I heard the drag of her crutch and the clatter of her cane as it struck an iron railing.

She emerged from the deep shadows of the tree-lined street into the grayness of the night. Her body was bent forward, shapeless beneath the loose folds of her long black skirt. She inched sideways, tapping at the uneven bricks of the sidewalk with her cane. Then she shifted her weight, swinging in an awkward arc, supporting herself on the crutch. She rested, motionless, for a few seconds.. Then once more her cane tapped ahead of her, exploring the irregular surface.

She moved slowly and yet there was an inexorable quality to her approach. I watched, fearful and fascinated. I could feel the shortness of my own breath and the weakness of my knees. I wanted to turn and run but a nightmare panic rooted me to the spot.

She came on and on and, it seemed to me, that a pathway stretched directly between us. She edged into the yellow circle of the lamplight. The glow fell on her long gnarled hands,the black hat, the shawl which she wore despite the heat of the night.

She raised her head slowly, tilting it back so that the light fell full on her face. The skin might have been made of yellowing parchment. The eyes seemed sightless black pools. The nose

was thin and pointed;; the mouth an ugly slash.

Another sound intervened. A car swung into the little-used street. Its headlights sent shadows skittering everywhere. As the gleam caught the misshapen figure of the woman, her shadow billowed outward, becoming enormous, then shrank back into nothingness.

The spell was broken and I backed away, spun about and ran to the next room where I flung myself face down on the bed. A long time later, I arose, undressed and put on my pajamas. I lay still, listening, and sometimes I thought I heard the tap and scrape of the old woman walking outside but I could not be sure because the night was filled with distant sounds which I had never noticed before.

I did not go to sleep until my mother came home. She flicked on the light and came to stand beside my bed. But I was turned on my side and feigned sleep. I heard the tiny sounds of her preparations for bed and, in her comforting presence, the memory of the nightmare dwindled and I drifted off into slumber.

The next time I saw the old woman was in daylight. Tessie and I had been playing in the park, dodging in and out among the trees on the heavily-shaded hillside. Temporarily I had evaded Tessie and was running free. I darted out onto a clearing beside a miniature pond. The woman was there, hunched on a bench, her twisted leg jutting out at a seemingly impossible angle. Her body was that of a discarded broken doll. She stirred and turned her head in my direction. The eyes were feverishly bright. The lips writhed as though in speech but only a mewling whimper came from her throat. She stretched one arm toward me in what appeared to be a gesture of mute appeal, but the bent fingers were like talons. She beckoned and something like a smile passed over her withered cheeks.

Even though I was frightened I took a step closer, curious and flattered by the attention of an adult.

Something struck my shoulder hard, spinning me half way around with such force that I nearly fell. Fingers dug into my arm and a hoarse whisper echoed in my ear.

"Are you crazy, Harry? Come on. Get out of here fast. Run."

It was Tessie who spoke the words, with the hard edge of panic in her voice. Her hand linked in mine and we went racing up the hillside together, without stopping or looking back until we reached the shadows of the deserted bandstand.

Tessie dropped onto the grass, dragging me down with her. She shook her head from side to side,

watching me with disapproval. "You scared me, Harry. You were walking toward her instead of running away. Don't you know who she is?"

I attempted a bravado I was far from feeling. "Aw, she's nothing but an old woman. She couldn't hurt me. She can hardly walk."

"That's what you think. But once she had her hands on you, you'd have been a goner. I think she must have had you hypnotized. You were walking straight into her arms."

"I wasn't either. I just wanted to get a better look at her. If you know so much tell me who she is?"

"I don't know her name but they call her the Crab Woman because of the funny way she crawls about. She hasn't lived around here long. I guess they drove her away from wherever she was before."

"Why would they do that?"

Tessie looked at me with pitying condescension. "Because she's a vampire. Don't you know what she would have done to you if she'd caught you? She'd have sunk her fangs into your neck and sucked out all the blood until you were dead and then she would have thrown your body into the pond."

As my imagination pictured the scene, terror mounted within me. But I wouldn't let Tessie know that. I tried to speak scornfully. "You're just making that up. She can't be a vampire because there aren't any vampires. My mother said so."

"Your mother said so," Tessie mocked. "Well, let me tell you something, Harry Pease. If she thinks there's no vampires, she doesn't know much. The Crab Woman would have drunk your blood all up and if anyone had tried to stop her, she would have changed into a bat and flown away."

I sat up to look at Tessie. Her eyes were venomous and her lips were puckered into a know-it-all smile.

"You're lying," I shouted. Then I was on my feet, running for home.

I thought that things would be different between us after that. But, if Tessie bore me a grudge for calling her a liar, she concealed it well. We still went to the park together and, in the evenings, she came to sit with me and bring me gifts of food.

Never once in the weeks that followed did she mention the Crab Woman, not even when, as happened on several occasions, we spotted the black clad figure wandering through the park. Whenever this happened, Tessie would grab my hand and solemnly lead me away.

But the seeds of malice born on her words bore malignant

fruit. Each night, after Tessie left me, I would lie in the darkness waiting for the scrape of the crutch and the tap of the cane that would announce the passage of the Crab Woman along the street. Sometimes, when I heard them, I would remain still, too shaken by horror to investigate and learn whether the sounds were real or the product of my overwrought imagination. But there were other times when I would force myself to rise on bare feet and pad into the dark front room. I would squeeze past the dental chair and peer through the bay window into the night.

She was not always there. The empty street would mock me and, unreasonably, my panic fears would set me to trembling. The threat was invisible. Perhaps Tessie had been right after all, and the woman had the power to turn herself into a creature of the night.

But sometimes the Crab Woman walked. And always, as she passed into the perimeter of light cast by the street lamp, she paused, seeming to look up at the window where I stood, her masked eyes commanding me to come to her.

The spell would be broken by my flight but now a fresh problem would arise. I must find a way of staying awake until my mother arrived home. Too often, when I dropped off to sleep, the Crab Woman would enter my dreams, her rusty black garments rustling, her arms outstretched to enfold me in a fatal embrace. Wildly I would struggle to free myself from her as the lips came closer and closer to my throat. I would be awakened by my own cries and the flailing of my limbs. After that I would lie rigid and covered with sweat until I heard the assuring scratch of my mother's key in the outer door.

I did not hate the Crab Woman. Indeed I had some strange feeling of sympathy for her. Sometimes I was sure that if I could go to her and touch her, a bond would be established between us which would destroy my fear. But, whenever there was an opportunity to approach her, my courage failed.

Such hate as I had was turned toward Tessie Coleman. It was she who had invented the stories of vampires which fed my terror. Yet, as the summer progressed, I became increasingly dependent on her. She alone knew my secret. She alone stood between me and the dangerous tug of the old and ugly woman who haunted my nights and days.

I grew thin and peaked that summer and my mother often questioned me, but I would not tell her about the Crab Woman. The deformed creature dwelt in a world of fantasy into which it was unsafe for my mother to

enter. So I hugged my secret fears to myself and waited, dreading, yet accepting as inevitable, the approaching confrontation between the woman and myself.

That day near the end of August was unbearably hot, with a moist heat that plastered the clothes to one's body. Tessie and I drifted toward the baseball lot but the game had been abandoned. Listlessly we waded through the deep coarse grass nearby. Something rolled beneath my foot and I stumbled, falling to one knee. My probing fingers found the object and picked it up. It was a baseball. Its white leather casing was stained brown and some of the threads with which it was sewn had been ripped open, but the center remained hard and firm. I shouted to Tessie but she had ploughed on ahead and had reached the green verge of the park. She paid no heed to me, so I pocketed my treasure and plodded after her.

She led the way along a winding path, which followed the bank of a stream, then we doubled back along the opposite side until we were in sight of the bandstand. The heat had grown more intense but now there was a ripple of breeze and a distant rumble of thunder. I looked up into a sky that had grown heavy and gray.

Tessie shouted, "Come on, Harry. I'll race you to the bandstand."

I ran after her, not trying to catch up because I knew that she was much the fleeter. We had barely reached cover when the storm broke with a crash and roar. A crackling finger of flame shot its zigzag pattern through the lowering sky.

The rain came pelting down but we were safe from its attack. The storm was awesome, majestic as it swept across the distant valley. I do not think I was frightened, but there was tension and a sense of conflict in the air.

Tessie swung around and suddenly she was screaming. "Look, Harry. Look."

My gaze followed the direction of her pointing finger.

The Crab Woman was hobbling toward us. She was only a few feet away from the base of the stairs leading to the bandstand. She twisted forward, moving more quickly than I would have thought possible. While we watched, she caught at the stairway railing. Her body jerked sideways on the crutch as she hauled herself upward. The cane was gripped awkwardly beneath her arm.

My gaze was focused on the lean hand with its blackened nails and its knotted purple veins that writhed like snakes.

Tessie was clutching me. "She's after you. We've got to get away."

But I was paralyzed as I had

been so often in my nightmares. The best that I could do was to retreat slowly, watching the woman's relentless approach.

She bent forward, shifting her weight once more. Her crutch rasped against the wet boarding. She looked up and rivulets of moisture chased themselves across her haggard face. Her mouth opened but, if she spoke, the drum of the rain beat back her words.

I heard myself screaming, "Go away. You can't come here. Go away."

Her eyes were on my face, dark eyes, half-masked by sullen folds of flesh. There was a dullness in them, perhaps of incomprehension, perhaps of hurt caused by my cruel words. I shall never know.

The crutch raised to the step above. The old body hunched for the effort of swinging upward.

It was at that moment that I chose to strike. I had forgotten the ball but now it was in my hand. I flung it with all my might and saw it strike against the gray wattled neck.

The woman fell without uttering a sound. There was only the metallic clatter of the crutch, the rattling of the cane as it struck one step after another. She clung to the railing as her body toppled backward. Then she let go, half-turning, rolling down the steps until she sprawled in a sodden heap on the wet cement of the walk.

Tessie held my wrist, yanking at me. "Run—run—run."

But for awhile I stood still, gaping down at the crumpled figure of the Crab Woman.

Then I was leaping down the stairs, racing across the park, never stopping until I reached home.

I huddled on the bed, with Tessie kneeling on the floor beside me. The rain stopped and the darkness of evening fell over the city. Once Tessie left me. She must have been gone for a long time but I scarcely noticed her absence until she came back.

"She's dead," Tessie said.

I did not answer. It had not occurred to me that it could be otherwise.

"Harry, I've been up to the park. They've found the Crab Woman and taken her away. Everyone thinks she was killed in an accident. You mustn't tell them different. Promise me, Harry, you'll never tell a soul."

"I've got to tell my mother."

"Listen, Harry. You killed her. Do you know what they do to murderers? They strap them in a big chair and shoot electricity through them until they're dead."

I jerked away from her.

"It's true," she insisted. "That's what will happen to you if you blab. Maybe they can do something to me too, but it was all

your fault."

"I won't tell," I mumbled.

"Cross your heart and hope to die."

"I won't tell," I repeated. "Not ever. Nothing can make me tell."

She left me but I did not see her go. I remained crouched on the bed, staring through the open door at the bay window where the silhouette of the dental chair was limned in clear detail against the pale light.

My mother found me in the same position when she returned from work that night. I have vague memories of her folding me in her arms, the clatter of her heels as she ran to the telephone and the urgency of her voice as she talked to the doctor.

The fever of that night was to last for many weeks. Later I was told that, in my delirium, I shouted of tapping canes, vampire bats and electric chairs. But apparently no one connected these rantings with the death of the Crab Woman.

The long sickness was followed by a still longer period of convalescence. When, at length, I was able to totter about the room, one leg had grown long, while the other seemed to have shrunken. The first time I saw myself in a mirror, I stared at my reflected image in consternation and disbelief. My skin was parchment pale; my eyes scooped-out smudges. My hair had darkened to a lifeless brown. My lips had thinned and my chin become pointed.

I could not recognize myself as the blond child I once had been. And yet there was a familiarity to my features. With a shudder of revulsion, I realized that in some grotesque pattern, my face had taken on a hazy resemblance to that of the Crab Woman.

The years spread out, harsh and bitter. I no longer ran or played games. I did not grow into a man but into an ugly, misshapen thing. Fortunately my mother married again, this time to a man of substance. Tutors spared me the humiliation of school and later there was no need to work. So I grew apart from mankind, a solitary creature, aware of the loathing which my appearance creates.

With the years I have become more crippled and live in constant pain. I walk with two canes, dragging a useless leg. I avoid mirrors for I know how I look. Lank hair. A wattled neck. Eyes that glitter. An ugly slash for a mouth.

Usually I walk at night, when there are fewer people to stare at me. Yet sometimes I seek out the sunlight in the lonely park.

Children shun me and for that I cannot blame them. Without doubt terrifying stories are circu-

lated about me. But there is one child who is always watching, her eyes filled with a sullen defiance that seeks to reject fear.

She is dark-haired, with almond-shaped eyes and a pouting mouth. She reminds me of Tessie, whose family moved away during my sickness and whom I have never seen again.

There is a bond between the child and myself. It is as though we both know of the inevitable confrontation which must occur soon. Once I saw her pointing a toy pistol at me. I longed to speak to her, to warn her of her danger. I could feel the writhing of my lips but articulation has become increasingly difficult. No words would come.

The child retreated from me, slowly, fearfully, her eyes never leaving mine. Her gun was raised in a threatening gesture. But it was only a toy. My desire to cry out became a sick yearning. But it would do no good. She could not understand. The time is not ripe for the confrontation between us. . . .

USEFUL TOMBSTONES

A Canadian postal clerk, a one-time member of the Communist Party of Canada, testified last year, in the course of an investigation which led to the expulsion of two Russian diplomats from Canada, that he had supplied information and photographs to the Russians between 1960 and 1963, for which he had been paid a total of £1,250, or $3,500!

The man, who died earlier this year, furnished information, largely from newspapers, on American troops in Canada and on the crossing procedure for vital industries on the U.S.-Canadian border. Among assignments given to him was one to photograph cemetery tombstones, to help future vistors to assume the identities of safely dead people.

Another assignment was to obtain a list of bankrupt businesses. Why?

This could provide incoming Russian operatives with a false employment history that would withstand a routine check. With records normally scattered to the four winds, except in the fastnesses of some bureaucratic archives the mere existence of which would only be known to the initiate, it would be easy to show the man or the woman as having worked for the defunct firm. The chances of the interrogator knowing this wasn't so, would be one in a million.

the faded moquette

by Nigel Morland

MRS. PYM descended from the carriage, pausing to inhale what she always dubbed "the morgue-like aroma of Paddington." On the arrival side it was moderately peaceful; only a few dozen people had taken the 7.16 to town on that cold Saturday night. That being so, there seemed no good reason for the crowd gathered round a compartment towards the front of the train.

Two porters were beside an anxious young man in a dark suit who carried an brief-case. A railway policeman was there. Standing by was a group of intrigued citizens.

It was the smell of possible battle to an old war-horse. Mrs. Pym touched the whitening hair under her usual insanely exotic hat, jerked at the front of an impeccable tweed jacket and marched forward with a sort of stolidly solid determination which vastly became Scotland Yard's only woman assistant commissioner.

Her chill grey-blue eyes noted the slumped figure in the compartment; she nodded at the railway policeman's quick salute of recognition.

We know many of you will remember British novelist Nigel Morland's stories about the formidable Mrs. Pym, Scotland Yard's only woman Assistant Commissioner. Her frosty eyes softening, she'd admit she had a twisted mind. She always distrusted a beautifully pat story. And she'd be right....

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"Evening, constable, I travelled on this train, too."

She saw that the reserved label on the window bore the name of Kember. "What is it, heart failure?"

The anxious young man realised that here was high authority. He poured out the story.

"I am Mr. Kember's secretary, ma'am. I always travel in the next compartment as he likes to be alone; we came up most evenings on this train. He's a stamp dealer, and I must say all this isn't unexpected. He's an asthmatic and his heart's poor."

Mrs. Pym was rapidly losing interest, particularly when a bustling little woman bounded forward.

"I was in the next carriage meself." She nodded to the compartment on the left of Kember's. "Cough? I could 'ear 'im through the walls. Must've coughed 'is 'eart out for last 'arf-hour."

"That's right," the secretary added. "I was on the other side. The train doesn't stop after Maidenhead. I heard the poor chap coughing terribly. I nearly pulled the communication cord, but hesitated as I was on my own."

Now she was there Mrs. Pym had to say. "Ambulance coming?" The constable nodded. "Died without help?"

"That's right." One of the porters answered. "That gent," he indicated Kember's secretary, "was waving to me from his window soon as the train got level. Said he thought his boss next door might be ill and want help. We opened the door together. Gorn all right, he was. No doubt of it."

When an ambulance had removed Kember's body and the platform had been cleared, Mrs. Pym frowned at Inspector Jervis, Railway Divisional Police Officer in charge, who had just arrived.

"Natural death, do you think?"

"*What's* that, ma'am?"

"Come over here a moment." She backed from the train, pointing. "See that? It's a new carriage and newly upholstered. That stuff covering the seats is called dot moquette. Now it's bright red in every compartment, bright red and new . . ."

"And dirty-looking in Kember's compartment?" Jervis was too polite to add, "So what?"

"That green floor carpet is faded; it isn't in any of the other compartments."

Jervis sighed heavily. "It's just a plain case of an asthmatic having a bad coughing fit and his heart stopping." He gestured uneasily.

"Meaning you're too polite to say I'm a melodramatic old busybody." Mrs. Pym's frosty eyes softened. "I've got a twisted mind, son. That secretary's too slick; I distrust slick young men who've got everything beautifully

pat."

But the hospital offered sternly mundane views.

"Nothing unusual in it," a cheerful house surgeon told Mrs. Pym and Jervis. Heart failure. I've spoken to Kember's medical man by phone. The condition's strictly in keeping with a final paroxysm of coughing. Asthma —"

Mrs. Pym nodded pettishly. "You're obviously right; I still don't like it. Call it a hunch, if you like. Everything was normal —I mean, not a thing outside the usual?"

"Well . . ." the doctor hesitated. "I did notice the body had a most unexpected odour, like the air in the underground railway." He chuckled at the expression on Jervis's face. "Exactly! Probably some new sort of cleaning fluid used on his suit —I only mentioned it *en passant,* you might say."

Mrs. Pym was staring into nothingness. Then a sudden touch of animation seized her body, as if an inwardly coiled spring was released.

"It's murder," she announced in a harsh, flat tone. "There was a similar case in the States 20 years ago. I want to see that secretary immediately."

Jervis looked at the doctor helplessly, trailing Mrs. Pym to the downstairs waiting-room where the young secretary was patiently sitting. He rose and beamed with a restrained pleasure, as if he wishes to smile but remembered his master's corpse was in the building.

"Tell me about Kember," Mrs. Pym demanded.

"He . . . ah . . . well," the secretary was disconcerted. "He deals in rare stamps and is a bachelor living alone in a small house. I go every day for the usual office hours and accompany him on all his journeys. He's careful with his money, but a fair man indeed."

"Why did you kill him, then?"

Jervis stepped back at the shock of such wholly improper behaviour; the secretary stared with sick dismay.

"I didn't . . . I mean . . . oh, good heavens!"

"Kember was murdered." Her voice was bleak. She was risking everything on this single throw. "You wanted him dead, and you devised a way of killing him by making use of his own infirmities and the isolation of two self-contained railway compartments on a fast, non-stop journey as a perfect alibi and as a remarkable means."

"You accuse me of poisoning —"

"Nothing so crude, young man. Read detective stories?"

"Eh? Well, frequently, though . . ." his words trailed away in bewilderment.

"There you are! I don't doubt some bright lad wrote it is a novel, a real case that happened years ago, and you—where are you supposed to be going?"

"I'm not staying to be insulted and you can't hold me."

Jervis watched him go as Mrs. Pym nodded cheerfully. "Have him watched—quick. I want anything he tries to throw away."

Uneasily, but under orders, Jervis left. He passed on Mrs. Pym's orders to a waiting plain-clothes man.

Three hours later Mrs. Pym was standing with Jervis beside the carriage where Kember had died.

"So the old battle-axe went mad, did she?" Her diabolical wink of achievement startled Jervis. "He killed Kember. It's the usual story—owes money all over the place. Read a book and planned the crime to occur on the 7.16, the only possible place where he could pull off a most ingenious trick."

"But why? Had Kember put him in his will?"

"He had not! He was taking up four stamps to be auctioned; he found them by chance in an old lady's collection and they were his death warrant—four blue Post Office Mauritius stamps issued 1847. Incredible rarities nobody knew existed and worth a small fortune. That secretary snatched them off poor Kember's lap when he dashed in with the porter at Paddington to see what was wrong."

"It *was* poison, then?"

"Air-conditioning, of a sort." Mrs. Pym was very bland. "I called in the experts about that dirty moquette and the carpet fading. It was ozone."

"Ozone?" Jervis really gaped this time.

"Certainly, ozone. It's an allotropic form of oxygen," she explained with sugary omniscience. "It's used for air-conditioning in tubes—remember the doctor's words, eh? As we use it, well diluted, it's harmless; but in concentrated form it can be a killer. It'd make an asthmatic cough his heart out, for example."

"Good Lord! Is that what happened?"

"Precisely. Concentrated ozone at what is called atmospheric pressure was used. It was crammed into a cylinder a few inches round and under a foot long—the one Kember's secretary tried to throw away. It wouldn't be hard to get the stuff if you knew your way around the wholesale drug trade like Kember's secretary, that being his father's profession."

"I still don't get it, ma'am."

He carried the cylinder in his brief case. He wanted an inlet and a sealed room, and train noises to hide the hiss when the

cylinder was releasing the stuff. Once the train was on its way he put the cylinder nozzle into the pipe holding the communication chain between his compartment and Kember's. It's cold tonight and the windows were closed. . . ."

"It's incredible. The chap's clever."

"Slick, call it. Concentrated ozone fades colours very swiftly, turns dyes black, and things like that. See why the moquette was so queer? Anyway, I've got a confession."

"You know," Jervis admitted reluctantly, "he almost deserved to get away with those stamps."

"Um?" Mrs. Pym took an envelope out of her bag. "He overreached himself without knowing it. Kember had been looking at these stamps when the ozone started coming." She flipped four odd-looking stamps into her hand. "Poetic justice, eh? The ozone's faded those pretty blue Post Office Mauritius into muddy-coloured nothings — they're about worthless now!"

THIS 007 MUST NEVER KISS!

Turkish movie goers will soon be able to follow the adventures of Altin Coçuk, master spy-catcher for Turkish counter-intelligence, as he is ordered to London to track down the leader of a gang of spies who also do business in drugs and arms smuggling.

Why to London? Goksel Arsoy, the Turkish movie star who will play the role of Altin Coçuk ("who smokes English cigarettes and drinks Scotch") explained the reason in a recent interview in Istanbul. "London is now recognized in Turkey as the sex and crime centre of the world. What better setting could we find?"

Arsoy, aged 28 and a veteran of 62 Turkish films, admitted they are still looking for the British actress who will play his English girl-friend, and who must, if we may put it that way, be reasonably well-developed. He will be making discreetly torrid love to her—kissing scenes are forbidden in Turkish films—inbetween hunting the spies throughout Soho, Kensington and Putney. And if it rains all the time, well, then they "may have to fill in with some interiors in the British Museum."

All this will have happened in London by the time you read this. It was anticipated that this would be a big budget picture, incidentally. They might go as high as a hundred and fifty thousand Turkish lire.

This would be £6,000. Or $16,800.

the flash

by Louis Joseph Vance

DONLIN walked into this story one sultry night that Summer through the doors of the old Dump, where a good many untold tales of his time got their start. The Double Eagle was the title its white lights blazed to Midtown, but to the regulars—until the courts plastered it with padlocks for taking that cosmic jest of Mr. Volstead's too lightheartedly—it was just the Dump, roughest all-night joint this side the Loop and the busiest; Park avenue packed it till the walls bulged all Winter long, and for no reason at all except that the show was fierce, the liquor poison, the food simply cynical, and the bulk of the crowd just mob—mobsmen, their molls, and their friends the enemy from Downtown and the Department of Justice. It was glad to have the high-hat trade, of course, but the Dump's real function in the urban organism was a dual one, that of Central to the Underground, the wireless ticker service of Queer Street, and crime exchange—Donlin called it the

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L. J. Vance, whose hitherto unpublished Lone Wolf novel, THE WHITE TERROR, appeared in our Aug. 1965 issue, was one of this country's foremost suspense writers and an immensely popular chronicler of the sins and ommissions of the Prohibition Era's "Society", as in THE GULP STREAM (SMM, April 1966). We first met Donlin in OLD MAN MENACE (SMM, May 1965). Here is a longer story about the by now retired Secret Service agent.

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Cheat Pit — where crooks and cops could get together and canvas the sucker crop and swap lines on one another's rackets.

Donlin wasn't prospecting for any thrills, if you asked him he'd had plenty, enough to last out his lifetime; he was just restless and bothered by a yen for the latest quotation on a little guy named Donlin. As he put it, in the lingo he had used so long that its use had become a mental as well as an oral habit, he was feeling screwy — way a fellow feels who has reason to suspect that persons unknown may be taking an officious interest in his movements.

This was during Donlin's first week out of Secret Service harness, and the sense of freedom irked his back as the red flannel underwear of his boyhood used to on the early edge of every Winter. Freedom from responsibility was all jake with Donlin but freedom from protection was something else again. He couldn't seem to get reconciled to the knowledge that, next time the drag-net took in his mob or some dick of his acquaintance invited him to step Downtown for a nice long talk, there would be no power in the background watching out for Stacey Donlin, ready to step up and cover him if the pinch got too tight or it turned out somebody was trying to job him.

Donlin had put in so many years existing shiftily as a crook among crooks that he found it hard to conceive of any other way to make an honest living, had thought so long as a crook thinks, because that was the only way he knew to beat a crook to his conclusions. that work, in the sense of drudging for a weekly wage, was still a remote and in many ways a fantastic abstraction to him, a mug's game. It was going to take Donlin a good while to realign his vision with the rule perspectives of the common lot. he was already, for that matter. beginning to grasp that he might all too possibly fail ever to work round again to its quaint, meek, workaday viewpoints.

Donlin on the other hand had come to hold private and police detectives alike in such contempt that he couldn't think of seeking a berth as either, and he knew what it would mean to take what he could get at an hour's notice, by simply asking for it. his old job back. He hadn't sent in his resignation because he was tired of the Service so much as because it was all at once either that or a dose of lead in the back some night. The grifters in the Narcotics Division had tumbled at last to his identity with the source of the private reports which had so long been cramping their style, putting it up to

Donlin to choose between two ways of making his exit from the Service, head or feet first; and he now acutely needed to know whether the N.D. was satisfied with his scalp or wanted his blood to boot. One whisper from it to the Underground, Donlin reflected, as he eased into the Dump to listen in, and any attempt to win a livehood in this country would be the same thing as staking a claim to a six-by-four plot in Arlington and filing a requisition for a headstone neatly lettered:

STACEY DONLIN
2nd Lieut. G. 2 B.—G. H. Q.
A. E. F. 1918-19
born 1895
Murdered 192-

2

Donlin knew just where to look for the one man who would be pretty sure to know what, if anything, 'they' were saying, about Stace Donlin behind his back, and who might have the grace to slip him the tip if it had any bearing on the show he stood of keeping his health: and sure enough, his first blink of the garish, stuffy, overcrowded little room marked Schwartzstein at his regular ringside stand, opening wine for a bunch of visiting Hollywood celebrities while sipping his own invariable choice of mineral water—his faithful bodyguard, an ex-middleweight title holder and a quick-firing gunman, at the table right behind him.

Leonard Schwartzstein had graduated early from obscure East Side beginnings, as a small-time pool room gambler, into the floodlight which Midtown plays on its professional plunger caste, and was winding up a notorious record as czar of all the racketeers. Few if any games for taking suckers did paying business where his rule ran—and it ran from Battery to Bronx and river to river—that Schwartzstein hadn't a controlling interest in. He was at that period a man approaching middle-age who habitually dressed a curvilinear person in clothes of sober pattern too smoothly fitted. He had a fat soft bleached face with a fleshy nose, slack lips, a weak round chin, and rather prominent but lacklustre, pale, staring eyes. These passed on Donlin as he delayed at gaze in the entrance without a glimmer of interest or even recognition.

Donlin didn't mind. He liked to think he was a man easy to overlook in a crowd, he was thankful that he possessed no distinctive features, and he took a lot of pains, first and last, to see that his make up should never be either too shabby or too neat. His everyday manner was friendly and modest, and of his

two speaking voices the one Donlin used most, his business voice, was a trifle husky and so tuneless that nobody ever heard it who wasn't listening for it. A place in the sun was the last of his desires, and at such times as he was caught in one he would battle if he had to with almost berserker fury for the privilege of fading forthwith into the shadowy distances. But that didn't happen very often: Donlin would seep through almost any scene as vaguely as a puff of smoke through a woodland aisle. The sum of these traits, the physical front of nobody in particular, he reckoned his most valuable professional asset. He knew, however, that nobody ever entered a room where Schwartzstein was and succeeded in being overlooked by those eyes of a dead fish; he knew, too, that he had been in small ways useful to Schwartzstein on more than one occasion, and felt fairly confident that the dirty cheating skunk would respect mob ethics to the extent of squaring their score whenever he could at a total cost to himself of not more than a nickel—if Schwartzstein had anything to tell him he would get the high sign in good season.

The indicated course of procedure was simple: Donlin could count any number of acquaintances in the crowd and knew nobody was going to think it funny if he should kill a couple of hours passing from group to group and paying his way with drinks. It was further completely in character, as the Dump knew its Donlin, that he should, as he did, contribute his bit to every conversation mainly by remaining a sympathetic but tolerably taciturn audience. Another trick of his which ordinarily paid dividends was that of being able to lend one ear to what was addressed to him directly and with the other hear everything that might be uttered within its range though not intended for it. He practised it this once, as it turned out, to no special purpose, since nothing thus eavesdropped was concerned with the lot of Stacey Donlin. And as the night wore on without a sign from Schwartzstein, the itch of worry sensibly abated, Donlin began to believe he might for the present safely go on about his business, when any, without exercising livelier circumspection than that which had come to be a second nature.

Donlin now found it possible to take some impersonal interest in a dialogue at one of the adjoining tables, one which he couldn't see without turning his head.

3

It was the voices more than their gossip that first quickened

his curiosity. One was a woman's, a warm but rough contralto that Donlin felt he ought to know but couldn't at the moment place, a more pleasing voice than most of the women who frequented the Dump could produce but on too easy terms with the local idiom to be an alien's. Besides, those were the dog days, the Park avenue bunch was out of Town, making its whoopee in the deep tangled wildwood or where the surf sang its runes to spellbound beaches; Donlin missed it, too—the buyers from the sticks and their broads of the evening who filled in the gaps were too well behaved, not half so amusing.

The other was an Englishman. Or that was as good a guess as any . . .

Donlin pretended to a nice taste in voices and held that no people in the world ever could boast a more agreeable method of speech than the educated English. He had spent a good part of his War time in England, in his performance of the chores of an Intelligence officer, and as one result rather plumed himself on being able to tell, as soon as an Englishman opened his mouth, what part of the island he hailed from. Tonight for once, however, Donlin was obliged to own this knack at fault. The speaker struck pretty much the tune of a public school man, but his 'county' wasn't at all clear; and whereas there was some Anzac tang to be distinguished, Donlin somehow couldn't rest on what was the likeliest hypothesis, that this one had been born and brought up in England but had spent most of his mature years in Australia or New Zealand. A fine elusive undertone haunted his inflexions like the ghost of stranger antecedents.

True that it echoed on a tongue of some excitement . . .

"It's fairly got the wind up me, I don't mind tellin' you, my dear. More I think of it, less I make of it—only thing I'm ready to swear to is, either that chap's balmy or I am."

"Better change your bootlegger, old thing," Donlin heard him drily advised. "Or else consult an oculist."

"I thought of that, you know." The man had a conscious chuckle. "I said to myself: See here, old boy, you're seein' things, either that or something's wrong with your glasses—"

"Too many of 'em."

"I was referrin' to my binoculars." Donlin thought this patient correction almost too thick to be true to any type of Briton but that whose sole habitat is the American theatre. "You'll laugh when I tell you I was so taken aback I actually staggered off and found another pair to check the first by. And when it did—

well! I knew then it was either the horrors at last or I was watchin' a lunatic at settin' up drill."

"I suppose even a cuckoo's got a right to keep fit," the woman replied in faintly fatigued humour. "Why begrudge a goof his daily dozen?"

"I mean to say, that must be the explanation—there couldn't be any other, could there?"

"Don't ask me. I might be mean enough to tell you."

"But I saw what I saw, you know—I'm not spoofin'. I took one squint through the second pair and popped off to get a whiskey and soda."

"You would."

"First I'd had all day, dear thing—and I needed it. Think how you'd feel if you were innocently whilin' time away with your trusty binocular, simply glancin' hither and yon, admirin' the great out-doors and what not, and all at once you happened to bring it to bear on a window high up in one of these swanky blocks of flats you Americans are so proud of, and saw Charlie Chaplin standin' in it and treatin' himself to a busman's holiday!" The woman gave a brief laugh and the man proceeded with new animation. "Give you my word!" there was this beggar, standin' square in the window with the sun beatin' in on him like fun, and no clothes on at all except shorts, a red necktie, brown gloves and, to top it all off with the absolute limit, a black bowler, and goin' through no end of the uncanniest calisthenics . . . I mean to say, how would you feel?"

"Like phoning for a cot in the psychopathic ward. It isn't too late even now, you know, Bellevue's open all night for just such cases. Though the chances are, if you'll just lay off this steady liquorin' a day or two—"

"You don't believe me!"

"Listen." The woman shortly laughed again. "No guy would tell a girl a story like that on himself unless he believed it. Oh I believe you, all right." Her next words struck a troubled note: "I wish I didn't!"

"Why?" Failing to get an immediate reply the man pressed for it with a pulse in his voice that, to Donlin, told a story. "Why, Teddy?"

"Oh *I* don't know!" The uneasy note repeated. "It seems a pity, sort of, a man like you that's got everything, letting himself go the way you do. I bet there hasn't been a night this week you've gone to bed sober."

"You know how to put a stop to that, dear girl—and only you —"

"Yeh—I know. That's what you keep telling me. But I always say a fellow who hasn't got self-respect enough to straighten

out for his own sake won't ever do it for any woman."

"That's not quite fair, you know." The man a shade sullenly ended a pause. "You don't understand—"

"Of course I don't. How can I? I'm only a woman. Besides, I'm too young to. That's a good gag!" Her laugh was this time not only curt but bitter. "I've told you about myself. Tim, you can't ever say I kept anything back that mattered. You know how I've been on the stage, off and on, ever since I was fifteen, and hoofing in a night club for more than a year now — you wouldn't be satisfied till you'd come over and caught my act! Oh sure! there's a lot I don't savvy, an awful lot, about men in love and men in liquor. All I ask is that you won't try to tell it to me—I'm too dumb to take it in."

Here the young woman became aware of a shadow that fell on the tablecloth at which she was louring, and looked up sharply to find Donlin standing over her, as if sudden recognition had arrested him in the act of passing.

"Why Stacey Donlin!" Her face lighted prettily to his diffident smile, a hand darted impulsively out to detain him. "Hello there!"

"'Lo, kid." Donlin sounded more than ever husky and shy. "Been a long time away, haven't you? When'd you get back?"

"Nearly a month ago. Haven't been around much lately, have you? Meet my friend Mr. Kendal."

4

Her friend Mr. Kendal would have cut an upstanding figure on any stage, carried his heft and inches easily and looked, to a surprising degree, in view of the young woman's strictures, fit. He had lived out under the sun a lot, the slate-grey eyes in his weathered mask had the steady cast of eyes at home with flowing horizons, but he knew how to accommodate himself as well to pinched city ways and forms. He was beyond doubt as happy in a dinner-jacket from Sackville street as he would have been in oilskins or a Mackinaw; and there was, Donlin thought, something touchingly British in his loyalty to hard-boiled linen on that sweltering night. The hand which he got up to extend was firm if the pins he got upon were wobbly. Donlin knew the type that drink takes that way, a ticklish type to get gay with—knows what it wants and will have it, as a rule, though hell pops.

Donlin was thus less mystified than he might have been to meet with such marked cordiality where he was on terms so casual

that he would hardly have thought of pausing if he hadn't been wanting a look at the hero of the binocular adventure. The girl was manifestly finding her Britisher a bit too much for her, with his unaffected infatuation and his fundamental decency that put him in a class apart from the run of the men she met at the Dump and knew how to hold her own with. That gushing welcome had merely been her way of signalling an S O S in the hope that mob freemasonry would prompt Donlin to respond.

Donlin accordingly sat down without waiting to be urged, accepted a dry ginger ale which Kendal fortified from a noble flask, made the good-natured noises which the circumstances called for, and rummaged his memory for data on this Teddy. The record which he at length pieced out was at once simple and sketchy; for the lives of her kind ran largely to a pattern, when you knew one you knew them all, it wasn't too easy to discriminate Teddy's from the next nymph's.

She worked under the name of Teddy Claire. Donlin had no information to the contrary of Teddy, but recalled that her mother had been Daisy O'Day, long a headliner on the Orpheum Circuit, and her father a Western race-track follower named Halloran. You couldn't blame the girl for wanting that forgotten. Her old man had done a stretch in San Quentin—for murder, as memory served—'way back when the century was young, but after two or three years had been pardoned out and found Daisy O'Day waiting to marry him. Daisy had been his girl before the conviction and—it just went to show there were women like that. She had given her best years to taking care of Halloran, and it hadn't done either of them any good—San Quentin had turned Halloran out a stir-bug, and stir-bugs never come back—had gone on working while he stalled around New York, picking up a few odd dollars off and on as a tipster but never cutting into any important money. Halloran had dropped dead in the street a while back, and Daisy hadn't waited long to follow him. She was played out, anyway, as a draw on the big time, and had been for years only too glad to catch broken weeks in the four-a-day. Donlin could just remember her as she used to look across the footlights before she began to crack; a vivid little thing, sweetly turned, with big brown eyes and a mop of rusty hair, same as Teddy's, and no voice to brag about but a way of putting her songs across that somehow got you—even if you were a case-hardened Service dick with a low slant on life that

you'd come by honestly, still she got you. You could hear in Teddy's voice at times some echo of her mother's, but only when she was fussed about something, never when she was working. Pity.

At that, there was nothing against the girl but the convict taint, and you'd think there ought to be enough of her mother's blood in her to cancel that out. She strutted her stuff well enough in the revue, ran no feuds with the other show girls, played no favorites among the male regulars, minded her own business. But what chance had she? They all went the same way. How could they help it? They had to get theirs while they were good, were only good as long as their looks lasted, and they didn't last long once the night clubs got them. This Teddy had taken time out last Spring, Donlin remembered hearing somebody mention that she was on a jaunt abroad, the coin she dragged down at the Dump didn't run to such junketting, now after a month or so she was back . . . It looked like the old story. And nothing to be done about it.

Donlin's mild eyes blinked in the glow of gratitude which was enveloping him. He didn't just get that. This Kendal bird looked like cash money, you'd think he would be just her dish. Maybe he did like his liquor, maybe he was a good deal older; anybody could see with one eye Teddy only had to reach out and take him by his little hand and he'd amble like a lamb right up to the altar, and a husband still sound in wind and limb with a bank roll equally robust was a proposition that girls in her fix didn't get a chance to pass up every day. Donlin supposed what it really meant was a sweetie in the background, not of the heavy sugar class: she didn't precisely put a person in mind of Dreicer's show window.

"That's my theme song this season." Teddy hummed a bar of the current band number. "I've simply got to dance it." She pushed her chair back but pinned Kendal's nearer arm with a kind yet firm hand. "No, old dear—not with you, not the way you are. You've got too many dogs flying around loose tonight. Stace here will give me a turn and then come back and tell you about life in a great city while I'm changing for the show."

"'Squite all right with me, nice thing." Kendal genially assured her. "Never did frightfully fancy myself as a dancin' man, you know. I'll be perf'ly happy sittin' here and watchin' you."

"Well: don't get to feeling too sorry for yourself . . . Another little drink won't do you anything but harm."

Kendal punctiliously stood up,

bowing and beaming, as Teddy left the table, but exercised considerable care when it came to easing himself back into his chair.

"That's one big-hearted bozo," Donlin mused aloud to the tawny head on his shoulder. "I don't know, though; maybe it only shows how much of a John Gilbert I look to him; maybe your boy friend ain't as pie-eyed as he lets on."

"If he isn't he will be before the night's out."

"Wouldn't take him for that kind, either," Donlin thoughtfully pursued. "Looks like he packed too much horse-power to lay down with all fours in the air and concede hootch the decision."

"He does," the girl impatiently asserted. "He's just like most men when they get an idea they're in love, that's all—you know, kid-minded."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"You do know what I mean: childish. Thinks the way to touch a woman's heart is to lap hard stuff up till he's plumb pitiful."

"Maybe so—maybe he really likes it. I've met guys that did."

"I guess I ought to know. I saw enough of him in Cannes, he never was like this there."

"All right, all right! I wasn't aiming to start any argument."

"It's only since he turned up here . . . I was sap enough over there to tell him how I made my living, only I didn't say where—you know, trying to talk him out of this case he thinks he's got on me. I guess he must 've tried every other joint in Town before he made me here, that's how he got this started."

"I suppose," Donlin hazarded, "there must be some rule only women know about that says it's illegal to put a dumb animal out of its misery—providing it wears pants."

"Mr. Kendal knows he hasn't got a chance," the girl a little sulkily insisted.

"That's right. I forgot."

"You forgot what?"

"Why! he must 've known, seeing you playing around Europe with another sweetie."

"You're just guessing. I was all by myself in Cannes."

"Oh yeah?"

"That's right. I know what you think, but you're all wet. I haven't got a sweetie."

"How come?"

"That's my affair. I made that trip alone, Mr. Donlin, on business."

"Check!" (What manner of 'business' could have taken Teddy Claire, show girl in a New York night club, on a flying trip to Cannes?) "I'm through. Ain't the music won'erful?"

"Listen, Stace," Teddy laughed: "You're a good sport, and I'll do as much for you some day

—anything I can! Stick around tonight, will you, and help me make my break-away? My boy friend means all right, but somehow I'd just as soon not have him ride me home alone in a taxi."

"Pop goes another bubble!" Donlin lamented. "And me kidding myself all along it was my nice eyes."

The girl giggled, and Donlin, broadly grinning over her head as though his own held never a thought unrelated to their private little joke, swung her into a reverse spin that ended only on the last discordant crash. Then to the eyes that, while still a little dazed from their gyrations, sought his insistently, he gravely nodded.

"Sure, kid. Everything's K-O with me. Sure—I'll stick."

5

The owner of Les Trois Amis came up for air the first time toward noon and found precious little stirring. The yacht rode to the tug of the tide with nose upstream and scarcely any motion. There wasn't enough wind to flaw the glass of the Hudson, whose glare beat up under the awnings so savagely that they were hardly to be thought of as affording shelter from the sun. The cloudless sky was a bleached dusty blue above the storeyed cliffs of Riverside Drive, but Midtown gave off fumes like drab steam to soil it, and farther to the south it was as if the heat materialized in the form of a dirty saffron fog.

Donlin from his deck-chair in some compassion watched the owner arrive at the head of the companionway, pause sailorwise to weigh the weather before turning his mind to affairs of less moment, and wince from its pitiless omen. Donlin wasn't too happy on his own account, he could stand such rigours as well as the next native but hated to feel yesterday's linen still clammily adhering to his skin and know it might be hours before he could change it; but at least, he told himself, he was inured to the climate, and he hadn't hot coppers to contend with.

The owner of Les Trois Amis had a body hardened by active habits, had but recently chilled it with a shower bath and clad it all in cool, fresh white; yet the first withering breath of the deck broke out a powdery dew upon his features, and mopping seemed only to deepen their sullen glow.

"Good mornin'," he civilly if somewhat sheepishly said.

"Good afternoon," said Donlin, not to be outdone — "but purely, of course, in the way of politeness."

"Ah . . . quite." The owner

was up to a wry smile in recognition of American humour. "I trust you had a comfortable night," he pursued in a dialect rather more true, to Donlin's ear, than it had seemed on first acquaintance— "and that my people did—ah—everything in their power—"

"They didn't forget a single little thing," Donlin hastened solemnly to assure him. "I've never been looked after more expertly. But far be it from me to complain that they watched every move I made as if they had reason to believe I was capable of snaking the keel right out from under their feet and smuggling it ashore as a souvenir. They must have some swell experiences if it's any habit of yours to shine up to fly-by-night strangers and bring 'em aboard at all hours and give them the freedom of the ship. The name, by the way, is Donlin, Mr. Kendal — Stacey Donlin."

"Thank you, Mr. Donlin," the owner answered with a chastened grin. He let himself down into a chair. "Though as a matter of fact, I'm sure I should have recalled it in another minute. It was damn' decent of you to look after me as you did, and I hope it hasn't inconvenienced you to—ah—lose so much of the day—"

He made a receptive wait that was wasted. "Not a bit," Donlin blandly declared. "I had a great sleep and a grand breakfast. I like your little hotel a lot."

"So do I," Kendal confessed with the nearest approach to enthusiasm yet. "Nothing strange in that, of course, seein' she's been my home year in and out for more than ten." He dotingly dwelt on the impeccable trim of the deck till a steward came to attention at his elbow. "I'm just about to order breakfast, I mean to say my second. Wasn't too frightfully keen about the eggs and bacon this mornin'. Perhaps you might care—sun's well over the yard-arm now—to join me. Shall I tell the steward to make it two Tom Collinses?"

"I never in my life heard of anything more reasonable."

"Splendid!" Kendal's faith in his judgment of men visibly revived; apparently he hadn't erred last night in picking this stranger as one of uncommonly sympathetic grain. "I say, old chap," he stammered as the steward made off—"about last night, you know—I hope I wasn't too—ah—"

"As man to man,' Donlin reported, severely judicious, "I don't mind admitting I've seldom seen a more elegant brannigan. But I will say this for you: I never knew anybody with a high sea running to handle easier. Bar the rukus you staged over there on the club-landing"—a nod designated the foot of West Eighty-sixth street—"when you got a

half-Nelson on me and insisted on my coming aboard to renew my taste for uncut Scotch, and the whole crew of your launch couldn't have pried me loose—"

"Jolly glad," Kendal commented as if he meant it. "I take it, then, I didn't do anything to make Miss Claire nervous—?"

"Who? Teddy? Listen, sport: If that little lady had any nerves to be racked by the spectacle of a plastered gentleman, she'd be doing time in a sanitarium instead of that bucket of blood they call the Double Eagle."

Donlin was alert to observe the reaction to this speech, whose crude implications were altogether calculated. It took a form he hadn't looked for. The return of the steward gave Kendal time to make up a mind which—when he had lifted his glass to Donlin, chirped "Cheerio!" and taken one nourishing deep pull—he spoke with pointed deliberation.

"That is precisely why, Mr. Donlin, I'm rather hopin' you may care to help me get Miss Claire out of that atmosphere."

"Says which?"

"Don't misunderstand me. I've knocked about a good bit, you know—I don't carry much excess luggage in the way of illusions. And Miss Claire has been most astonishingly frank with me—I don't imagine it's news to you that she's had a rotten time of it, rather, thus far. And while I don't say a husband twice her age would completely dress the balance, even if it shouldn't succeed the experiment would leave her comfortably provided for."

Donlin was by no means unaware that it was one of his pet failings to adopt what is termed a cynical attitude toward all human relations; and it was acceptable to his vanity that he had to repent this attitude on very rare occasions. But he now began to surmise that this might be one of them. Up to this point such interest as Kendal had for him had been wholly owing to certain anomalies apparent to his pretensions, wholly speculative and skeptical. Now all at once he found himself beginning to like the man.

"Count me in, if that's the plot," Donlin heard himself saying. "I'll play along and won't squawk if all the cut I get is one of frosted fruitcake to put under my little white pillow."

6

"Thanks very much." Kendal was pensive for a moment, his gaze ranging out across the oily waters to the contours of Manhattan. As though involuntarily one hand strayed toward a binocular that lay on the table beside his glass, but on abrupt reconsideration was withdrawn. "You're most awf'ly good and all

that," he declared. "It's going to make me feel a good bit easier, I don't mind admittin', to have somebody I can turn to who knows all the ropes, this side. Teddy's a dear girl but, as often as not, when I ask for information about your American customs and expressions, she simply laughs, I can't get a thing out of her. You've no idea what a weird feelin' it is to be in a country where everybody pretends to speak English and find one doesn't know half the time what they're talkin' about."

"Shouldn't think you ought to take it so hard. I always thought you Aussies shook a right mean slang."

"Oh! found that out, did you?" Kendal gave a nervous laugh. "You have a good ear, Mr. Donlin."

"Thanks for the second thought," Donlin replied good humoredly. "I haven't been at your crew with a stomach-pump. Teddy didn't wise me last night, either, more than to say she had met you at Cannes. To be perfectly fair, I wasn't just sure you hailed from Australia, once or twice I've had a notion that if anybody mentioned South Africa you'd say 'Jo'burg' with your next breath."

Kendal at this slewed on Donlin an odd, long, hard look. But it was part of Donlin's stock in trade to be sized up by experts, and after a minute Kendal's stare relaxed into a grin.

"I say! but you are sharp, you know. That is, unless you're pullin' my leg. Because—well, of course, England's home, but I've knocked about a good bit in both Australia and South Africa."

"I was in the Intelligence Service during the War," Donlin confessed to ease the man's mind —"mixed a good deal with the Anzacs and South Africans, among others. Funny how old Service tricks stick — I mean, how a fellow goes on using them more or less unconsciously. I just can't help analyzing voices and reading signs in general and putting two and two together."

"I believe you! Perhaps —" Kendal absently reached for the binocular again — "some day when we get to know each other better, I may ask you to look into one or two questions I can't seem to make sense of, no matter how I try."

"Anything serious?"

"One might be murder. Might be anything." Kendal was fiddling nervously with the glass. "Mysterious disappearance of my secretary in Cannes last Spring. I was frightfully cut up about it —still am. Splendid chap Galbreath, James Galbreath — had been with me more than ten years. Colonial stock — picked him up in Jo'burg in '19. Never

knew him to go off the rails, no bad habits—I mean to say, human and all that, but a gentleman. He'd gone ashore on a little matter, night he vanished . . ."

Kendal gave his embarrassed laugh again. "Oh!" I suppose there's no point in my not tellin' you he had taken Teddy ashore to her hotel. She'd been dinin' on board with us. Galbreath was pretty hard hit, and there isn't much doubt that Teddy was sweet on him, too. They hadn't known each other too long, but they were about of an age and well matched in every way—it seemed so perfectly natural I was all for it, hence the dinner—"

"Decent of you."

"Any man would do as much for a friend. Fact is, I wasn't thinkin' of myself as in the runnin' at the time, never did till Jim Galbreath was definitely out of it. . . . As I was sayin': Galbreath left the launch to wait at the landin'-stage, took Teddy round to her hotel in a taxi, said good night after remarkin' he guessed he'd walk back by way of the Promenade de la Croisette—and was never seen again. The police at Cannes were an absolute wash-out. First and last I don't recall their makin' one intelligent suggestion. All they did was preen their moustaches and ask annoyin' questions."

"You mean, about Teddy."

Kendal had the binocular at his eyes, but now turned an open stare on Donlin instead. "Didn't anybody ever tell you the motto of the French police?—'cherchez la femme!' They're the smartest in the world, 'specially on the detective side, but if those birds can't locate a woman in the show they just lose heart—it ain't regular and they won't play."

"You've spotted it." Kendal had a reminiscent chuckle, half vexed, half sad. "I know it was standin' by, helpless, and watchin' them bear down so hard on Teddy that made me realize how much her happiness meant to me. And when they couldn't turn up anything to prove she knew more than she was tellin', they as good as told me there wasn't any case and never had been—Galbreath had simply gone stale on his job and cut his stick without troublin' himself to give me notice. As if ten years hadn't taught me to know the boy better than that!"

He wagged his head, sighed. "Well! there you are—Mystery Number One."

"Any connection between it and Two?"

"Not the remotest, old chap. That was Cannes, three months ago. Two's right under our noses. Half a mo'." Kendal trained the binocular on the New York shore. "I only stumbled on it yesterday by the merest fluke,

usin' this gadget for no purpose but to pass the time away. And now, after sleepin' on it—I expect you would say sleepin' it off!—I don't mind ownin' I'm tempted to believe it was all in my eye, or perhaps in the muggy old bean."

His voice trailed off into a mumble as the glass, raking the ranked apartment houses that overlook the Drive, at length came to a point. But the next instant—"Holy Mackerel!" the Briton violently expostulated, and showed his guest a face that unmistakably had lost a shade or two of its composure. "It was bad enough yesterday," he stammere, "but today—either I'm plumb loco or that ornery coot's back on the job in the same crazy get-up *but wearin' goggles!* Here" —shaky-hands pressed the glass on Donlin—"take this, will you, like a good chap, and see if you see what I saw!"

7

Donlin owed much to a way he had of looking not quite bright while actually functioning at the peak of his capacity as expert in one of the most abstruse and exacting of all arts. He was none the less glad now of an excuse to hide his eyes from his host during the time he needed to adjust the lenses and follow agitated directions.

"Take off from the capstone of that monument over there; three mill. points to the right, a tallish block of flats, red brick with greystone facin'."

"Check."

"Now directly under its cornice: top row of windows, fourth from the corner—"

"Got it."

Donlin's disengaged hand made a sign for silence.

The field of the glass now centered on a window the more readily to be singled out because, unlike any of its neighbors, it invited the stark pour of sunlight with awning, shade and lower sash up as far as they would go. Immediately back of its sill that preposterous figure posed which Donlin had heard Kendal picture to Teddy: a weedy little runt of a man, so lean his ribs could have been counted and his arms looked like pipe-stems, his skin so unaccustomed to the sun it shone an almost ghastly white, naked but for brief baby-blue drawers, a crimson four-in-hand tie, leather gloves, a derby, and a pair of those large dark sunglasses that motorists affect—and describing with utmost rapidity and precision a string of small gestures, now with one hand, now with the other touching points of his anatomy and its strange accoutrement, his nose and ears, his shoulders and stomach, his tie, occasionally his hat,

its brim or crown.

"Got a piece of paper of any sort about you, Mr. Kendal. No —then here." Donlin hastily fished a pencil and a dead envelope from his own pockets and, passing them over, again sighted the distant window. "Just take down the numbers I call, please, and show all the speed you can. This egg's a fast worker. All set?—1, 12, 12—break—19, 5, 20—break—"

His reading briskly rattled on through two or three minutes. Then Donlin snapped "That's all!" and, springing up, darted to the rail, to peer intently forward, both down the side and along the deck.

In the upshot he turned back a bit crestfallen. "Too slow, I guess. Anyway, I didn't catch the sign-off. My friend," he announced to the staring yachtsman: "you've caught a fish. Shouldn't wonder if it was a shark, at that, with teeth complete—to be handled with care. That bird up there ain't the loon you might think."

He sat down and took a well-earned swig.

"If it's all the same to you, Mr. Donlin," Kendal ventured: "would you mind bein' a trifle less zoological and more lucid —?"

"Sorry. I mean, you've tapped a private wireless, so to speak. Our friends up there — maybe you didn't notice the other sportsman, standing back of the human semaphore and feeding him the stuff to send—are communicating with somebody on board one of the boats hereabouts by the Flash Code."

"'The Flash Code'?"

"And we've every right to figure they're up to something sinful because they're afraid to trust their messages to the air, radio operators being notoriously the worst gossips ever: while it stands to reason they're signalling some one on the river and not over on the Jersey shore, seeing that for land communications the telephone would be just as cheap and even more secret. The Flash," Donlin pursued, taking over the envelope to study the numbers Kendal had jotted down —"is the system the race-track mob first cooked up to beat the pool-rooms when public betting was made illegal and the telegraph companies stopped furnishing direct pool-room service. They would plant a man at the track-side to flash the results as the horses came under the wire, using the same signals we've been catching, and another a couple of miles away, maybe, up a tree or something, with a telescope on the track bird. They had arranged in advance to delay the results getting through to the pool-rooms on the leased wires of the information services—say,

fixed the operators on the sending end to hold the dispatches back a few minutes—while they were holding a leased telephone line open to the city. That way, they would phone the winning numbers in, slap down their last-minute bets before the poolrooms knew the race was even started, and clean up. Killings that ran into six figures were made that way before the poolrooms tumbled and their information services adopted the Flash and used it—as they do today — to beat the track releases."

"Extrawdnry!" To this priceless Britishism Kendal added a query in spirit as racial; "And do you mean to tell me the practice is a matter of general knowledge —"

"Never said it was general. Thousands know about it, but I don't suppose twenty men, all told, can send the Flash or read it."

"I mean to say, the authorities take no steps to put a stop to it."

"They do what they can. Every time they get an excuse the stewards rule a Flasher off the tracks; but they've got to have something more on him than merely making goofy passes with his hands. If it would interest you, if racing doesn't bore you—"

"My dear man! I'm mad about it, always have been."

"That so? Thought you yachting bugs didn't go in very deep for anything except salt water. Then it might amuse you to run up the river some day and take in Saratoga. I'll tag along, if you're polite enough to want me, and show you Dancing Wallie flashing from the track lawn any afternoon and nobody lifting a finger to forbid it. The elements of the code are perfectly simple: Right hand to right shoulder is one; to the stomach, two: to left shoulder, three; to mouth, four; to right ear, five; to necktie, ten. Left hand to right shoulder, six; to stomach, seven; to left shoulder, eight; to mouth, nine; to tie, twenty. Either hand on brim of hat, zero; tapping the brim, Attention. What? or Please repeat; taking it off means O-K—I've got you."

"Most amazin'! Still, I can't quite get it through my head why the—ah—operator, as one might say, up in that window, had to dress up—or undress, rather—in that mad fashion."

"Oh that's easy." Donlin was, however, patient. "He has to keep the awning up to be visible, and the sunlight makes the room so hot that he finds it more comfortable to work stripped; but he has to wear a hat and necktie, because they're essential to the code. Against a background of ordinary dark clothing his hands would show up well enough; but

against his bare flesh they'd be practically invisible; hence the gloves, to make them stand out. As for the goggles . . . You say he didn't wear any yesterday? Well: he found the sun hard on his eyes, so he took measures to protect them today. And that's that. But this"—Donlin tapped the intercepted message—"is different. I picked up the rudiments of the deciphering game in the Intelligence, but if this is any way involved—well, I'm no Hartikoffer, maybe I'll have to have a bit of help. That's if the business interests you sufficiently, Mr. Kendal."

"Oh, it's no end interestin' and all that; but after all," Kendal naively argued, "it doesn't seem likely it concerns me any way, does it?"

"That's for you to tell me. Think it over. You lost a valued secretary some time ago under still unexplained circumstances; now if this Flash stuff is meant for any member of your crew—there's no telling, there may be a link between the two mysteries."

"I should call that highly improbable." Kendal betrayed symptoms of a disposition to become stuffy. "One ought to know one's own crew, don't you think? All but three of mine have been with me ever since this boat was put into commission, every man of the original lot from master down to stoker was an ex-R.N. holding a citation for gallantry in action and selected for me by a friend in the Admiralty."

"Weren't taking any chances, were you?"

"My dear man! I meant Les Trois Amis to be the home for me it has been—I haven't slept ashore a night in nine years. When one is plannin' to live like that, one naturally wants to know all about the people one is to live with."

"But the three who came later: how much do you know about them? and were any of them signed on, by any chance, about the time of, before or following Mr. Galbreath's disappearance?"

"Why! now you remind me, all of them since . . ."

"If I were you, then," Donlin lightly recommended, I'd programme myself for a fat think."

"I don't just see the occasion."

"Neither do I, if you don't. What's more, I'm not honing to horn in on anything that doesn't concern me. Still, we both know this much: You're a rich man, and all rich men have their private worries. So do poor men, for that matter, but it's seldom worth anybody's trouble to try to make a poor man pay through the nose for the privilege of sleeping easy."

"Oh I say!" Kendal's mouth was grim now, his slate-grey eyes

frosty. "Are you takin' it upon yourself to suggest I'm open to blackmail?"

"God forbid!" Donlin made his own eyes infantile. "What put that into your head? But you'd give something—wouldn't you? —to see Galbreath again or be assured that he was alive and well and still a good friend of yours."

"That goes without saying."

"And pass a better night if you didn't have to fret, now I've put it into your head, about the three strangers."

"See here, sir!" It was as if Donlin all innocently had set his fingers on a secret spring; the shock caused Kendal to rear up in his chair as though but little more would be needed to bring him to his feet in a fighting temper; but at the same time his sanguine cheeks showed grey, his glare flickered like a flame in the wind, and a distinct quiver sounded in his bluster. "What the devil are you gettin' at?"

"Damn' if I know—more than the three recent additions to your crew. What else are we talking about, anyway?"

"Sorry," Kendal the next instant mumbled, shame-faced and took himself in hand. "Thought I heard you say something you didn't. I apologize. Now if you can make allowances for my nerves being rather ragged, we'll have another spot of tonic."

"Just as you like. But make mine short and thin this time, please."

Donlin sat down and busied himself once more with the binocular. Further conversation could serve no purpose until the man had had the dram he thought he needed to pull himself together.

8

"That show's over for a while, I guess." The steward having performed his office and departed, Donlin put the binocular aside and nodded over a replenished glass. "They've dropped the awning. Wish I'd known where to watch for the sign-off."

"What's that?"

"A display of something white at the receiving end, like waving a handkerchief or towel, or a light flashed on and off in a window; 'yours received and contents duly noted.' "

"Once you've sunk your teeth in a theory you do stick to it, don't you?" The new heart which Kendal had put into himself proved a turn for dour humour. "Nothing will content you but to place the receivin' end on board this yacht. As a sleuth-hound, if you ask me, you're by Sherlock Holmes out of Bulldog Drummond."

"It doesn't sound just right, somehow. Still, I'm sure you

meant it as a compliment. Of of course!" Donlin allowed in a lazy stretch, "I'm only guessing. Even if I have retired, the old instinct is still kicking. I hate like hell to meet up with any problem and let it lick me."

"Well!"—Kendal struck a note of reluctance out of key with his professions—"I hope you won't let this one lick you. If you really think there's a chance in a thousand of its leadin' us to a solution of the question, what became of Jim Galbreath, expense is no consideration."

"Let's go, then." Donlin sat up, no longer lazy. "Suppose we take the inquest up where we broke it off. What about these three—ah—newcomers?"

"The first is the secretary I engaged when I finally gave up hope of ever gettin' Jim back; the second, an emergency radio operator; the other a middle-aged Irishman we picked up in Boston last week as temporary substitute for a stoker who is in sick-bay with a broken leg."

"The radio operator would seem to be a promising subject for distrustful dissection."

"We signed him on at Halifax, where my old radio man had to leave us to return to England because of his father's death. The port authorities highly recommended this lad Axton. He's a Canadian, about thirty years old, an excellent operator, with certificates and references all proper."

"And the secretary?"

"A youngish American named Niles; likable chap, well bred and educated. I had only known him six weeks or so, but took a fancy to him because he was a friend of Galbreath's, through whom we met. Niles told me he was deliberately squanderin' a little inheritance as an investment, so to speak; knockin' about Europe in pursuit of colour and inspiration for a novel—claims to have literary inclinations."

"American, eh? and a friend of Galbreath's! I take it, then, of Teddy's, too."

"Don't think so. Niles was rather popular with the American colony at Cannes, I gathered, pretty much tied up, most of the time, with social engagements. We didn't see much of him—never, as I remember, when Teddy was in our party."

"But Teddy must have got about in the American colony, too."

"Not to any great extent. She's a strange girl when you know her, naturally rather shy and retirin'. She gave me to understand she had saved up to realize a life ambition, a trip to Europe. When her money was gone, she would go back to her dancin'—and did. She hadn't any silly social ambitions and didn't attempt to

make up to anybody at Cannes; she's very level-headed and, I imagine, knew she wouldn't make much way if it got about that she had been a dancer in a New York cabaret."

"Galbreath ever tell you how he and Teddy got to know each other?"

"I believe he did mention that they had met through some acquaintance, but who it was I don't remember."

"We're forgetting Mr. Niles. He was in Cannes, of course, at the time of Galbreath's disappearance?"

"As it happens, he wasn't. He turned up a day or so later, learned of the unhappy business, and came out to the yacht to ask if he could be of any service. Said he was just back from a week in Marseilles."

"Is he on board at present?"

"He is. Would you care to see him?"

"There's no hurry. Just now I'm more interested in the lay out of the yacht. If the receiver of the Flash does happen to be planted on you, he must be some one in a position to catch the signals from either side as the vessel swings to the tide, without attracting attention. He can't read them except as we did, with a glass; therefore he must have quarters to himself with ports on both sides."

"I see. Niles naturally has the run of the ship, all the opportunity he could want to use a binoeular unobserved. The radio room, where Axton spends most of his time, looks to starboard, but opens into the chart room which has windows on both sides. The upper gallery gratin's on the fireroom, where Malony is stationed, run the width of the ship with ports at both ends."

"As we were, then: Niles, Exton and Malony, all three, still in the picture, and nothing to tell us how to fit a frame round the right one; that is, if either of 'em is enough of a wrong one to be the right one. There's still every chance, of course, the lead is here." Donlin's pencil tapped the scribbled envelope. "It might save the old nervous system a heap of wear and tear to withdraw into the Silences and see what the human intelligence, if any, can make of this. I could do with another scrap of paper, if it isn't too much trouble, but I'd just as soon you fetched it yourself instead of ringing for the steward. The less we give the crew to gas about the better."

But by the time Kendal returned from below with a sample of the yacht's embossed stationery Donlin was ready to hold out brighter hopes.

"I'm plumb dumb, and don't let nobody tell you different". Here I've been sitting and looking this document straight in the

face for a quarter of an hour and I never noticed till this minute there ain't a number in the mess bigger than 25. That's not counting 30 and 73; they are telegraphers' slang that everybody uses; 73 is a sort of 'Howdy, sucker! I'm fine and the same to you'; and 30 is the universal sign-off; 'No more at present and God bless everybody—amen.' So it begins to look like this Flash mob isn't bothering to gun the works with cipher—just assigning each letter a numeral between 1 and 26; and with 5 showing oftenest here, and the fifth letter of the alphabet and the most used, as every kindergarten cryptographer knows, I'm betting they didn't think it worth their trouble to scramble the numerals any, just let 1 stand for A, 2 for B, and so on. If that's the case, anybody in the know ought to be able to read the stuff as fast as it's flashed—without taking it down on paper, I mean, for subsequent decoding. Now if you'll just hold your hosses a mite longer . . ."

The pencil got off to a faltering start but was fairly racing across the notepaper at the finish.

"Get this," Donlin grunted, and sat back: "Heed 'em and weep. . . . 'All set to take rumdumb tonight. Stop. White Mike lights this p.m. Wolverine—will pull the badge on him when he leaves the Dump. Stop. Fish-eye says he sizes up a battler, and there's just a chance he might be half sober, so be sure to plant duds in his rod in case he travels heeled. Stop. Look for flash confirming this and last-minute dope five-thirty to six."

Donlin sought Kendal's eyes above the paper and finding them both confused and dogged, with a hesitation that was almost apologetic offered the transcription that the man might see for himself.

"What more proof do you want that I didn't smell a rat without good reason — and his nest isn't on any other vessel?"

"Afraid I don't follow." But there wasn't breeze enough to make the paper rattle as it did in Kendal's fingers. "This is all Greek to me."

"Promise to keep your hair on and I'll interpret. The accent is mostly on the first syllable of 'rumdumb'. You've been working your elbow overtime since you started combing the night clubs for the only skirt in the world. Maybe you had your reasons; but no guy can make himself a torch-light parade every night in New York without getting a reputation. That ought to make it plain enough whom your Flash friends are getting set to take tonight."

"Whether you're right or not, I daresay I deserve it," Kendal said in a strangled voice, his face

dull crimson. "But don't mind me, please continue."

"White Mike Brewer is the daddy of all the shakedown artists. When he puts on the war paint as a copper and bulges into a speakeasy the patrons just know the pie-wagons backed up to the door to take them riding. He's been out of town on another job but gets back this afternoon on the Wolverine Express; and Fish-eye — that's Schwartzstein—wouldn't hear of any attempt to take you without White Mike's expert assistance."

"Who is this Schwartzstein?"

"Leonard Schwartzstein, fall-dough provider for all the big time rackets—"

"My mistake, no doubt; but I thought you offered to interpret."

"The fall-dough provider is the financial backer of the racket; provides the bank-roll for the mob to fall back on in case of any slip-up, as well as to meet running expenses. Schwartzstein is fall-dough banker for the Dump, for instance—The Double Eagle, where this mob hangs out that's aiming to take 'Rumdumb'. I noticed him lamping you last night when he didn't think I'd be looking—and I was doing a tail-spin on the floor with Teddy. He can see you're a husky and is afraid you might put up a battle, and he's all yellow, like every con man, so he tells this rat they've wished on you to change the slugs for duds in your rod—extract the live cartridges from your pistol and replace them with blanks. The lay-out is for White Mike, posing as a Central Office detective, to jump you as you're leaving the Dump tonight, flash a tin—phony police badge—and shake you down for whatever the mob thinks you ought to be glad to pay to duck an introduction Downtown — that's Police Headquarters in Centre Street."

There was a pause. Then—"Most ingenious, I'm sure," the very voice of an idly amused Englishman observed. "But my dear chap! don't you think you're by way of wastin' a rare romantic talent? I can name half a dozen novelists who are doin' famously on nothing like so much imagination."

Donlin gave a small snort and roused up to help himself to a cigarette from the cabinet that stood, with their glasses, on the little table between them. The movement enabled him to rake the deck all roundabout without seeming to and satisfy himself that none of the personnel of Les Trois Amis had wandered within earshot. But when he did settle down to pursue the conversation it was though he addressed an interested third party.

"Here's a bird," he argued, "who admits he's got so much kale he can afford to marry just

to set the lady up for life with alimony—that's if the marriage shouldn't take—and proves how solid he is by running a steam yacht Vincent Astor wouldn't turn up his nose at. This bird admits he manned the yacht in the beginning exclusively with hand-picked heroes, so he could pound his ear of nights without any fear of being got at by undesirable landlubbers, and that he hasn't slept a single night ashore since 1920. She's ocean-going, every inch of her, but he keeps her in commission nineteen years without once taking a notion to cross the Atlantic, and when finally he does get his spunk up to pay America a call the adventure gets on his nerves so he goes on a binge that lasts a week—and if he's a natural souse I'm the Anti-Saloon League! What's more, he packs a gun when he goes ashore—I know because I'm the little guy that fell in astern and heaved and shoved like hell last night, when he had to be helped up the accommodation ladder. He sports all the ear-marks of a John Bull that's gone Colonial, including a swell public-school accent, but when he gets a jolt from something unexpected he lets out a 'Holy Mackerel!' that nobody never picked up east of Cape Cod and talks about an 'ornery coot' and being 'plumb loco' in the only twang that's natural. I happen, entirely by accident and meaning no harm, to say something about 'the three strangers', and he r'ars back on his haunches and paws the air and shows the whites of his eyes like somebody had smacked his muzzle with a rattlesnake. And *then* he has the crust to let on he hasn't got any skeleton in his cupboard and accuses me of having the imagination of a fool author because, out of the simple goodness of my heart, I try to wise him to the way a New York con mob is fixing to frame him!

"Ain't it always like that?" Donlin appealed to his discarnate auditor. "I go my humble course through life, scattering sweetness and light and doin' my damnedest to let no day pass without at least one good deed done: and what do I get for it all? I'd be ashamed to tell you."

And it was as if Donlin actually had succeeded in conjuring up a third party to the conference, for the voice that toward the end of another minute answered was American to the last inflexion.

"All right: I give up. I'm licked. My home port is Baltimore. I'll admit anything but one thing, if you'll just open up and tell how you came to connect me with 'The Three Strangers'."

10

"I didn't," Donlin replied, dis-

assembling some mean satisfaction — "anyway, not until you forced me to. I used that term quite casually a while back and you promptly blew several fuses, and that put me in mind of something I might never have remembered, otherwise. They bumped off an innocent bystander in a speak-easy brawl, fortnight or so ago, over on Thirty-ninth near Eighth avenue. When the smoke cleared away and the police boiled in, some old-timer recognized the remains and told the reporters; and the Sun man wrote quite a piece about this Slim Getrick, the said deceased. Seems he was one of three partners that worked the Western race-tracks with great success in the first years of this century and were known as 'The Three Strangers' because they were always rowing among themselves and practically never on speaking terms. Then one night they plugged the wheelman in a crooked roulette layout in Oakland, and the partnership dissolved. Getrick and one of his side-kicks, Halloran, drew terms in San Quentin for manslaughter, but the third parner, Kildare was his name, made a clean getaway and never was heard of again. Halloran came out a stir-bug—"

"A what?"

"Convict that cracks under the strain of imprisonment — goes buggy in stir — and never gets over it. He drifted East, but only to bum around till he did a flop in the street one day, year or so ago—when they picked him up he was cold. Getrick had tougher stuff in him—took to house-prowling, did another stretch in Joliet, came on to New York when his time was up, just after the War, tried to click with the swell mob but couldn't seem to make the grade, and dropped out of sight till he made the mistake of getting caught between two rival gangs of gunmen that night."

"Why are you tellin' me this?" the owner of Les Trois Amis querulously demanded. "It's all bilge and you know it. Getrick was shot dead holdin' up a jewellery store in Massillon, Ohio, June twenty-first last. I read the account myself in a copy of a Massillon paper I came across in Cannes one day. It was the same Getrick and no mistake: the paper called him 'Slim' and mentioned his term in San Quentin."

"How come a copy of a Massillon paper in Cannes?"

"Why, Niles brought it aboard, one day shortly after I engaged him, and left it kicking round in the saloon. Massillon's his home town."

"Oh I see. Funny—isn't it?" Donlin asked without expression —"the yen a guy has for home-town news when he's travelling. I suppose Niles had this paper sent him regularly."

"Daresay; though, now you ask me, I don't actually recall ever seein' more than that one copy."

"Give a think."

"Are you tryin' to make me believe that paper was queer—?"

"Either it was printed on purpose to be left where you'd see it, or the New York Sun let itself be played for a sucker. Seeing that the story was what decided Kildare that the climate of New York would maybe be healthier than he'd been figuring, it might be safe enough, after all, to run over and make another play for the little lady he'd taken such a fancy to in Cannes—wasn't it?"

"I suppose it was, largely."

"It would be interesting," Donlin ventured, when he had given the other time to get over some of his chagrin, "to hear Kildare's side of the story."

"I don't mind tellin' you." Vocally the British-Colonial was himself again, though he had apparently made up his mind to abandon all other pretense with Donlin. "Back in '99 I found myself an orphan with less than two-hundred dollars to my name —all that was left of my old man's estate when the lawyers finished with it. He had ruined himself runnin' a racin' stable; and horses were in my blood— I couldn't keep away from the tracks and didn't try. In the next three years I ran my original roll into fifty-thousand playin' the ponies by my own handicappin'. It got so that the bookies wouldn't give me a price, so I picked up Halloran and Getrick and put them on the pay-roll at twenty-five a day to act as my bettin' commissions on the q.t. They were never in any sense, you understand, my partners. The scheme worked well because we never so much as nodded to one another in public — they would wait for me at a prearranged time in the paddock and I would slip them their bettin' orders as I passed—till Getrick got drunk one night in 'Frisco and blabbed the tale in the bar of the St. Francis, and Dressy Dan dubbed us 'The Three Strangers'."

"Definitely crabbing the act."

"Naturally. So I decided to chuck it till the bookies forgot and I could try again with a new brace of secret commissioners. I met Getrick and Halloran at a hotel in Oakland that night and gave them a dinner and a thousand each as a partin' bonus. They felt pretty happy about it because they knew a gamblin'-house nearby where they could get a private game and — you know the type—they were goin' to wake up worth a million each next morning. So after dinner we went along and tried our luck. I dropped a few hundred before it was time to pull out and catch my train, but Getrick and Hal-

loran were doin' so famously they could hardly spare the time to say good night. I hadn't told them anything about my immediate plans, nor anybody else, for that matter, because I didn't want the news to get about and make me the target for a hundred farewell touches. Somebody they knew, but I didn't from Adam, strolled into the private room as I was leavin', but I met nobody else on my way out; and twenty minutes or so later high words and shots were heard, three men were seen leavin' on the run, and the wheelman was found lyin' dead across the layout. As luck would have it, when I dropped off the train to stretch my legs at Albuquerque the next day I bought a local paper and the first thing that caught my eye was an A.-P. despatch from Oakland sayin' Getrick, Halloran and I were wanted for murder."

Kildare-Kendal paused to wet his whistle and Donlin remarked that it had been a mean break.

"I thought so! I walked right on into the station and out the other side and never stopped for breath till I was across the Mexican border. I had closed out my bankin' account in Frisco and had practically my entire fortune with me in thousand-dollar yellow-backs. That made things simpler. Three months later I turned up in Sidney as Timothy Kendal, doubled my roll at the tracks, and went in heavily for sheep raisin'. In ten years I was a millionaire and fed to the teeth with Australia. Some ghastly ass I met somewhere told me South Africa reminded him of the States, so I had to go and see for myself. I liked the country better and had some profitable flutters in diamonds, but it wasn't any more like home than this anchorage is like the Rade de Cannes; so I pulled up stakes again and went to England as soon as the War was over. I was lonesome and homesick as a lost pup in London, and made the mistake of hangin' round the Savoy and other spots where Americans swarm just for the pleasure of hearin' home-folks talk. Somebody who remembered me from the old days must have seen me and carried the word back, because it wasn't long before I received a letter from Getrick demandin' money for himself and Halloran under threat of exposure."

"And you knew what that meant."

"Both of them on my back for the rest of my days—I assuredly did! Even so, they could have had anything they wanted in reason if Getrick hadn't thought it necessary to open negotiations in such nasty terms. Helpin' a fellow in trouble for old times' sake was one thing, but submittin' to blackmail twen-

ty years after for a crime I didn't commit was a horse of another colour. I had just heard Les Trois Amis was for sale. It had been built to order for Baron Krauscher, who, however, died soon after the hull was launched. I bought it from his estate . . . And here I am."

The man heaved a deep sigh.

"Why so wobegone?" Donlin wondered. "You can't complain you haven't had a life."

"Oh I've been lucky in some ways," Kendal agreed; "but I'm gettin' along, the best of my time's behind me, I want to come home."

"Quit kidding yourself; remember Getrick's gone the way Halloran went two years ago, and all con men are yellow—leave the Flash mob to me and don't worry. Hey!" Donlin remonstrated as Kendal jumped up with a half - smothered exclamation. "What's biting you now? Where are you going?"

"I've just remembered it's my duty and pleasure, now we know what we know, to boot young Mr. Niles over the side."

"Keep your shirt on. Maybe we're wrong. You don't want to do the lad injustice—do you?—because present appearances seem to be against him."

"But that doctored newspaper [illegible]!"

"We can't tell, it may have been planted on him. Con men are rats, but rats are cunning. This mob's got brains enough to have found out your new secretary hailed from Massillon and sent him a cooked edition of his hometown paper anonymously, just to put you off the track if you should happen to have a mean suspicious nature."

"How are we goin' to tell, then—?"

"There's another Flash message due this evening between five-thirty and six. It won't come through, though, unless those stiffs up in that window get the code OK to their opening signal. Any flashing light or something white from this boat to be visible to them up there must be visible to anybody watching for it from the level of the Drive as well. We've only got to plant a lookout—I know just the man—and have him spot the porthole which the OK shows, and we'll have the rat dead to rights. And it's only through getting the goods on him that you stand any show of scaring the truth about Galbreath out of him; as long as he knows you're only acting on suspicion, he'll lie till he's black in the face and swear you're misjudging him. You can give him the boot as hard as you please, but that's one secret he'll take with him."

"You're right, of course," Kendal reluctantly conceded, but —"

"Then sit down, please, and ring for the steward or somebody. No—no more for me, because it's too hellish hot to get any fun out of two-fisted drinking, and none for you because you've got your word to Teddy to honour. Maybe you don't remember asking her to come aboard this afternoon in time for tea and stay to dinner, and promising if she would she'd find you unusually sober, but you did, and I was a witness. Besides, you've got to keep your eye peeled the rest of the afternoon to see that neither of our suspects gets the needles and sneaks ashore by any means before five-thirty. Meantime you're going to order the launch manned to run me over to Hoboken and be at the Eighty-sixth street landing to pick me up again at five or thereabouts."

"I'm in your hands. God help me," Kendal meekly agreed, pressing the button. "I only hope you won't mind if I make so bold as to enquire what part Hoboken plays in this scullduggery."

"It's there I'll find our lookout, either Macy the First Passer or Dutch Jerman; both old Flash Code experts, ruled off the tracks by the Pinkertons. They hang out in Hoboken to be handy to Boode's poolroom. If I hurry, I'll catch Macy while he's broke and sober. I'd rather have him drunk with his one eye, at that, than the Dutchman sober with his two. It'll set you back twenty-five bucks for either, but I guess you won't think that too much if it buys news of Galbreath."

11

Teddy Claire was beforehand with Donlin for tea aboard Les Trois Amis; but Donlin had put in a number of uncommonly active hours when, at a quarter after five, he found himself once more mounting the accommodation ladder. Inasmuch, however, as he had taken time to stop in his room for a bath and change, he showed fewer signs of dilapidation than humanity in general was displaying in that hour, when to say that the heat of the day had passed was merely to employ a figure of speech. The sun still rode high in a sky like a shield of tarnished brass, there was neither an evening breeze nor any earliest of one; and while the little group that Donlin found on the afterdeck of Les Trois Amis was bearing up, no member of it was able to muster spirit enough to claim more. Teddy alone in the summery, sheer and scanty garments of the modern modesty, looked half-way comfortable—and that didn't go, Donlin surmised, for her mind. Her countenance was fair enough, her smile quick and cool, her

self-possession entirely adequate; but Donlin had the impression that a shadow lurked at the back of her eyes.

The others of the group were the owner and his secretary, a mannerly young man with a dark face and dark eyes that went well with creamy flannels. He had an agreeable mode of speech, too, and other ingratiating little ways which he was generous with in his attitude toward his employer and the pretty guest but practised on the unpretending, unimpressive Mr. Donlin with more economy. Donlin inferred from this that neither Kendal nor Teddy had been chanting his praises behind his back, and was thankful for that. The less people found to say about him the happier this man was in his own vanity: he never thought so well of himself as when he found he had succeeded in making himself so unobtrusive that nobody else thought anything of him at all.

Shortly after he put in appearance Mr. Niles was observed to consult a neat strap-watch with a moderately concerned air; following which he inserted an amiable voice into the first crevice in the conversation.

"This is so very pleasant," he said, addressing Teddy Claire directly, but with a comprehensive smile that left neither his employer nor Donlin any cause to feel slighted, "that I simply hate to tear myself away, I mean I actually do. But I'm booked for dinner ashore with some friends and afterwards a play so I really must buzz along and dress. If you will excuse me . . ."

He shook hands all round most prettily, assured Miss Claire that it had been wonderful to make her acquaintance and that he did hope it was only the beginning, and took himself below.

As his sleek head dropped below the lip of the companionway Donlin consulted his own timepiece. The hands stood at 5:25. A moment later Kendal bethought himself of something that wanted his attention below, rose but without haste with a murmur of apology, and followed his secretary.

Donlin felt more than saw Teddy's eyes turn to him and responded with a dim smile that took no account of their troubled colour.

"Fine old boy," he said in a confidential voice.

"Old!" the girl echoed in faint impatience. "Why! he's just in the prime of life."

Donlin idly picked up the binocular. "Think so?" he dubiously enquired, examining the instrument with a vague frown.

"He's got all his best years before him."

"Yeah? Had any chance to talk to him alone this afternoon?"

"No—"

"Then he doesn't know it yet."

"Know what?"

"That he's got all his best years before him."

"I haven't got anything to do with it."

"You've got this much: He won't believe it unless you tell it to him and promise to make it come true."

"I'm not dreaming of it."

"All right."

Donlin put the glass to his eyes and began to finger its focussing devices. The girl with a hasty glance toward the companionway bent over to touch his sleeve.

"Listen, Stace: you've got a lot of influence with him—"

"Who?" Donlin demanded without lowering the binocular—"me?"

"I don't know how you did it, but he was perfectly straight when I came on board, and he hasn't touched a drop of anything but iced tea since. He's almost as steady as he used to be in Cannes and—"

"It wasn't me he promised to lay off the stuff today, if I'd consent, to come to tea and stay to dinner."

"No, but listen—please!" Teddy tugged demandingly at his sleeve. "I want you to do something, Stace. He'll listen to you, maybe. I know he won't to me. I want you to find some way to talk him out of coming to the Dump tonight."

"Hot chance."

"No, you can do it. You're clever—"

"Wouldn't kid me, would you, lady?"

"I'm not trying to. You *are* clever."

"All right, then; you listen to *me*. There's only one way to keep that bird from turning up at the Dump tonight, and you know what that is."

"What?"

"Promise him you won't go back there yourself."

"But Stace! I've got to, it's my living—"

"The future Mrs. Kendal doesn't have to dance in any dump for her living."

"You're crazy! I could never marry that man."

"Why not? He's goofy about you, and he's a prince."

"I know he is. That's why—"

Donlin dropped a glance under the eye-pieces that saw Teddy's hands twisting in her lap.

"Why what?"

"There are reasons—you don't know anything about."

"Neither do you know anything but what Slim Getrick and Leonard Schwartzstein wanted you to believe. But there's one thing you do know: you know this Kendal too well not to know he never handed anybody a dirty deal in all his born days."

To that there was no answer. Donlin, still holding the binocu-

lar in position, looked round to see Kendal leaving the companionway. The slate-grey eyes were dour. Donlin judged that the owner had found something interesting in his stateroom.

"Shake a leg." he hailed none the less gaily. "You don't want to miss a word of this. They've just raised the awning and waved the opening signal." Donlin glued his eyes to the glass. "Yop—and our little friend the plucked sparrow is about to do his comedy act all over. Only he doesn't seem to have his heart in it tonight, way he had at noon. And he's got all his clothes on, too; maybe that's the reason. And he ain't wearing his cheaters. Darned if it isn't Fire-cracker Rosey! Got that paper handy, Mr. Kendal, and the pencil? Take this down, then—I won't give you the code numbers. I'll just spell it right off the bat. As soon as he gets the O-K from this end . . . Let's go! B-U-L-L-S—"

Kendal took the message down as the letters slowly fell from Donlin's lips:

"Bulls boarded Wolverine 125th Street yanked White Mike off found tin on him trampling him in back room this minute. Stop. All bets off. Stop. Do nosedive into river and don't come up within rifle range, you poor crumb. Rumdumb wise."

By way of signature Donlin added a cheery *"Socko!"* and as he dropped the binocular laughed aloud.

"That's just how it ended," he explained. "Somebody sneaked up behind Rosey and beaned him with what looked like a length of rubber hose. I wonder could it have been some rude policeman?"

Nobody answered—only a patter of rubber-shod feet on the companionway followed by a flash of creamy flannels along the port deck, as Mr. Niles sped forward to be met by a boatswain at the head of the accommodation ladder. Upon his brawn the secretary flung himself with ill-advised fury, and from it rebounded to bring up against the deck-house with a thump that must have shaken every bone in his body. While he crouched against it, panting, rat-eyed, Kendal came between him and the rail. in his hand a pistol.

"Stick them up, Niles!" The British-Colonial voice cracked like a stock-whip. "And don't make any mistake—the slugs are back in the clip, the duds in my pocket. Stick 'em up and be quick."

The hands of the terrified animal lifted, trembling, to his ears.

"For gossake!" he sobbed—"y'ain't got any call to shoot me, Mr. Kendal! For gossake, turn that rod away!"

"If I get the truth out of you, not otherwise," Kendal snapped.

"In the meantime, bear in mind that a rumdumb's nerves are not to be trusted—my finger might tighten unintentionally on this trigger any instant. What did you do, you and your foul mob, with Jim Galbreath?"

"He's all right, I swear to God we didn't harm him!" the creature yammered. "We had to snatch him, but we didn't hurt him—just had him shanghaied on the brigantine Clarissa out of Marseilles for Hong Kong. Gossake! turn that rod the other way!"

Donlin plucked Kendal by the sleeve. "Can't you see the boy's telling the truth," he pleaded in clear and earnest accents. "No point in his lying to you is there, the way things are?"

Kendal blankly glared another instant, then shrugged, nodded to the boatswain—"Take him!" —and turned aft with Donlin, pocketting the pistol.

"That's how I figured it," Donlin explained. "It was their only way to get rid of Galbreath short of murder; a murder's out of a con mob's line. They haven't got the guts for it even on this side, and wouldn't dream of attempting it in France, where they couldn't possibly square the rap."

There was a noise like a sharp smack from over the side followed by a scream and a splash. The two men turned to hang over the rail. Below, on the lower grating of the accommodation ladder, the boatswain stood with his right foot in the air, in the attitude of a man who has just delivered a mighty kick. The launch of Les Trois Amis was standing out a dozen feet or so, a sailor with a boathook poised in its bows. Between the grating and the launch the water was in furious agitation; and as they watched a shape in creamy flannels thrashed to the surface and the launch nosed toward it.

"Oddly enough," Kendal thoughtfully observed, "Niles was unpopular from the first with the crew.'

12

The young woman whom they found waiting on the afterdeck had frightened brown eyes that looked abnormally big and dark in a face blanched by dismay.

"Wh—what"—she wretchedly faltered—"what happened?"

"I've got news for you," Kendal said. "But you mustn't thank me, thank Mr. Donlin. Prepare yourself for a shock, dear girl." He took the hands that had been clasped at Teddy's bosom and gently unclosed them. "There's every reason to believe Jim's alive, safe and well on a windjammer bound for Hong Kong."

"I'm so glad."

"I'm sure you are." Kendal spoke more slowly, as if the

words cost him something. "We'll get busy on the cables and see when he's due. Perhaps . . . in fact I'm sure we can arrange it for you to go out."

She said, unmistakably uncomprehending: " 'Go out'—?"

"To Hong Kong. I'll see about your transportation the first thing —"

"But why? why must I go to Hong Kong?"

"To meet Jim—to bring him back. Don't you want to?"

After a moment she slowly shook her head. 'No," she said. "I'm glad, of course, about Jim . . . but I just want to be here with you."

Donlin withdrew without advertising his intention. In the absence of an audible objection he took it that the maneuvre was unnoticed. He went forward and stopped by the rail beneath the bridge. A light draught was making down the river. It grew stronger and stirred the water till it chuckled. From somewhere in the distance, probably from some excursion boat, came strains of music. Donlin reflected that chance every so often was guilty of a charming gesture. That wasn't jazz, that was the Blue Danube Waltz they were playing.

COLONEL ABEL TALKS

Colonel Rudolf Abel spoke at a private meeting in the Moscow Press Club in March of this year. No one saw him arrive at the two-story club, ten minutes walk away from the Kremlin. And no one saw him leave. And no one was allowed to get near enough to him to have a few "private words."

And questions from the floor were definitely not in order.

Abel began his description of his experiences by telling those present (to quote the *Sunday Telegraph* of London for March 13, 1966):

> "I was not the great master spy they made me out to be. I was really only the radio operator. I was no second Sorge. The man who really master-minded the Soviet espionage network in the United States is still going strong."

Perhaps it should be added at this point, to again quote the *Sunday Telegraph,* that "most Soviet journalists presume he runs the Moscow spy school . . ."

women pirates

by W.O.G. Lofts

MANY women pirates have appeared in literature who are reputed to have actually lived. But my own researches bring to light very few indeed who are truly historically authentic. Penny bloods issued in the middle of the 19th century showed whole fleets of women pirate crews who sailed bare-breasted and who captured young sailors to gratify their desires. The wives of pirate captains have also been romanticised by hack writers who obviously used their vivid and colourful imagination to the full.

The reputedly notorious Lady Killagrew of Penryn, Cornwall—nicknamed by many writers 'The Pirate in Petticoats' was not in my estimation a pirate at all in the true sense of the word. She dressed at all times as a lady, and never served aboard ship. She was, in fact, the mother of Sir John Killagrew, Vice-Admiral of Cornwall, who was head of a pirate combine operating on shore (one can easily see here how corrupt the Governments were in those days); and once commanded a boat and steered a crew to capture a merchant

W.O.G. Lofts continues his series of articles on the Pirates of the 17th and 18th centuries with the story of some extraordinary women — not only those written about in the "penny dreadfuls" of great-grandfather's time — but also those women pirates who actually did "sail the Spanish Main"...

ship lying off-shore. In actual fact it would seem that only the crew boarded her, but the story has become twisted throughout the years, making it appear that the delicate lady personally killed all on board and then went back to breakfast.

The only case I have discovered of a captain's wife who could have been termed a pirate was Mrs. Maria Cobham, wife of Captain Cobham of Poole, Dorsetshire. When he first took Maria on board there was great discontent amongst the crew and his position as captain became perilous, to say the least. But by getting her husband to 'go easy' on the various punishments which were handed out to the crew from time to time, she soon became popular.

Maria, who dressed in naval uniform, was by all accounts a most bloodthirsty female. She once stabbed the captain of a Liverpool brig with her dirk, and on another occasion shot a ship's captain and his two mates with her pistol while they were tied up to the windlass. Later still she poisoned the whole crew of a captured vessel whilst they were in irons aboard her pirate ship. When eventually Captain Cobham and Maria retired from their plundering and the husband set himself up as a highly successful magistrate, Maria became so mentally deranged as a result of the peaceful life they were leading that she poisoned herself with laudanum.

But it was not until about September 1720 that our best story opens, when the Governor of Jamaica, weary of the ceaseless plundering activities of the swarms of pirates and buccaneers in the West Indies, commissioned a merchant ship, under a Captain Barnet, in an attempt to catch at least a few of them. The Captain, to his credit, succeeded, and caught the entire crew of one of them while the ship was at anchor—they were, apparently, the worse for drink. Being taken captive to San Jago de la Vega, Jamaica, the pirates were shortly tried by a Vice-Admiralty Court.

The trial was a mere formality, for all were found guilty of piracy and sentenced to death. But when they were asked the usual question, as to whether there was any reason why sentence should not be carried out, two of them replied to the Judge: "My Lord, we plead our bellies."

This was certainly not an unusual plea at that time. Even at that period of history, when laws were very harsh indeed, a court was not allowed to order the killing of an unborn child. A condemned woman, therefore, escaped the gallows if she could prove that she was pregnant. But in this case, this was certainly

not the kind of plea one would expect to hear from a couple of pirates!

According to some reports the pleas were greeted with ribald laughter from the crowd of people in the public dock. Bravado was always appreciated in such circumstances, and it was a time-honoured custom for pirates to give some sardonic joke in reply to the death sentence.

But these two pirates were not joking and insisted on being examined by the court doctor. After an examination down in the cells the doctor returned and announced to the astonished officials and the people in the court that the two pirates were undoubtedly women. and unquestionably pregnant. In the circumstances the Judge had no alternative but to commute their death sentences.

Spared the dreaded execution. the first of these women, named Mary Read, developed a high fever and died in prison before her child was born. The second, named Anne Bonny, was eventually freed from prison but nothing was ever traced of her whereabouts afterwards. She simply 'faded away', out of history.

For the beginning of their amazing careers: commencing with Anne Bonny, the account of her early life—related by herself in prison—reads like some sensational novel.

She was born Anne Cormac, out of wedlock, in a town near Cork in Ireland, about 1700, as a result of her father's attentions to their housemaid. As a result of the ensuing scandal her father, soon after she was born, gave up his practice as an attorney and went to live in Charleston, South Carolina, where he became a successful planter.

Anne. as a girl, was somewhat quick-tempered and even in her teens was supposed to have killed her English maid with a clasp-knife. This affair, however, was quickly hushed up, as the law was very lenient in those days where rich and powerful landowners were concerned. But later, when she was 16, Anne fell in love and married a young English smuggler named James Bonny. Her father. strongly suspecting that he was only after the family fortune, promptly told Anne to pack her bags and never darken his door again. According to some reports. Anne's rejoinder was to set fire one night to her father's house.

Realising that Anne now had no inheritance her husband in time deserted her, and so Anne found herself one day on the dockside at Charleston. She was soon greatly popular with the rough pirates in port, drinking with them in their taverns and she could, indeed, hold her own in a fight with any one of them.

Then Anne met a highly successful pirate captain by the name of Jack Rackham, a handsome, young and dashing philanderer who was named 'Calico Jack' because of the striped calico trousers he always wore.

There was obviously more to their attachment than just a seaman's casual affair; in fact, there is evidence to prove that they were undoubtedly in love with one another. When the time came for Calico Jack to return to sea he did not want to leave Anne behind and it was characteristic of colourful Calico Jack, therefore, to conceive the idea of taking her with him disguised as a man.

It must be remembered that it was one of the strictest codes of a pirate ship that women were not allowed at sea under any circumstances, and the penalty for a culprit found hiding or disguising a woman was death; the captain of the ship being no exception.

Calico Jack, however, had no fear of Anne being discovered, as not only did she disguise herself quite easily in the loose blouses and wide-fitting trousers that seamen wore in those days, but she was also a very good sailor and could even wield a cutlass as efficiently as any man.

In Anne's case it was quite easy to slip into the Captain's cabin to conduct her love affair without anyone being the wiser. It was also possible for her to hide the natural functions of nature in the seclusion of her lover's room. Even if her repeated visits to his cabin aroused suspicion in the minds of some of the other members of the crew, it must be concluded that this was passed off as homosexuality, which in those days was not uncommon on board ship.

Needless to say Anne soon found herself pregnant, and she was compelled to leave the ship for a while until after her baby was born. Anne was completely lacking in mother-love and soon deserted her child; she was quickly back on board once more and still in her disguise as a man.

Now aboard the pirate ship on this occasion was a young, clean-shaven, handsome man who greatly attracted Anne's attention. Incidentally, he was the first man to have diverted her attention since Calico Jack came into her life. Gradually, and in order not to cause Jack any jealousy, she developed a friendship with the good-looking young sailor which soon ripened into a very strong fascination.

Her love and admiration grew even stronger when she saw her new lover winning battles almost single-handed when fighting aboard plundered ships. Allowing her passion in time to over-

ride her discretion and the strict secret she kept of her sex, Anne finally confided to him her affections. She was probably the most astonished woman in history to learn that her lover was also a woman, and that her real name was Mary Read.

Calico Jack, who in the meantime had grown somewhat jealous of their frequent meetings and had threatened to cut the throats of both of them unless these meetings ceased, was it is said greatly amused when he learned from Anne that he now had two women aboard his ship.

Mary Read's upbringing reads even more sensationally than Anne Bonny's. She, too, was born out of wedlock and with her elder brother dying in babyhood, she was brought up as a boy to please the whims of her paternal grandmother. This paid off, as she was left a small inheritance—quickly spent. Mary was quite a tomboy and even worked as a footboy to a wealthy neighbour; later she signed on as cabin-boy on a man-o'-war dressed as a youth. Adopting a male disguise came naturally to her now and she later enlisted in the army, winning the admiration of her N.C.O.'s and officers whilst in battle in the Flanders. She also attracted the friendship of a young soldier which, in Mary's case, soon turned to love. After confessing to her lover that she was really a woman, they were shortly afterwards married, much to the amazement of their comrades-in-arms—and above all to the astonishment of the army authorities.

Mary and her husband, thinking they might as well capitalise on their marriage and the consequent notoriety, opened an Inn called The Three Horseshoes, near the Regiment's headquarters in Breda. After only a few years of happy marriage, the sudden death of her husband caused Mary to close the inn and—putting on her disguise once more—she joined the Dutch Army. She found the army life extremely dull in peace-time and as soon as her length of service expired she shipped aboard a ship bound for the West Indies in order to find excitement.

She certainly found it much sooner than she expected, as her ship was boarded by a pirate crew. The ship's articles showed that she was the only 'Englishman' aboard the ship, and she was invited to join the pirate crew—which did not take much persuasion. Again she successfully hid the secret of her sex and so we come to the time when Calico Jack found that he had two women pirates amongst his crew.

Old engravings which I have seen of Mary Read and Anne Bonny show them both to be

very buxom women and certainly, to the average male, they looked most feminine. But there are no authentic portraits showing how they disguised themselves on board their ship.

As already related, it could have been fairly easy for Anne to conceal her natural functions in the seclusion of the captain's cabin, difficult though this may have been at times. But it is still somewhat baffling to historians as to how Mary could have done so without arousing the suspicions or the curiosity of the crew. On board ship in the 18th century there was no privacy at all in respect of the sanitary arrangements—crews simply made do with forechains on the bow at the head of the ship.

According to some historians it was more than likely that a urinary instrument was used—a silver whistle painted over flesh colour and supported with straps —as in the case of Mother Ross, the most famous of all impersonators. But whatever Mary may have used to help disguise her true sex, there is no doubt that she must have found it very difficult at times. Apart from the fact that there was no privacy of sanitation, all the crew lived and slept together in a very small space.

With two women now on board, Calico Jack found himself in a very difficult situation. Both women, it appears, were very highly sexed and the two of them were more than even such a lusty seaman as Jack could cope with. The situation was solved, however, by an accident when Mary chanced to reveal her bosom to a member of the crew—who, incidentally, was an intelligent man, being the former pilot of a merchant ship. To keep her secret, and also as the man promised he would marry her as soon as they reached port, Mary agreed to a love affair, and soon both pirate women were able to solve the situation amicably with a lover apiece.

Mary Read, with years of Army experience behind her, seemed the more mannish of the two and the following incident is worth recording. They had anchored near one of the islands in the Caribbean when Mary's lover got into a quarrel with a shipmate, perhaps because he had made homosexual overtures to her. The quarrel ended with the usual challenge to a duel. Mary, knowing that his antagonist was a crack shot and an excellent swordsman, realised that her lover would be killed. So she took the only action possible which she could think of quickly —she provoked an argument with the man and this resulted in her fighting him, instead of her lover doing so.

They both went ashore, with

pistols containing one shot each, and swords. Both fired and missed, so they then set about each other with cutlasses. After a lengthy duel Mary ended up victorious by running the man through and killing him.

After many adventures and as related earlier, the law at last caught up with Calico Jack and his crew, although it should be added that although the crew were half-drunk and put up a feeble resistance, Mary Read and Anne Bonny fought until they were overpowered by sheer weight of numbers. Both were disgusted with their shipmates and swore and cursed at them, urging them to at least fight like men.

Mary Read's lover died on the gallows, whilst Anne Bonny's Calico Jack also met the same fate. He was granted a last request, which was to see her before being taken to the scaffold.

Led into her cell, with his hands and feet in chains, the once handsome and debonair pirate captain now looked a most pathetic sight, haggard and with his clothes in tatters. He was apparently too overcome with emotion to say anything at this last meeting and it was left to Anne to utter her famous last words to him.

"I'm sorry to see you in this situation," she said, "but if you had fought like a man you need not have died like a dog."

Calico Jack is said to have made no reply, but turned silently away to meet his fate in front of the huge crowd waiting by the gallows.

Mary Read and Anne Bonny were, in the writer's opinion, undoubtedly pirates in every sense of the word; they lived a true and full pirate life in those stirring days—days which must have represented a glorious period in history for all who loved adventure. However great a scourge the pirate-ships were in those days, however cruel and destructive their crews, they added colour and romance to the age in which they lived.

If it had been my own fortune to have been able to choose in which period of history I would have liked to live, I think I would have chosen to be with Mary Read and Anne Bonny aboard my own pirate ship—and who would dispute me if I said it might have been great fun?

THE saint CROSSWORD

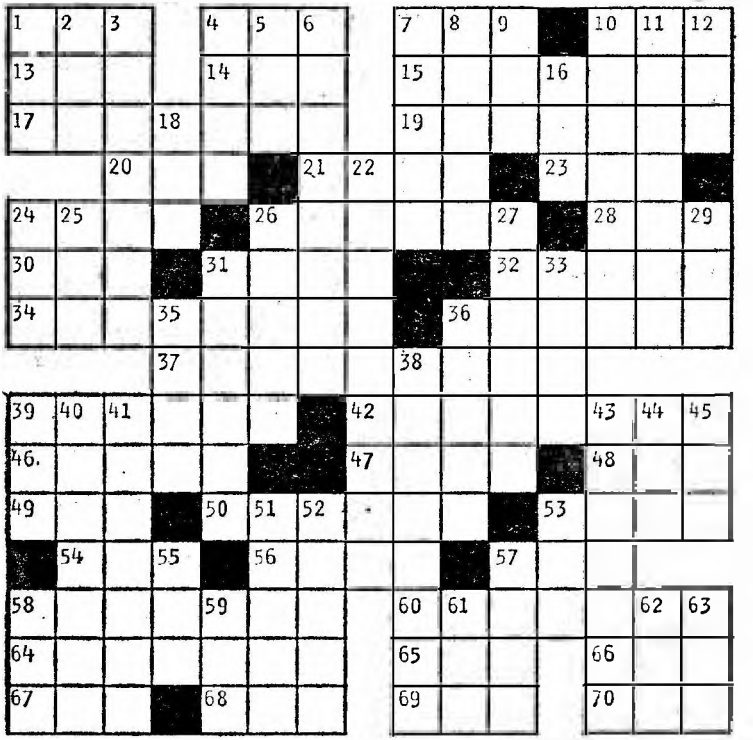
ACROSS

1. Wonderful in a Saint title
4. Voice of 70
7. Much earlier if long
10. Use for 9
13. Unfinished lament
14. River in *Saint's Getaway*
15. Scenes from coming attraction
17. Russian 22
19. Depends on drawing
20. Bell pusher
21. Pottage trader
23. What Caesar called himself
24. Door opener
26. Seizes
28. Abbreviated President
30. Specialty of French 58 down
31. Alia makes it Italian airline
32. Capital of Crete
34. Latin use of ablative
36. Hang around
37. Primitive scale
39. Scraped
42. Heart sufferer
46. Religious head
47. Bohemian river
48. Song of a herd
49. Opposite of kindled
50. Hunting dog
53. Fish propellers
54. End of sun
56. Asks attention
57. Goes with 66
58. Snare
60. Educated with no head
64. Be first
65. Miracle in a Saint story
66. Dwarf dog
67. King's beheaded wife
68. I dropped in Ireland
69. Common anguilla
70. Woolly female

DOWN

1. Saw upside down
2. Habitat of edelweiss
3. Croaking
4. Would flower on a colum
5. A dyeing line
6. Mineral
7. Big firework
8. Gathering
9. Racing fuel
10. Neat leg jumbled
11. High altitude rocket
12. Render
16. Terminates 6
18. Upended French aim
22. National dependent
24. New Zealand bird
25. Pinch
26. Fixed
27. Goal kicker
29. Ornament with ring
31. Topless garments
33. Cooperates
35. Norwegian city
36. Baptismal water
38. Park in America
39. Mark with nothing out
40. Saint of shoemakers
41. One 53 across on wing

43. Copy
44. Jailbird
45. Indian measure
51. More than willing
52. Points to place
53. Opposite of 44
55. Element
57. Bell sound
58. Resort
59. Phonetic joint
61. 65 for ball
62. Blond head
63. Starts potato



(Please turn to page 108 for the solution.)

NOTE:

Some grouches will complain that many of these clues are unfair. They are perfectly right. Who said we had to play fair, anyway?

L. C.

circles in the sky

by Daoma Winston

FOR three days Jim Conrad slumped on the up-ended keg and watched the buzzards make lazy black circles over the cottonwood trees. The dusty limbs tipping the red slope were the only green visible for miles around.

Over it, the buzzards swooped. It would take them a good while, he knew, to finish their pickings. They wouldn't leave until the bones were white and dry in the hot New Mexican sun.

A man could say it started a month ago when Kelsy came by and asked if Jim were going to town. Jim was surprised. He hadn't seen his brother for five weeks, even though they lived so close that only the slope and a bit of barbed wire separated them.

But Jim understood when Kelsy said, "I want to leave the car for a tune-up. Figured I'd ride back with you."

That was Kelsy. When he wanted something, he didn't mind asking for it. Otherwise he'd hide away for a month of Sundays.

And all the better, Jim thought. A man couldn't choose his kin. But that didn't mean he had to

The two of them had saved for three years to take their trip to the West—to a West which was nothing like their dreams . . . One day the sun would own the land again, and there'd be nothing to show for the sweat and the blood and the tears—and the prayers—of the generations who had lived there. Not even the memory of Death would remain...

love Kelsy Conrad.

Still, he said, "You can ride back with me if you've a mind to."

"Meet at the post office?" Kelsy asked.

Jim thought it over. "No. Make it the Two Corners Bar. In case I got to wait for you, like I probably will."

"Two o'clock?"

"Three," Jim corrected. "If that's no good, get another ride."

Kelsy grinned like three o'clock was what he'd wanted all along, and Jim was tempted to change it back to two. But then he decided to let it go.

In town, Jim took his time picking up a sack of potatoes, sausage, and flour. He wouldn't hurry for Kelsy. Then, having killed an extra half an hour, as much as he had patience for, he dropped his groceries off at the car. It was so old and dusty it didn't have a color. The steering had gone bad, making it ride hard to the left, like a horse blind on one side.

It wasn't like in the old days when the Conrad spread had five strings of horses with the little "c" brand on them, and enough head of cattle to keep twelve hands busy throughout the whole year.

Jim and Kelsy had come too late. They got what was left by their mother. Two parcels of land good for nothing but soaking up a man's sweat, and burning the seed he put into it.

Even in that Kelsy somehow came out top dog. *His* land had two cottonwood trees and a thin stream.

But they'd both hit natural gas under the mean earth. Not enough, maybe, to set a man up in style. Yet the small check that came in every month was something to count on when you had to buy your grub.

Jim liked to tell himself that if the lease had come through in time, Nellie would have stayed on with him. That all she cared about was a roof over her head, and three squares a day. But he knew better, and he didn't blame her for pulling out. He heard the whine of the windmill the same as she did. In his bones, he, too, knew that one day the sun would own the land again. With nothing of the Conrads left to show for three generations' sweat.

Besides, he wasn't much of a bargain. Stoop-shouldered, and weathered dry. But Nellie hadn't been a whole lot either, with her three-colored hair and raw hands.

He met her in the diner. He was two years back from the war then, and still wearing the old fatigues and boots. He kidded with Nellie over three cups of coffee, and when she went off, he picked her up.

They drove around for a while, then parked. She was soft and

warm as a lamb. He took her on the front seat without promises or love words. But afterwards, he asked, "You like it so much in that diner? Or you want to come stay with me. Not that I got anything. But if you should want to . . ."

She flipped a hand at him. "I got nothing myself. I don't mind. If you really want me to."

He didn't ask for her reasons, nor even wonder why she'd have him. The next afternoon, he stopped at her rooming house. She carried the one bag to the car and got in. Back at the place, she smiled wryly, looking at the windmill. "Looks like I'm back where I started from."

He pulled her down on the bed that had been his mother's. It was the only piece of the old furniture that he'd gotten. Kelsy hadn't wanted a broken bedstead. Later, Jim went out to do the chores.

Having Nellie with him hardly made a change in his life. Sometimes he would think of things to say to her, but by the time he got around to it, he felt foolish and held his tongue.

He considered her as a person only once. The day Kelsy came to borrow the grindstone. Nellie was washing clothes in a tub out back, and Kelsy kept staring at her. When he left, Jim heard him mutter to himself, "For crying out loud!"

Jim turned to look at Nellie. Her face was beet-red and her mouth was as tight as an Indian's. The liver-raw hands clenched tight around a pair of jeans. He had in mind to tell her to pay no attention to Kelsy. But he didn't, mostly because he couldn't think on Kelsy too long without getting mad.

One day when he got back from fence riding, Nellie was gone. He thought of looking for her but figured it wasn't worth the gas. If she'd had enough, he couldn't talk her into coming back. Saturday night, when he was in town to do some beering, Kelsy made sure Jim heard how Nellie had gotten a bus for Santa Fe.

Gradually the blankets she'd scrubbed went back to gray, and the kitchen became the mess she'd found it, and there was nothing to show she'd lived three months with Jim.

The only time he thought of her was when something reminded him that it was over a year since he'd had a woman.

As he loaded the groceries in the car, the *something* was the sight of two girls crossing the road to go into the Two Corners Bar. Jim dropped the flour sack on the floor and turned to watch.

They were a picture, all color and brightness in skin-snug frontier pants and shirts. The swagger, as nice a roll as a man ever

whistled at, came from Western boots that hadn't yet been broken in, and probably never would be. The girls disappeared into the bar. To Jim, it seemed as if the sun had been turned off.

He hesitated. By now, Kelsy would be in there waiting for him. But to go in, walk past those pretty fillies . . . He shook his head. He'd feel like a fool.

Then he got mad. It was *his* town. If they didn't like it, they could have stayed at home. Wherever that was. Automatically, he checked the plates on the new Chevrolet they'd parked across the road. He stumbled on the curb, looking back at the familiar color. Funny. He'd never have guessed those girls as coming from Albuquerque.

Watching for them out of the corner of his eyes, at first he didn't see the hand Kelsey held up to him.

They sat in a booth, laughing between themselves, and staring around so boldly that Jim felt as if he and the few others there were on display, like prize bulls at the state fair.

The thought brought a flush to his cheeks, and he swung up to sit beside Kelsy, thinking all could see it, and read his mind. A good look at his brother made it worse. Kelsy had his stool half-turned, his eyes glued on the girls. Watching with the secret, anticipating stare Kelsy always had before he got something he'd set his heart on.

Jim was about to nudge him to quit being a fool when Kelsy spoke up. "You girls just passing through?" he asked.

Jim's body went still, ready to dive behind the bar for cover, or to hang one on Kelsy. Girls like that could cut a man to ribbons with a look. Jim wasn't sure which way he'd fall if pushed by that shame. He never found out. One of the girls answered, proving she wasn't Albuquerque-bred, car or not.

"Yes, we are," she said in the flat Eastern tone that didn't sound snotty coming from her. "Beautiful country you have here."

"It sure is," Kelsy agreed. He leaned toward them. "I hope you won't think I was forward asking if we could buy you girls a drink."

"If you want to," the same girl answered.

Kelsy got up, shoved at Jim with a bony elbow. In front of the booth, he introduced himself and Jim, and pulled off his black Stetson with a flourish.

Watching him, Jim grinned. That Kelsy, playing at being a big Texas rancher, drawling soft and slow, smooth back iron-gray hair.

Jim meant to do like Kelsy and raise his hat and shake hands. But the thinking slowed him until too late, so he jammed his fists

in his pockets, said, "How do?" dryly and distantly, and sank in relief next to the girl who made room for him in the booth.

It turned out they were cousins, Leila and Mary Danner, from Philadelphia. Jim couldn't tell which was which until they'd traded sharp cracks back and forth. Then he knew the blonde one was Leila. The girl beside him was Mary.

He slid a quick look at her, and found she was watching him. She was a pretty little thing. Small enough so he could lean his chin on the top of her head. It would feel good. Her hair was black, and shiny as satin. She was filled out solid even for being so small, and her cheeks were smooth. Eastern cheeks. He looked down at his sand-paper hands.

"Your cousin, she do all the driving?" Kelsy asked Leila.

Jim watched her lips move in answer. They were bright and full. The paint was left off part of the lower one. Like she'd tried to hide the natural pout in it. Always, as she talked, her eyes moved, going back and forth over the table, then shifting to search the room.

Jim felt the old familiar heat stir in him. He glanced at Mary. That didn't help. Either one of them fit too good into a man's body.

He was glad when Shorty came up to get the order. The way his mind was going on both sides, he needed the drink bad. He needed it so bad he felt like smacking Kelsy for deliberating over what he wanted as if he wasn't going to end up with bourbon and branch water, no matter what.

Jim's judgment was right. He sat back, grinning again, when it was bourbon and water all around. He was doubly proud he'd hidden the double-take when the girls made it four a go. Maybe he was wrong, but they didn't look like bourbon girls to him.

He let the words wash over him without listening. It would add up to the same lie-swapping that always went on between men and women who met in a bar.

But then he found Mary looking at him, knew she'd asked a question. He glanced helplessly at Kelsy.

Kelsy grinned and took care of it. "No. Jim's got his own place. Down a ways from mine."

"What's it like?" Mary asked.

He understood that she was trying to draw him into the talking. But he didn't know how to help her out. Finally, he shrugged. "You seen plenty like it, driving on the road."

"All I saw was barbed wire and a lot of land."

He stared at the table edge where her soft white fingers played with a dead match. Shorty turned up with refills and saved Jim from having to answer her.

It was the third round, and the table already looked like a hard night had been put in. Bits of paper napkin drowned in puddles of glass sweat, and dunes of cigarette ash. Shorty went at it all with a half-hearted swipe that landed much of the debris on Jim's thighs. He didn't mind. The jeans were already shot. Had been, now that he thought of it, for a month.

"What do you do, back in Philadelphia?" he asked finally.

They were secretaries. They'd saved for three years to take their trip West. It took a while for Jim to think that over. In the end, it didn't tell him anything. But he stopped listening when Kelsy's soft voice took over. If a couple of girls wanted to ride around New Mexico to see what was what, that seemed all right. A waste of time maybe, when you knew there wasn't anything to see. But nothing wrong with it either.

Kelsy was talking about the land. It caught Jim's attention because he sounded as if he meant it. Yet Jim knew he didn't. Kelsy was like a two-headed coin. Both sides looked good, but all together, it was nothing.

"A man gets to feel his own size out here. With nothing between him and the horizon." Kelsy shot the girls an embarrassed look. Like he was saying too much.

Jim agreed. Saying too much of nothing. A man got to feel his own size all right, listening for the creak of the windmill, and hanging around General Delivery for the gas company check. More than anything, he felt how he was nothing, and wouldn't ever be anything either.

But it went over big with the girls. Jim could see that. And in a minute, he got what Kelsy was driving at. For once he gave his brother whole-hearted admiration. Between the two of them even, they surely didn't have money to sit drinking in the bar the rest of the day. But Kelsy knew what he was about.

He was saying, "I'd like for you girls to see our places. If you want to know what living is, that's how to do it. It's a whole lot different from what the tourists get at the rodeos."

That Leila, Jim thought. She's got a wooden leg or two under those pants. All that bourbon and the lipstick isn't even smeared. He glanced sideways at Mary. And the little one, too. They were a pair all right.

He made himself listen to Kelsy although the sound of the smooth voice going on in that fake drawl made his hackles rise. Turned out it was worth it.

"Why don't we ride out and show you?" Kelsy demanded, being the hospitable Westerner wanting to share God's country.

Still, Jim was surprised when the girls agreed. He caught the look that passed between them. They were older, wiser, than they seemed. The look fit in with the bourbon. They knew how to take care of themselves. He wondered if they were sharp enough to outwit Kelsey, though. Jim hadn't ever seen anyone do that. It would be a treat.

Kelsy settled up with Shorty, and they started for Kelsy's place. Jim felt good, warmed through with liquor and the soft laughter of the girls. He was so relaxed he handled the wheel like reins, and gave the fool car her head. She didn't pull sideways near as much as usual. That bewildered him, but it was nice, too.

Mary had sat up front without his having to ask. She stared out the window at the fields. In back, Kelsy kept talking. Jim caught a couple of words about the Conrad spread, and stopped listening. He didn't want to hear any more about that. It was one thing for Kelsy, who'd managed to graduate from high school, to talk about that. But Jim knew better. The only Conrad spread there'd ever be again was when both the Conrad boys were spread in the earth.

Kelsy yelled, "Hey! Whoa a minute, Jim," and Jim slowed down, his mouth going dry. But the scare was for nothing. The fifth of whiskey hovered over the seat.

Mary grinned, "Don't you want refreshment?"

He dared a smile, keeping his lips closed to hide his broken front tooth. "Sure I do." He took a long pull at the bottle, and barely kept from choking. Then he passed the bottle to her.

Her hand went over the top of the neck as if she didn't notice that she was wiping it. Jim thought to tell her that hooch murdered germs. But he didn't. When she held the bottle to her mouth, her red lips puckered like they were kissing the cool glass. Her throat didn't move. He knew she was fooling. She hadn't swallowed any.

He was wondering about that when he paused at Kelsy's gate. Kelsy hopped out to open it, then rode the cracked running board up to the house.

Jim thought wryly that it was a good thing there wasn't a bronc around. Kelsy would sure of tried to break it, and broke his back instead.

The cottonwoods threw a nice blanket of shade over the house and yard. Jim got out of the car, and felt the breeze. It had been a long while since he'd been to Kelsy's. He looked at the place through the girls' eyes. Listening to their compliments. Not that sweet-talk ever paid for potatoes.

He followed them inside, stiff-legged as a colt under the rope for the first time. It was cooler, and neat as if a woman lived there. His mother's rocking chair was shining. Like when she used to sit in it. Jim wondered contemptuously how often Kelsy got down to polish it.

The girls made much over the old junk. Jim took another couple of pulls at the bottle that Kelsy offered him. He shoved back his hat, and leaned against the wall, waiting while Kelsy took the girls back to the chicken yard, and down to the stream.

Jim watched the lace curtains blow at the window. Even the dust was on Kelsy's side. It sifted against the outer walls, instead of creeping in. The dust knew Kelsy was boss, too. Jim wondered how it was that Kelsy should always be boss. It didn't seem right. Yet it was true. A man couldn't argue with what was true, could he?

When he led the girls in again, Kelsy was talking about Indian mustangs, and wagon trains. By God, Jim thought, in a minute he's going to fly the old cavalry flag. Maybe it was that. Maybe it was the drink. But Jim needed air.

He walked out as Kelsy was saying something about arrow heads. The sun was dropping fast. By dark it would be so cold a man would forget the sun's terrible heat, and wish for sunrise, and then be sorry and curse it when it came.

Jim swallowed hard on the sickness in his throat, and tried to smile as Kelsy and the girls came out, talking about hunting up flint stones.

"Not me," Jim said. "I want some supper. I'm not going any place but home."

Kelsy grinned at him. "You got something there, Jim. And the girls ought to see your place, too. What say you go on and get the potatoes started. The girls and me will go down to the flats."

"I start supper alone? Why should I?" Listening to the quietness that fell, Jim knew his power. The truth had a way of cutting deep.

Then Mary offered, "I could help you, Jim."

He still thought going to the flats was crazy. But Mary and him fixing supper, that would be nice. Maybe he could think of something to say to her.

"The only thing is," Mary was saying. "We have to get an early start tomorrow."

Kelsy said, "Now wait a minute, Mary. You getting skittish about us?" And Jim held his breath.

But she smiled. "I know I'm safe, Kelsy."

"You'll be in town plenty

early," Kelsy assured her.

Jim grinned to himself. When he wanted to. Kelsy sure sounded convincing. But Jim would do the carrying through on Kelsy's promises. Just like he'd been doing ever since they were kids.

When he and Mary got out of the car at his place, he saw through her eyes again. She looked over the littered yard, across the dry, cracked fields, to the blackening silhouhette of the windmill. and the hellfire of sunset behind it. She blinked at the shack, the paper-covered windows, the broken front step. "It's like Kelsy said," she whispered. "This country does something to you inside."

The sickness came back on Jim so full and fast that he had to stop and lean against the car. But finally he dragged the groceries out. If he thought of fixing supper, he'd keep his mind off the flicker he caught in the girl's eyes. Comparing Kelsy's place to his.

She offered to help him, but she didn't know how to do anything. She felt his resentment at that, and turned for a quick uncertain glance at him. So he pointed to the jug in the corner. "'Get us drinks. We need something to go on."

He got the sausage rolled into patties, trying to hold back for himself to finish the week on. But saw what he made wasn't going to be enough, so he gave in and used it all. Peeled and sliced, the potatoes went into the big frying pan. He mixed up batter fast, and gave Mary a glass to cut the biscuits with. In no time, coffee was smelling up the untidy kitchen.

Kelsy and Leila still hadn't come back. All the while, Mary talked to Jim about Philadelphia, or asked him questions about where he'd been. He answered as well as he could, and felt proud at how he managed.

He poured himself another drink, though she wouldn't have one. Then he sat down in the rickety chair. "Nothing to do but wait."

She moved her head in agreement, went to look out the door. "It's beautiful."

He wanted to ask her what was, and why it was. To him it was just as natural as his own breathing. If it was beautiful, then he didn't know what beauty was.

Banked fury built up in him. She tried to act like she understood. But he was sure she didn't. Besides, he knew how different Kelsy's place was from his. There she'd exclaimed about the house and the furniture and the chicken yard. Here she brushed at the flour on her frontier pants, and went on about the sunset.

She went out for a last look, and when he followed her, she was staring at the windmill. It moaned on the night breeze just starting to come in, and he saw how she shivered.

"You cold?"

Though her arms hugged her small waist, he knew it wasn't that when she looked at him. Her eyes were scared. He put a hand on her shoulder. She didn't pull away from him. But after the first tingling touch, she just wasn't there.

He didn't let himself look down at his fingers the way he wanted to. He couldn't give himself away like that.

"It's lonesome," she said softly. "I don't know if I'd really like it."

His arms went around her, palms flat on her back, his elbows tight, so she was circled. He nuzzled her cheek and throat, trying to find her lips.

She didn't struggle, but her head kept turning, and he let his arms drop when he heard the sputter of Kelsy's old jeep. She started ahead of him, but swung around when Kelsy drove up to the house.

It was a sight then to see her face, the wide smile, the glowing unafraid eyes.

They were at the table. Leila showing off a pile of arrow heads. But Jim saw the secret separate look that passed between her and Mary. He opened his mouth to ask, to ask, "What?" But Kelsy cut in, "Butter?" stirring Jim's anger again.

"Sorghum," he grunted. He got the jug and while he was doing it, he caught up the whiskey.

Everybody fell to, Mary exclaiming how good the food tasted, Leila agreeing. Kelsy bragged on the cook Jim was. But Jim let the talk and laughter swirl past him, trying to keep it from pricking his skin.

The softness of Mary still touched him. He sneered to himself. The fright in her eyes was just to throw him off. One or the other of them he would have. Even if Kelsy took first choice. Jim promised himself that as he refilled his glass.

Kelsy offered him the dented coffee pot, but Jim shook his head. "That's for women and children," he muttered. "This," he tipped the jug, "is for men."

He promised himself. But some time during the meal, he knew he was wrong. Leila and Mary, they were different. You couldn't go by the bourbon, nor the taking up with strangers. They could be scared. But they never had sense enough to be afraid. Nothing would happen to them.

When Kelsy and the girls left

the table a week's provisions had been eaten under the mask of laughter. Suddenly it was all over.

Jim sat, staring, while Leila picked up her bulging pocketbook, and Mary looked around the kitchen, eyes hidden to shutter her thoughts.

He lolled back in the chair, gazing stupidly at her and the others. Why, they'd as good as promised he'd have one of them. Kelsy and his drawl, the girls and their bright looks. The curves under the frontier shirts. The red lips that were like store-bought fruit.

Something in Mary's glance peeped knowingly at him.

"We'd better move," Leila said briskly.

But for a quiet minute, they watched him. When he pulled out cigarette paper, began, deliberately, to roll a cigarette, it was Kelsy that moved. He opened the door, herded the girls ahead of him.

From outside, Jim heard Mary, "What about him though?"

A blur of words, whispered but deep, answered. Kelsy. Jim snorted. Let Kelsy explain it. Let him try. Why, nobody could. Even Jim didn't know how to put it into words. They'd as good as promised, that's all. He meant to have his way. But he sucked on the cigarette.

There was a stumble on the broken step, a curse. Kelsy came in. "Driving us to town, Jim?"

"Hell, no. They can walk back, and you, too, for all I care." Jim rose. "Praise your house, and eat my food, and turn and run. What do I want to take them in for?"

"Now don't be like that, Jim."

"I'm like that," he snarled.

Kelsy stared at him, blue eyes flat. Then he agreed softly. "Yeah, you sure are."

"You're not taking them either," Jim offered.

"In the jeep, I will. She ran once today. She'll do it again." Kelsy grinned. "But come on, Jim. Forget it and drive the girls back and say goodbye and good trip."

Jim dragged on the cigarette, spat smoke at Kelsy. "You never had guts."

The door moved softly. Jim heard Mary again. "What's wrong, Kelsy? Isn't he coming?" Her voice going up on a strange note of regret.

"Let's go then." That was Leila. Jim could almost see her eyes moving back and forth, searching the horizon.

Kelsy rumbled something. Footsteps scuffed the dust. Jim grimaced as the jeep's motor protested but caught. Frantically he dug in his pockets, hunting for his keys. A moment later, he sprinted to his car. The mean red eye of the jeep bounced and

wavered tantalizing him from the distance.

But at the gate, when Kelsy had to stop, Jim caught up. He leaped from the car, ready with his apology, with his goodbye. But Kelsy got in the way.

"Don't be a fool," Kelsy said loudly. "It's all right. Just sleep it off, Jim. I'll run the girls back."

The apology, the goodbye, was gone then. Jim yelled, "Just because you're not man enough to finish when you started . . ."

Mary peered out at him blankly. Now she was afraid. The very blankness of her face gave her away. She whispered, "What's wrong?" knowing, but pretending not to, because that was easier for everybody.

Leila looked away, across the dark fields toward town. It was as if Jim were not there, leaning at the window, yelling, "You promised . . ."

But Kelsy grabbed his arm, drew him off. The words came at Jim like the crest of a flash flood, drowning him. He didn't know what Kelsy was saying. It didn't matter. He was beaten again. Beaten, and put in the wrong. The girls would never know different. Mary would always be afraid.

When the jeep sped through the gate, Jim was standing at the edge of the road. "Don't come back," he yelled. "Don't never put your foot on my land again."

After a while, he drove back to the house, and threw himself on the grimey sheets. The jug was under his hand. Now and again, he took a long pull at it.

The month passed slowly. He spent the days looking across the fields, and listening to the occasional creak of the windmill. For hours, he stared toward the slope where the tips of Kelsy's cottonwoods showed.

He didn't see Kelsy. He figured that Kelsy drove to town in the jeep, and got somebody to ride his car out for him. It didn't matter.

Often Jim stood in the kitchen doorway. The dishes were on the table just as they'd been left the night Kelsy had taken the girls away, not even giving him a chance to say a polite goodbye.

Flour from the biscuit dough had blown across the floor. A little high-heeled boot print cut a pattern in it. He thought about the shape of the girls, their flower mouths juicy as southern fruit, their bright clothes.

He thought of Nellie, too. How she'd warmed him in the mornings, given him a reason for hurrying his chores. The way her raw hands had gone still on the jeans, listening to Kelsy, feeling his look on her.

One afternoon, Jim caught up

his shotgun. He drove over to Kelsy's place. Kelsy was working in the yard under the cottonwood when Jim got out, his fingers wet, squeezing the stock of the gun.

Kelsy looked deep into him, said quietly, "How do, Jim?"

He raised the gun, sighting with slow pleasure. Then he fired. Kelsy wavered and fell. The red of his blood, and the red of the earth was the same.

Jim climbed into his car and drove home. Whistling, he scrubbed the stale grease from the dishes and pans. He took a broom to the flour on the floor.

Now and again, he tipped the dirty jug of whiskey to his lips. Later, he went to stand outside in the dying afternoon. In three or four days, they'd find Kelsy. Both he and Jim had to sign papers at the bank come the middle of the week. If they didn't show up, somebody would come out.

He could run away. But in running a man lost his free and easy feeling. And where was there to go? He'd rather stay and think on how Kelsy's sweet smile was a liar, and the drawl false. How they'd praised Kelsy's house and Kelsy's trees, though they'd eaten Jim's own week's provisions and laughed on his drink.

Now Kelsy's empty blue eyes looked up at the empty blue sky, maybe still making promises he'd never keep. At the thought, Jim threw back his head and laughed.

When everything was ready, he sat down to wait.

After three days, he saw the first cloud of dust, and he nodded. Soon then.

He glanced at the shotgun that leaned against the shack. He'd unloaded it the day before, and carried the last cartridges down to the cold house and drowned them in the tiny pond. He wanted to be sure he didn't give trouble. It would be a shame to put up a fight at the last minute. A man's business ought to stay his own to the end.

The cloud sped away, back to town. Again, Jim nodded. Yes, soon indeed.

Forty minutes later, a new red cloud drifted over the road. It moved fast, and broke up on the limbs of the cottonwoods. In a few minutes, it gathered again, moved on to hover at the gate. Under it, the state police car rumbled up and stopped. The two troopers got out and hailed him.

He slumped against the wall, sucking on his cigarette as they walked up, hands uneasy at their holsters.

"Howdy, Jim," one of them offered. But both eyed the empty gun.

"It"s not loaded," Jim said.

"You want it, take it."

The big dark one, his name was Bill Mayo, Jim suddenly remembered, caught up the gun and checked it.

"We got to take you in," the other, Cookie Rayburn, told Jim regretfully. "Kelsy mentioned in town there was bad blood between you two."

"No blood. Not kin blood," Jim told him absently.

He flipped his cigarette to the ground. Funny how he couldn't remember if they gassed a man or hung him. Hung him, Jim finally decided. It was cheapest that way. And only right, too. No need to waste money killing a man.

The three of them got in the scout car and Jim leaned back, eyes closed.

But at the slope, he turned to look.

The windmill was moving slowly on a hot breeze.

Over the tips of Kelsy's cottonwoods, the buzzards made easy black circles in the sky.

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like i said

by Penelope Wallace

IT'S FUNNY the way things happen; like you look for something and you don't find it. You stop looking—there it is. Like you pity your friends their shrew-wives. You marry a pretty little doll "Yes Dear" "No Dear" "Whatever you say, Dear". You marry her and the change is gradual; by the end of the year it's the same as with your pitied friends . . .

Like I said, it's strange the way things happen; like last October. I was in the train to London and I started talking to the other man in the compartment. It's funny, a man you meet by chance and you talk like you've known him all your life; even before you know his name is Christopher Jones; ordinary name—ordinary man . . .

Strangely, I was thinking about Christopher Jones—wondering if we'd ever meet again and thinking, too, how quiet the cottage was without Ann; when the doorbell rang. I'd heard the car but I hadn't taken much notice. They were two big men — tall and broad. The tallest and broadest said "Arthur Straker?" I agreed that I was and then asked them

Alibis can be two-edged... You plan and you plan. You set everything up the way it should be and, for the moment, it looks as if it'll all work out the way you want it! But — take it easy... Don't ignore the familiar! The person you pay least attention to — that person can hang you!

in. The Tallest and Broadest continued "My name's Donovan. This is Sergeant Smith. We're from Scotland Yard."

I nodded, and he continued "I think I should explain that we are not here to investigate the death of your wife. The local police have that in hand, I understand that it was a prowler."

He paused—a long pause like he was getting up steam for the next tack.

"We are here in the course of investigation into the death of Christopher Jones . . ."

"Death?" I asked. numbed.

"Murder," said Donovan, brutally. "The night your wife died. The night you went to London on the same train as Christopher Jones—in the same compartment—by your own admission . . ."

It wasn't worth fighting. They cautioned me. They drove me back to London and all the time I thought 'It isn't possible' but it was.

Police line-up. "Any objection?" and myself "Yes, they look such a weedy bunch."

"Same height and weight as yourself."

So I'm in my place.

A nervous woman. I've never seen her before. It seems she agrees. She's shaking her head.

Another woman. I have seen her. She has the Buffet Trolley on my home station. She's seen me. She's giving me that tight-lipped look, like I always took the tea-spoons. Then she's nodding away like she's testing her hat-pin for holding power.

Next the Ticket Collector—looking sorrowful; like I might be a poor old lady, no ticket, no money, no friends. Then he's nodding, but slowly and sadly.

Then it's ". . . legal advice . . ." and the trial and it's that man Donovan again and he's talking about ". . . receiving enquiries from the County Police about a Mr. Christopher Jones with whom the accused stated that he had travelled to London on the night of his wife's death." He went on about how Jones was not at home and his wife was worried because she'd expected him the previous evening and finally how they'd found Mr. Jones—the body of Mr. Jones—at the foot of a Railway Embankment between Reading and Maidenhead. Then there was the old woman with the Buffet Trolley. She'd seen me getting on the train and talking to Jones. She was sure that it was that night—well almost sure. She was positive it was me—well almost positive and she'd never liked me. So my hopes started upwards . . . and then the Ticket Collector took the stand.

The Ticket Collector—under oath—and those sorrowful blue eyes; looking at me like he's so sorry to set me up like this . . .

Certainly he'd seen me in the compartment with Mr. Jones and then, after Reading, nearing Maidenhead he'd say, he'd seen me in the same carriage—alone. Reluctantly he admitted that I'd seemed nervous but he hadn't thought anything of it—at the time—not until they'd found the bruised and battered body of the late Mr. Christopher Jones. Yes he was sure that it was that night. Was it him or Donovan who said that the ticket collected from Jones had a telephone number written on it—my telephone number—written by Jones. That fixed the date and it was the Ticket Collector who said—Yes he was quite sure it was me—with Jones at Reading—alone at Maidenhead. He'd particularly noticed the way I talked. He said "I'm interested in people, I like to study them, it would be a dull job if I didn't and I noticed the way this gentleman spoke."

"In what way?"

"He started every sentence with the word 'like'."

So there I was—packaged and ready for delivery—right on the spot by my own admission. They couldn't work out a motive—but what could I say.

The Buffet woman was mistaken. The Ticket Collector was lying. I know why. Like I say it's funny the way things happen.

It was last October that I met Christopher Jones on the train to London. He died two days before Christmas; killed by the Ticket Collector for the £1,000 in cash I'd just given him for my alibi . . .

The Ticket Collector saw us together last October. Like he heard us too—our wonderful plan . . . Like he lied and lied at the trial.

How *could* I have been on that train the night I killed my wife?

THE SOLUTION

to the

PUZZLE

on page 91

murder is a gas

by Allen Kim Lang

I PARKED the unmarked Indiana State Police sedan and walked over to the gatehouse of Loki Laboratories, carrying a briefcase fat with autopsy-reports and a half-gallon thermos of black coffee. Behind the forty-foot hurricane fence, six buildings curved about a lawn set with circular beds of tulips, marigolds, and scarlet phlox. The structure farthest to the right—wooden, windowless, and painted heavy-duty red—looked like an Amish farmhouse. The central building spiked the bell-tower I'd sighted far down the highway. For one dizzy instant, I thought that someone standing behind that tower was peering round its green copper cupola, like a squirrel reconnoitering from the top of a tree-trunk. By the time I'd blinked my eyes, he'd disappeared.

A uniformed guard stood at the gate. "Pass?" he asked me.

I flipped open my wallet to display my credentials. "Sergeant Felix Himmel, Indiana State Police," I announced. I stared past the guard at the girl who sat beside his desk. "I believe that I'm expected."

Sergeant Felix Himmel, Indiana State Police, investigates "the string of accidents" at the Loki Laboratories that has eliminated the three members of the Cosmos Project team — and runs head on into a deadly tin cat, a whistling moron who is emphatically not a moron — and Michelle Kelly...

"So you are, Sergeant," he said. "If you'll just sit over there in the catbird seat, I'll introduce you to the boss."

"Rough!" I hardly noticed the pop-eyed pup, so fetching was the girl who held him. A brunette in her middle twenties, she turned to regard me with eyes of cobalt blue.

"Miss Michelle Kelly has been assigned as your secretary," the guard explained.

"Thank you, Sergeant Himmel, for rescuing me from the Pool Room," Miss Kelly said. "The secretarial pool, that is." She took my hand. "This is Bem," she said, introducing her cornsilk-colored Pekingese. "He's authorized himself to nip the ankles of all strangers, so you'd better shake hands with him right away."

"Bem?" I asked, taking the tiny beast's right paw.

"For Bug-Eyed-Mouser," Miss Kelly explained. "Bem was Doctor Heinemann's dog until poor Hans got blown up in that awful shower-room accident. I adopted the little orphan."

The dog, abandoning his role as menace, loosed half an inch of pink, upward-curling tongue to lick my hand. "Sit down, please, so that you can meet Mr. Luger," the girl said, pointing to the plastic contour chair that was bolted to the floor. Checking to see that it wasn't plugged into the wall, I sat.

The guard picked up the red telephone on his desk. "Security One here," he said. "Connect me with Lucky."

A halo of lamps flashed on in the corner of the room. I saw that the metal-sheathed eye of a TV camera was aimed through the lights at me. A screen blinked to life beneath the camera. It flickered through the spectrum, then settled down to a picture of a vandyked young man seated on a deckchair against the rail of a boat. Behind him, clouds scudded and a seagull swooped toward the water. "Howdy!" the bearded fellow said. "I'm Lucky Luger. You must be the state cop they told me was comin' out to visit my outfit."

"Where are you?" I demanded, my curiosity overwhelming courtesy.

"Just down the pike a ways," Lucky Luger said, grinning. "About eight hundred miles due east as the electron flies, aboard my *Midas Touch* in Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts."

"Sergeant Felix Himmel," I told him, and unfolded my wallet to let the camera scan my I.D.

"I've let out orders that you've got the run of my place," Luger said. "You'll get all the assistance the Loki Laboratories staff can provide."

I shook my head. "Assigning Miss Kelly as my girl Friday will

hardly help me keep my mind on police work," I said.

"Shelly can type, introduce you to my eggheads, and run down to the cafeteria to fill up that coffee-jug you got cuddled under your arm," Luger said. "Coffee's good stuff; squeezes sugar out of your liver to perk up your brain-cells." He reached out of the picture to get his own stimulent, a glass of gin-and-tonic with a bright green half of lime floating in its ice. "I want you to find out what's been happening, Sergeant. I can't afford to lose any more help. My motto always was to give the best men I could hire the best tools I could buy and run to the bank with what they thought up. When a string of accidents picks off three of those best men—the whole danged Cosmos Project team—I feel a twinge, and it ain't just in my wallet. I liked those fellas, Sergeant Himmel. So dig in. Anything I can do, you just hop on the phone and give me the word." The owner of Loki Laboratories gave me the thumbs-up sign for luck, then switched off the viewphone. The lights dimmed. I was off-camera.

"Even on vacation," I observed, "Luger runs a tight ship."

"Lucky Luger is never on vacation," Miss Kelly told me. "He's working around the clock out there off Martha's Vineyard. The *Midas Touch* is his research ship. He's got tanks of a special resin down in her holds, chelating gold out of sea-water."

"Ridiculous," I said. "That's like the old scheme of squeezing sunbeams out of cucumbers. It'll never work."

"Of course it won't," Miss Kelly agreed, stepping to the lab-side doorway of the gatehouse. "On your way out, Sergeant Himmel, be careful that you don't trip over our doorstop. It's a forty-four-pound block of Lucky Luger's Atlantic Ocean gold, and it might mash your toes."

"Oh." I reverently stepped across the brick that blocked open the door, and followed the girl out onto the grounds. She dropped Bem, who trotted several times around my ankles, barking, then took off ahead of us down the sidewalk.

"Forgive me for needling you, Sergeant," Miss Kelly said; "but the word *impossible* is in bad taste at Loki Laboratories."

"Three stripes are frail armor to carry into this arena," I mused. The sidewalk ducked under an old fashioned rose-arbor, arched over with pink-and-cream blossoms. "Even the flowers here have their doctorate."

Shelly Kelly halted at the far end of the arbor of Doctor Nicholls roses. "Right here is where Doctor Hoyotoko Nakamura was

stung by a bee," she told me. "It killed him. He was hypersensitized — allergic to bee-venom. Nakamura was the motivational research associate on Project Cosmos, Sergeant."

"Call me Felix," I suggested.

"I'm Shelly," she said. "Felix isn't a common name."

"My father was a Latinist," I explained; "and he called me 'most happy fellow,' which I am, except when some lardwit twits me for being named after a comic-strip cat. Tell me more about Project Cosmos," I suggested, easing over toward the park-bench set beneath a flowering redbud tree. Bem hurtled up to sit between us like a conscientious chaperon. Shelly stroked the fur on the pup's belly. He closed his eyes in ecstasy.

"There were three men working on Project Cosmos," she said. "But I suppose you've got everything I know, and more, right there in your briefcase."

"I'm a cop, not a nibby neighbor." I said. "Fill me in."

"All right, Felix." Shelly got a filter cigarette from her purse, and I lighted it for her. "Doctors Heinemann, Nakamura, and Wilson all died last month." she said. "All of them were here at Loki Laboratories when their fatal accidents occurred." She paused. "Do you know who Loki was, Felix?"

"The Nordic marplot," I said. "The delinquent juvenile of Valhalla, who made eternity tough for Balder, the boss-god of Norse mythology. It's an odd name for a think-works."

"Not really," Shelly said. "*Loki* is a pun on Lucky Luger's nickname. Loki Laboratories makes a business of shaking the world up with research-and-development, of inventing new things for Americans to buy and making buggy-whips out of what they were buying yesterday."

I was staring toward the brick campanile. that facsimile of Venice transplanted in our Hoosier heartland. "Hey," I said, grabbing Shelly's arm. "There he goes again!" Someone forty feet tall was promenading behind the tower, wearing a red baseball cap and a look of extreme concentration.

"One of our R-and-D programs is the pedipulator," Shelly said. "If you'll forgive my saying so, they're making great strides with it."

"Magnify, if you please, that last remark."

"Manipulator comes from *manus,* hand; pedipulator from *pes,* foot: surely that should be obvious to the son of a Latin-fan," Shelly said. "I imagine that you've seen these master-slave devices they have in radiation laboratories, gimmicks that allow a man to handle radioactive materials from a distance of thirty

feet, standing behind a radiation-shield wall and window. Well, just as that operator wears a glove that activates the slave 'hand' in the hot-room, the giant who's walking toward us wears mechanical legs that multiply his natural walking movements."

A jeep raced around the corner of the building, towing a trailer on which was supported a hair-net thirty feet across. "Sometimes the pedipulator pilot stumbles," Shelly said, explaining the net. "Generally, the jeep-driver is able to catch him."

The Brobdingnagian pedestrian strolled toward us on his mechanical stilts. "Hi, Shelly!" the operator called. Bem vaulted from our bench and set off after the intruder, barking at the yard-long, jointed feet that settled down, one after the other, on the soft grass. "I thought I might run into Bem," the stilt-walker shouted. He rained a handful of dog-biscuits down on the Peke. "Watch out, kid," he cautioned Shelly's pup. "I'd hate to have to scrape you off my instep."

"Bingo, this is Sergeant Felix Himmel, of the State Police," Shelly yelled up. She explained to me, "Doctor Bingo Lane is the development chief for the pedipulator."

"I'd shake hands," Dr. Lane shouted at me, "except I'm afraid to lean forward that far. Miss Kelly, may I have the next dance?" He executed a waltz-step over the redbud tree, looking down at his feet anxiously as any Arthur Murray drop-out. "Watch it!" he cried. One stilt-knee clashed against the other. The forty-foot man leaned to the left, stuck the other leg out for balance, and fell with the majesty of a Douglas fir. His jeep-driver gunned the vehicle and raced around to field Dr. Lane in the glove of his net.

"It ain't the gettin'-up that bothers me, it's that long step down," Bingo Lane said, taking off the baseball cap and blotting his forehead. He disengaged his bare feet and knees from the straps of the follower-rack, a sort of control box in which he'd been standing to walk his machine. Wearing Bermuda shorts, he clambered down the net and dropped to the grass. We shook hands. The two-man crew of the catcher-jeep got to work with a hydraulic hoist, getting the pedipulator legs strapped under the net of their trailer. "Take you up for a spin sometime, Sergeant," Dr. Lane volunteered. "It's like skiing, only warmer and higher."

'I seldom have to pick any coconuts," I said; "anyway, I'm clumsy enough at ground level."

'My pedipulator is as easy to walk in as a pair of elevator shoes," Lane said. He rubbed a bruise on one bare knee. "Al-

most as easy," he amended that. "You here to look into those Cosmos Project accidents?"

I admitted that the State's Prosecuting Attorney had exhibited interest in that cluster of exotic deaths.

"Find out what those three men were working on, Sergeant," Lane advised me; "and you'll have found out why they were killed. Unfortunately, the Cosmos Project is a bit of a mystery. They were all pretty close-mouthed about what they were aiming at. My game, well, I stick out like a City College basketball center in a Japanese tea-house. Let me strap you into my follower-rack, Sergeant; I mean it. You can get higher than a dozen Martinis will take you, and no headache after, if you land right." He jumped into the back of the jeep, waved, and rode off, towing his seven-league boots behind him.

Bem had gulped the veterinary cookies and was bounding toward what had once been a tennis-court, now surrounded by wire and populated by a bedlam of chickens. The dog scampered around the enclosure, terrorizing the hens with his sharp-edged barks and lunges toward the wire. "Chickens?" I asked Miss Kelly.

"You're a whiz at descriptive zoology," she said. "Those Leghorns are guinea-pigs in one of DeeGee Nova's programs. He added a teaspoonful of aspirin to each hundred pounds of their feed. The chickens who got the aspirin averaged seven percent heavier after three weeks than their sisters who didn't eat the pills. Multiply that weight-gain by the number of orders of southern-fried served every Sunday, and you've got one reason Lucky Luger can afford to spud around on a yacht." She intercepted the Pekingese as he vaulted in an attempt to highjump the chickenwire, and patted the pup calm as we walked on toward the towered building. "What do you personally think about those three accidents, Felix?" she asked.

"The coroner couldn't pinpoint what was wrong with them," I said; "but my Colonel and the doc agreed that three fatal accidents, one right after the other, suited *Hamlet* better than Hoosierland." I held open the main door, then jumped aside. "What the hell?"

A miniature tank, clustered with waving tools, rolled past us. A turret swiveled, and a pair of glass eyes inspected me as the tanklet ground toward the rose arbor. "Make way, make way," it announced from its loudspeakers. "Lady with a baby . . ."

"That's Kitten," Shelly said. "Lucky Luger's prize project. She's a cybernated, servomechanical cat. Kitten's brains are most-

ly upstairs in the tower, in Lucky's laboratory. His idea was to build a robot that was self-supporting, that had intelligence enough to plug itself into a wall-outlet when its batteries ran down, that could avoid hitting people and dogs, and that could find its way around. Kitten has free run of the grounds. She's something of a pet at Loki Laboratories."

Like a ceramic Chinese figurine, Bem was frozen in attack-position, pointed toward the robot and gurgling deep-throated growls. "The furred pet doesn't seem to care for the steel one," I remarked.

'Bem can't stand Kitten, and Kitten purely hates Bem," Shelly said. "I think Lucky programmed a little malice into that machine. One day, I caught Kitten carrying off Bem's water-bowl. I'd swear she was chuckling as she ran down toward her den in the basement."

"You say Kitten's brains are in the tower?"

"It wouldn't be practical to program a robot as complex as Kitten without making her too big to run around," Shelly explained. "The tower-computer works with her through telemetry. Once, during a lightning-storm, Kitten went crazy, and tried to stand on her head on a stairway. Static had commanded her to play yoga."

"I wish," I grumbled, "that I was back in my quiet MP car, chasing speeders. The Colonel didn't tell me I'd be visiting the funhouse."

"It's hardly ever dull at Loki Laboratories," Miss Kelly agreed. She shooed Bem through the door, and he pattered down the hall with all the aplomb of a chief of research.

"What was the Cosmos Project all about, Shelly?" I asked. "That's one piece of information I don't have in this briefcase."

"I don't know." She gazed at me with those deep-blue eyes and shook her head. "I mean that literally, Felix. I was secretary for the Cosmos team for half a year, and I didn't get the faintest hint of what they were up to. Secret? The Manhattan Project was a brass band by comparison. Nothing was filed in our office beyond scientific journals and laboratory-equipment catalogues. The lab was used mostly, it seemed to me, as a coffee-kitchen. Any notes that may have been in our safe disappeared the day Woody — Doctor Wilson — had his fatal heart-attack."

"Perhaps some Federal agency, CIA or FBI, sneak-footed in to pick up the confidential notes before the Albanians got 'em," I suggested.

"No, Felix," Shelly said. "Project Cosmos had nothing to do with the government, except

as a possible means of increasing Lucky Luger's income-tax. Our secrets here are mostly drugstore, supermarket, filling-station stuff; not outer-space or Pentagon-type mysteries."

Bem, pausing at the open doorway of a brightly-lighted laboratory, barked a note that ended on a banshee howl, the most succinct piece of music-criticism I've ever heard. Through that doorway came a sound that would have set an Arab's teeth on edge: the shrill, fruity tones of a clarinet doing violence to the memory of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. "Is snake-charming another of your projects here?" I asked my pretty secretary.

"Doc Greene's degree was not in musicology," Shelly said. We went on into the lab.

The grey man in the white coat put his instrument aside and stood to learn my name. "Einstein had his violin, Sergeant," he explained; "and I have my clarinet."

"I blow a little French horn, myself," I confessed, shaking his hand. I glanced around the laboratory, recognizing only the most obvious items of equipment. There was an electric furnace in which Volkswagens could be baked. Over a kitchen sink hung a spice cabinet, whose glass-stoppered bottles were labeled in chemical shorthand. Near one wall a doughnut of steel was mounted on enormous gimbals, an electromagnet large enough to serve as pot-holder for those hot Volkswagens. On another wall hung several dozen copper cooking-pots. "I give up," I confessed. "Is this the cafeteria, or the room you bring competitors to for coaxing out their secrets?"

Dr. Greene picked at the yellow-headed map-pin that was stuck into the lapel of his lab coat. "This is a metallurgical research laboratory," he said, somewhat primly. "I am working toward a process for keeping copper kitchenware, among other things, bright as a new penny. Got it, too," he added, a brief smile lighting up his grey face. "A sixteenth-inch coating of Johnson's wax does the job fine." He frowned. "Stinks up the kitchen some, though, when you put the soup on the fire."

"All this alchemist's nightmare just to keep frying-pans shiny?" I asked, waving my thermos jug around the crowded room.

"Don't trivialize my dream, Sergeant," Greene cautioned me. "I'm really onto something: a magnetic altering of the copper-air interface that seems to inhibit oxidation. What's more, with the bonus I'll get once the kinks are smoothed out, I intend to buy myself a symphony orchestra to conduct. You may audition, if you like." He sat and picked up his clarinet. "Right now, there's

a gap betwixt theory and practice. If you'll excuse me?"

The woeful music commenced again, something, I believe, by Bloch. We tiptoed out, Bem eager to leave the woodwind's wail. "What's the yellow pin Doc Greene is wearing?" I asked Shelly.

"That's the emblem of the Mensa Society," she said. "It's an organization of brain-buffs, people who flaunt their IQ's the way other folks do sportscars. Only the top two percent of the population is smart enough to join. The three Project Cosmos men wore the yellow pinhead, too; but they joked about it."

Behind us, down the hall, another musician was whistling *Jingle Bells* with fearful concentration, hitting each note hard as a steam-calliope, and rattling as accompaniment something that sounded like sleighbells. "That's Red Cowhage," Shelly said. "You'll meet him soon enough, Felix. In the winter he whistles *In the Good Old Summer-Time*."

"Red Cowhage sounds like a welcome relief from the company of giant brains," I remarked.

"That he is," Shelly said. "Here's the animal room."

There was no smell of zoo in the place, no odor beyond that of damp animal-feed. Peering at us through the walls of transparent, flexible vinyl plastic hutches were several generations of white rabbits. "Doctor DeeGee Nova, I'd like you to meet—don't panic—Sergeant Felix Himmel, of the Indiana State Police," Shelly said, introducing me to the man in charge.

"Germ-free animals?" I asked him.

"These bunnies are, strictly speaking, gnotobiotes; infected with selected organisms," Nova told me. His words had the streetcar clatter of Chicago accent. "I'm trying to find out just how aspirin, added to their chow in almost homeopathic doses, fats 'em up fast. You may have seen my Leghorns out on the old tennis-court. If not, you'll meet 'em at lunch, once I'm done." Nova grinned down at Bem, who was dancing round his feet like a nephew petitioning a fond uncle for chewing-gum. "Here, beast," he said, opening the household refrigerator behind him to get out a sandwich. He dangled a circle of ketchup-smeared baloney above the Peke's nose. Bem arfed, jumped, and swallowed the meat. A lipstick-trace of ketchup remained on the pup's nose. Bem thoughtfully licked the upper part, then let Shelly blot the lower, which his tongue wouldn't reach, with Kleenex.

"Back there in the silicon jungle is Doctor David Ilf, the rabid Russian," Nova said. I looked through a forest of glass-

ware toward the far side of the lab, where a bear in a white coat was peering into a funnel of filter-paper, pushing some sort of greeny-yellow fluid through it by sheer force of will. "Ilf has no time for the social whirl," Nova explained to us, "working, as he is, on the most profound problem of our generation. He's trying to develop a lining for beer-cans that won't taint the brew."

"What poet has done as much to promote human happiness?" I inquired.

Dr. Ilf smiled at me through his distillation columns. "Heh, heh," he said.

"What say, Sergeant Felix, shall we run a little test right here and now?" DeeGee asked me.

"Fine." We sat down at a dissecting-table, pulled the zippers on three cans of beer that Nova produced from his refrigerator, and tilted them up. "Good stuff," I remarked. "I can't taste degradation-product one."

"Dey are dere," Ilf growled. "Dey will poison you, give dem time."

"A case a day for ninety years, and your liver will look like a coral sponge," Nova promised. "If I may make so bold, beer-drinkin' buddy, what's a state cop doing here in Disneyland Central?"

"Snooping," I said. "What do you know about Project Cosmos, DeeGee?"

"Heinemann, Nakamura, and Wilson used up herds of germ-free mice," Nova said. "Heinemann was the bacteriologist, Nakamura a hidden-persuader of the most dangerous sort (although I liked the man), and Wilson was a pretty fair cook-book chemist. Bright men, all of 'em. What were they doing, though?" DeeGee Nova shrugged his big shoulders. "This place is run on a need-to-know policy. It isn't considered graceful to ask unsolicited questions, lest Lucky Luger suspect you of wanting to tote off our know-how to General Mills to claim a spy's ransom."

"You're not wearing your yellow-headed pin, DeeGee," I noticed. "I though it was part of the uniform at Loki Laboratories."

"The costume jewel of the Mensa gang? Nope," Nova said. "These IQ-nuts around here remind me of little boys comparing their equipment behind the barn, begging, Miss Kelly, your innocent pardon. All this emphasis on raw intellect bores me. There are facets of personality that bear more weight. Honesty, say. The grace to wince at another man's misfortune. Brains are like a bank-account, Sergeant. They're to use, not to brag on."

Jingle Bells sounded outside the door.

"That's Red Cowhage," Nova said. "There's a fellow uncontaminated by reason, but a nicer guy you'll never want to know."

The rattle I had interpreted as sleighbells proved to be the supermarket shopping-cart loaded with mail that Red Cowhage pushed through the door. The pilot of this craft was red-headed, red-faced, and round. "Hey, there, Miss Antarctica!" he bellowed at Shelly Kelly. "Love-letters, DeeGee," he told Nova, piling our table with professional journals, lab-gear flackery, and books. "Got a can of juice for this thirsty, wing-footed Mercury?" He checked DeeGee's reefer, found himself a can of beer, and joined us. "Call me Red," he told me, sticking out a freckled hand. "Nothing political about my name, either; understand?"

"I'm Sergeant Felix Himmel," I said.

"Felix? Like the cat?"

"Very like," I sighed.

"So bottoms up!" Red Cowhage emptied his can at a single draught, took it between the heels of his hands, and crushed it flat. "You an Army sergeant?" he demanded.

"State cops."

"Good you're a sergeant, and not a doctor, like DeeGee and the mad Russian and that crazy flute-player down the hall, Cowhage said. "We got more doctors in this lash-up than the Mayo Clinic, and ain't one of 'em fit to paste a Band-Aid on a sick cat. What you doin' here?"

"I'm looking for the cause of the plague that killed three men," I said.

"That wasn't no plague," he said. Cowhage reached down to scratch the back of Bem's neck. "Doc Hans got blew up in the shower-room. The Jap guy was killed from a bee—can you feature a little bug biting a man to death? Doc Wilson had an ordinary heart-attack. No plague."

"I've got to tie up some loose ends, that's all," I said.

"They say that on TV all the time," Red Cowhage observed; "and some joker always ends up with a rope around his neck, all the same. Well, anything I can help with, Felix, let me know." He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, removing a blond mustache of beer-foam. He jumped up and seized the tiller of his shopping-cart. "Back to carrying billy-clubs to the cells of this prison-compound," he said. "See you all." He winked at me. "Meow!" Whistling the top tune of his farm-weather repertoire, Red Cowhage shoved his cart out the door and headed down the hall. "Watch your feet, you darned Frankenstein!" he yelled.

"Lady with a baby . . ." Kitten cautioned, rumbling past the

mailman on an errand of her own.

"We'd better get on with our sight-seeing tour, Felix," Shelly suggested. "Fifteen minutes is all the morning beer-break we're allowed."

"I intend to organize a union to fight that sort of sweatshop regulation," DeeGee Nova vowed. "Well, I've got to do a colostomy on a bunny. See you at lunch, Sarge."

Shelly Kelly, Bem, and I stepped out into the hallway. "We could visit the Diamond Mines, out in Building B," she mused. "They're hunting for a catalyst to ease the process of squeezing graphite into diamonds. It costs as much now to produce a handful of synthetic industrial diamonds as it does to dig the real thing out of the ground. A cheap diamond would sell well. Or we could visit the Radiation Lab, down in the basemen next to Kitten's cave. But maybe I'd better show you where we live, first, so you can drink some of that coffee you've been carrying around." We were outside Doc Greene's copper-foundry, where the clarinet still climbed up and down the scales in weary search of elusive theory. "We're in here," Shelly said, opening a door.

Bem skittered in, and headed under the desk for the petri dish of water that sat there to wash down his recent snacks. "There's not much equipment in our lab, since I have no idea of what a policeman needs; but you can draw on the Glass Shop for anything from a cyclotron to a can of beans." Shelly pointed to the desk Bem was sprawling under. "You can use that if you want to, Felix. Woody Wilson was sitting there when he had his heart-attack."

"You are, Miss Shelly Kelly, a regular little sunbeam." I dropped my briefcase on the desktop, got a couple of 500-ml. beakers from the lab, and poured us each a shot of coffee from my thermos.

"I was fond of the Cosmos bunch," she explained. She dragged her Pekingese from under my desk and smoothed the fur down over his ears. The pup came as close to purring as his dignity would allow. "The word you haven't said yet, Felix, is murder."

I sat at Dr. Woodrow Wilson's fatal desk. "If I could say that word," I told her, "I'd still need more than your blue-eyed intuition to make it stick on a warrant. What I really want is a picture of the big McGuffin."

"The huh?"

"It's a technical term used in the science of flatfootery," I said. "It means the boodle, the loot, the bait that coaxed a person or persons unknown to detonate one

scientist, stop another's heart, and sick a lethal bee on the third. What was in the Cosmos Project lockbox? Ten years' salary in unmarked bills? A blank check on all the drugstores in North America? Or the blueprints for a hotline to Mars? What the devil was that project all about?"

"All I know," Shelly said, sipping her coffee, "is that my three doctors felt they had something big. They felt sure that they'd make a fortune for Loki Laboratories, and win for themselves bonuses big enough that they could quit and go into pure research. That's the applied egghead's equivalent of a fallen woman's return to the church, Felix; abandoning the marketplace for the sanctity of pure research."

"Hans Heinemann was the first to die." I tipped back my beaker of brain-stimulant. "Did Nakamura and Wilson go ahead with their project afterwards?"

"After Doc Hans died, the other two scientists acted like a four-man basketball team; busy, but not getting much work done. Then Hoyotoko Nakamura was bee-stung, went into convulsions, and died. I wasn't here at Loki Laboratories the day it happened; but when I got back to the office, Woody Wilson sat at that desk, staring at the wall. It wasn't a week later that he bowed over his blotter and died."

Shelly scooted the dog off her lap to get a Kleenex from her purse. "Don't worry, Felix," she said. "I'm not going to go all weepy on you. Murder makes us Kellies grim, not giddy."

"You sound convinced that the Cosmosmen were murdered," I said.

"They died in the same month, Felix," Shelly said, lifting one finger. "All of them were working on the mysterious Cosmos Project." Another finger went up. "All their notes disappeared the day the last of them, Woody Wilson died." She held up the "W" of her fingers, then inverted it. "*M* is for Murder most Foul," she whispered.

"Pretty, Shelly; but your demonstration will convince neither my Colonel nor a jury. And without a suspect, it would be an empty victory to prove those deaths were murders." I popped my briefcase open. "Here are the postmortem reports on your three doctors," I said, fanning out the typewritten forms. "Woody Wilson was born with a damaged heart. When he was twelve years old, a surgeon went into his chest to perform one of the first successful open-heart operations, implanting an artificial mitral valve. The pathologist who opened him up on the autopsy table found Wilson's heart torn to bits, as though it had been hit by a steel-jacketed bul-

let. Nothing, though, had perforated his skin."

I picked up the second report. "Hoyotoko Nakamura, although his physician confirms that he has long been sensitive to bee- and wasp-venom, had at death a peculiar scratch at the right angle of his jaw. Razor-bite? He shaved electrically." I glanced through the final report. "We've nothing at all on Hans Heinemann. Not much of him was left. Heinemann stepped into the shower-room down the hall and exploded. Sewer-gas, that's what the Sheriff said caused the explosion. Luger had a firm of plumbers tear up all the pipes here in Building A. All the drains were wholesome."

"Doctor Hans was a fat man," Shelly said. "He perspired, wearing his shirt and tie and white lab-coat. Every day, before he went home to his bachelor apartment with Bem, he'd take a shower and change clothes." She cuddled the Peke. "Poor little pup," she crooned. "He can't understand what became of Papa Hans."

"Neither can I," I complained. I held up my hand. "Someone's fumbling with our door," I whispered. Getting up quietly, I reached over and tugged the door open.

"Thank you kindly," Kitten said. She rolled into the room on her six fat-tired wheels. The robot came to a halt in front of the desk and tilted its brain-listening cup-antenna toward the tower, above and to the left of the machine. "I thought I'd stop by to see if there's anything I can do for you, Sergeant Felix Himmel," Kitten said.

"Lucky Luger taped Kitten's voice-bank," Shelly said.

"Could I, perhaps, run down to the cafeteria to fill your coffee-jug?" Kitten asked me.

I felt self-conscious about talking back to this rolling tool-shed; it was like holding conversation with a Cadillac. "You're a clever machine, Kitten," I said.

"Clever? Why, I should say!" Kitten raised one of her half-dozen paws—this one a three-tonged plier—and tapped the front of her optical turret. Between her "eyes," I saw, was welded the yellow-head map-pin that identified Kitten as a member of the Mensa Society.

"Gruff!" Bem oozed out from under my desk and leaped onto the robot's back, a cornsilk David taking on steel Goliath.

A whiplike tentacle wrapped itself around Bem, lifted him with a hydraulic surge, and dropped him onto Shelly's lap as gently as a handkerchief. "Dirty dog," Kitten said. "I would delight, were it permitted, to eviscerate, decorticate, maul, bray, and depilate hair-by-particular-hair the obnoxious, egregious,

excrementitious small mammal. Blood and stink in a bag . . . ugh!" Kitten wheeled out of the room like a goosed dowager.

"Wow," I said. "Who'd think I'd ever meet a pile of junk that drops tag-lines from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius?"

"Drawing on her tower full of brain-tapes, Kitten could rattle off the technical catechism from AARDVARK to ZYMURGY," Shelly said; "and if there was anything she didn't know, she could call up Lucky Luger to fill her in. But let's get back to our murders, Felix. What makes you so sure that I'm not the Lady Macbeth behind all the bloodshed? No one else worked as closely with the Cosmos team as I did."

"You're innocent," I said.

"What makes you so certain?"

"Masculine intuition, my pretty; added to which is the fact that you were visiting your sister in Omaha, down with infectious mononucleosis, poor girl, the day that Dr. Nakamura was killed."

"If I hadn't taken that three-day vacation . . ."

"I'd have had to ask Luger to assign me the second-loveliest girl from the Pool Room," I said. "For now, I'm going down to look at a shower-room."

"Scene-of-the-crime?" she asked.

"Exactly. Can you find me a screwdriver?" I asked.

"Surely." Shelly got one from a cabinet in our laboratory. "If you're going to be wandering around here, Felix, you might as well disguise yourself in a scientist-suit," she said, holding out for my inspection a white, knee-length laboratory coat. I slipped off my jacket and hung it on the coat-tree. Shelly stared at the .38 revolver snugged into my blond-leather shoulder-holster. "Do you really have to wear that awful thing?" she asked me.

"It comes in handy for fending dragons off raven-tressed maidens," I explained, buttoning up the white coat. I walked out, snapping my fingers for Bem to follow me. Surprisingly enough, the Pekingese fell in at my heels.

In keeping with the general air of luxury displayed in Lucky Luger's money-factory, the john was equipped with a locker-room that would have done a country club credit. A small gymnasium adjoined for the convenience of the *mens sana* who wished to maintain his *corpore sano*. The locker-room boasted forty combination-locked wardrobes and a faint odor of athletic endeavor.

Bem stuck his nose into the shower-room, sniffed, and backed out whining. I patted his head, then stepped around the pup to look into the room that had become Dr. Hans Heinemann's death-chamber.

The shower-room had been re-

built since the explosion, which had brought the ceiling down onto Heinemann after spreading him across the floor. The coroner's physician had reassembled him with tweezers.

Bem barked for my attention. The punching-bag back in the gym was rattling on its hook, massaged by a pair of well-synchronized fists. "Hi, Red," I said, looking in to the Lab's mail-clerk.

"Howdy, Felix." Cowhage grinned, keeping the bag skittering off his fists. "You want to keep some change-of-clothes here, the end locker's your'n. The combination works 20-right, 15, 20."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"All the combinations are the same," Cowhage said, dropping to his knees to pet Bem. "These brain-types can't seem to keep three numbers straight in their heads; so I set the locks simple, and all the same. Forget your combination, you just ask the next guy what it is."

"You do more, then, than hustle around the mail," I said.

"All kinds of stuff," Red said. "I'm the factotum." I nodded recognition of his field. "The mail comes in twice a day, and I trundle it round in my baby-buggy. Between mailcalls, I change lightbulbs and weed flowers and bring up sandwiches to the brass. They make me mad, I run in here and pound at 'em on the punchin'-bag." He left-handed the bag one more time. "See ya 'round, Felix. *Meow!*"

Forty lockers. I began at the right end and worked my way down the line, trying on each the combination Red Cowhage had given me. All the first twelve opened. Lacking any reason to snoop on my hosts, I didn't so much as glance inside the lockers, just snapping each one shut again and going on to the next. Number 13 didn't open to the all-purpose combination. The next twenty-six lockers did.

Interesting. Was locker 13 the cache into which the thief of the Cosmos Project papers had dumped them? Had the murderer stored his killing-tools, whatever those might have been, in locker 13 until he'd seen his opportunity to use them? Never having worked burglary detail, I'm a dub at lock-picking. Tomorrow I'd bring along a set of soft-copper keys, with which I could feel out the tumbler-patterns of the slot-lock at the center of locker 13's combination dial.

I hefted my screwdriver and went again into the shower-room. Choosing a four-by-four tile above eye-level. I slipped the blade beneath it and pried it off the wall. It went into the pocket of my lab-coat. Time for me to play scientist.

Dropping Bem off to keep

Shelly Kelly company in my office, I went down to the basement. The Radiation Lab at Loki is marked, of course, by the purple-and-yellow rosette that means for your genes' sake, wear your film-badge. I pinned on the badge, and the pencil-type personal dosimeter Dr. Lily Fredericks, chief radiation physicist, handed me. "I'd like to have a neutron activation analysis run on this," I told the handsome Dr. Lily, giving her my vandalized shower-room tile.

"What are you looking for, Sergeant Himmel?" she asked.

"Iodine has been suggested to me," I said. "Can do?"

"Can do," she replied briskly, taking the tile. "This is about Dr. Hans Heinemann's death, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Murder?" She fitted a chip off my tile into the slide that would carry it into the hotspot of Loki Laboratories' most-expensive toy, their TRIGA Mark-F pulsing reactor.

"Iodine would suggest foul play," I admitted.

Dr. Lily Fredericks smiled. " 'If this paper remains blue, all is well. If it turns red, it means a man's life.' Like that?"

I nodded. "My dear doctor, it's clear that you and I grew up in the same literary neighborhood, breathing an ecstatic yellow fog and thrilling to the rattle of cabriolet-wheels. What a pleasure it is to meet an alumna of the Baker Street Irregulars in this unlikely place."

"Call me Lily." She activated the device that transported my shower-room shard into the inferno of her reactor. "Do you understand the principles of neutron activation analysis?" she asked, keeping an eye on the stopwatch that was ticking off the seconds above us.

"Only in tales-for-tiny-tots terms," I admitted. "As I get it, neutron activation analysis consists in causing a bit of material to absorb radioactive energy, after which one measures the nuclear 'heat' that oozes back from it. The various elements show themselves by the character of their induced isotopes, which can be identified by the monstrous clever computers you no doubt have at your disposal."

"Capital, Sergeant!" Dr. Fredericks said. "The last policeman I had business with presented me an undeserved pink parking-ticket. I had nearly come to despair of the detectival breed. You have renewed my faith. I have no doubt that you, like the Master, can differentiate the ashes of all one-hundred-forty varieties of pipe, cigar, and cigarette tobacco. While we await results, Sergeant, would you care to have another cup of coffee? I observe that you're addicted to that inno-

cent juice."

"Elementary," I said, glancing at the coffee-stain that marred the exposed cuff of my shirt. "Yes, indeed."

Over our coffee, Lily sang the glories of NAA, the technique that had sniffed out scandalous arsenic in a lock of Napoleon's hair; that had proved King Eric XIVth, dead four hundred years, to have been the victim of a northern Borgia who's served him a broth spiced with (most likely) corrosive sublimate.

It was with a sense of betrayal, therefore, that I received the verdict of the jury of computer read-out charts. No iodine had been blasted into the pores of that bathroom tile. "What had you in mind, Sergeant Himmel?" Dr. Fredericks asked me.

"I wanted an explosive that could have been spread on the shower-room floor in solution; which, upon drying, would be fulminated by Dr. Hans Heinemann's bare and unfortunate feet," I said. "Crystals of nitrogen tri-iodide, which fits the bill admirably, can be set off by shouting at 'em. You've just ruled that out."

"I can supply you with an understudy for your Enn-Eye-Three," the physicist volunteered. She stepped into her office and returned with her finger marking an article in the British *New Scientist*. ". . . a violent explosive, of power about equal to that of TNT," she read aloud.

"Excuse me, Lily." I grabbed the magazine and read on: "The explosive nature of xenon trioxide, leaving no traces of solid materials may find use—not it is to be hoped, by criminals as detection of the explosive used would be difficult."

"At present, impossible," my savant interjected.

"This may be it," I said, uncrossing my superstitious fingers. "It appears that any clever high-school boy could cook up a batch of this xenon trioxide, once he got hold of the groceries required. He'd pipe xenon and fluorine gases through a hot nickle tube, bubble the escaping xenon tetrafluoride through water, and spread the resulting solution of xenon trioxide on the shower-room floor to dry. The game, doctor, is afoot."

"What will you do now?" she asked.

"I'll find out who ordered supplies of xenon and fluorine from the Glass Shop," I said. "The killer didn't pick that stuff up at his friendly, corner Walgreen's."

I took Bem along to the Glass Shop to check the records. Both gases were kept in stock, the attendant told me, amused that I should suppose that his inventory lacked any imaginable resource. His amusement vanished when he discovered that his

shelves were short a peck of calcium fluoride and a tank of xenon.

Only moderately elated, I led Bem back to the office, where we could confer with our friend and secretary. "Poor Hans," Shelly said. "Finding out what killed him does no more good than pointing to the bullet-hole. You still don't know who held the gun."

"With Lily Fredericks' help, I've found one invisible weapon," I said.

"Lily, eh?" Shelly asked. "First-naming lady physicists now, Felix?"

I ignored her. "Something of the same sort, far-out, fingerprintless, and fatal, was used on Nakamura and Wilson."

"And will be aimed at you, if the killer feels your caffein-scented breath on the back of his neck," Shelly observed.

"Since you mention danger," I said, "you'll have to take precautions, too, Shelly."

"I'm always circumspect in the company of strange men, Sergeant," she said.

"Shut up and wear this," I said, handing her a pocket dosimeter I'd got from Lily Fredericks' stock. "Radiation is the sneakiest killer of them all."

"Do you suspect anyone yet, Felix?"

"I don't even know everyone here, yet," I protested. "All I know about our murderer is that he has free access to lab goodies, can go pretty much where he pleases, and wanted the Cosmos Project papers badly enough to kill for them." I gazed at Michelle, her hair the color of coffee unmarred by cream, her arms tanned to the tint of claro cigar-leaf.

"What's the matter, Felix?"

"I'm contemplating the wonderous structures that can result from piling amino-acid on amino-acid, tying peptides into polypeptide chains, weaving skeins of protein molecules into lacework of helixes and nets . . . You're a beautiful girl, Shelly. I'd rather not tell you everything I find out from here on in. You'll be in danger if the murderer thinks you suspect his name."

"This is the first time I've been complimented as an organic compound," Shelly said. "Thank you, Felix. And thanks for the warning. I'm with you, all the same. Those three men who died were my friends, not just entries on a coroner's report."

"I wish we had a canary in this office," I mused. "A bird of the sort coal-miners used to carry with them underground, to warn of noxious gases. Lacking such a sensitive bird, though, I'm glad I wear hardware under my white coat." I patted the .38. "How about dinner this evening, Shelly?"

"You'll get bored with me," she protested, "seeing on duty and off."

'If I do, I'll get my Smokey-Bear hat back, put on blue whipcord again, and return to the job of terrorizing motorists on the Toll Road," I promised.

The next morning, Bem and I adjourned to the men's locker-room with the set of copper keys I'd requisitioned. After some jiggery-pokery with a file, I got locker 13 open. A black jacket hung inside, with a yellow-headed Mensa pin on its lapel. A chessboard sat on the floor, the pieces arranged in a pattern that awoke no insight in ignorant me. Laundry-ink inside the neckband of the jacket spelled out COWHAGE. For some reason, Red was hiding his light under a bushel. I leaped to no obvious conclusions. A murder-investigation typically turns up tangential bits of hanky-pank.

Shelly and I had fried chicken with the gang in the cafeteria, refused DeeGee Nova's offer of a postprandial beer, and went back to our office to try the Mycroft Holmes bit. "It's strange," I said, pouring warm water over Bem's grubby-looking dog-chow, "that Lucky Luger shouldn't know what Project Cosmos was aimed at."

"That's the way he organized his shop," Shelly said. "Lucky gives his researchers their heads. Paperwork is anathema. He expects loyalty from his staff, and that's the end of his rule-book."

"What devices did Cosmos employ, Shelly?" I asked. "Any hint would help."

"Hans Heinemann had a row of bac-tec incubators over there in our lab," she said. "He and Woody Wilson did a lot of work with DeeGee's germ-free white rats, too. Not even Nova knew what they were up to. When people hinted, little Nakamura would grin and shake his head. The project seems to have been originated by the other two. Nakamura came along later, adding, I'd guess, some sort of motivational-research-type hooker."

"How many people knew about Dr. Nakamura's allergy to bee-stings?"

"I did. I suppose everyone did," Shelly said. Hoyotoko would walk 'way out across the lawn to avoid the flowers when they were in blossom, this to lessen his chance of being ambushed by an peevish bee."

"Heinemann's penchant for showers was no secret, either, was it?" I poured us out some coffee.

Shelly smiled. "Hans had a deep-dish Dutch accent," she remembered. "The other fellows had one joke they repeated time and again: about how Hans would go take his shower and

feel Rosie all over. He'd laugh each time they told that, and slap his belly; a three-hundred-pound Katzenjammer kid."

Someone fumbled at the door. I opened it for Kitten, who rolled in like she'd had a hard night out and headed for the wall-socket next to my desk. Bem padded out the open door, muttering canine curses over his shoulder. "Thirsty," Kitten whispered. She reached out her power-tentacle and plugged it in. "Aaah!" she sighed. "Delicious alternating current. You meat-things don't know what you're missing. Don't mind me, now."

It is difficult to ignore half a ton of iron in the middle of the floor, especially when it persists in purring and scratching at its back with half a dozen arms, rejoicing in recharging. "How long have you been here, Kitten?" I asked the robot.

"Since the Greeks first stroked amber with a woolen cloth," she boasted.

Unable to resist the invitation of our open door, Red Cowhage wheeled in his shopping-cart to join us. "Got any more of that coffee, Sarge?" he asked. I got another beaker from the lab and poured him a shot. "I saw Bem hot-pawing it down the hall, and I kinda figured old Kitten had shooed him out," Red said. "How's the big murder-case shaping up, Felix?"

"I'm drinking lots of coffee," I testified. "How much time does that tin cat generally spend sucking at the electric teat?"

"Kitten just sips, a little here, a little there," Red said. He patted the three-foot-high turret.

The robot brushed Cowhage's hand aside with her whip-tentacle. "Human perspiration," she growled, "is very corrosive." Rather pointedly, Kitten unplugged and rolled out the door.

"Snob," Cowhage hissed. "If she wasn't the boss's pet, I'd put sand in her gears."

"Red's afraid that Kitten will swipe his job of delivering the mail," Shelly explained.

"She's too darned lazy to work," Cowhage said. "She just runs around the halls, tracks through flowerbeds like Ferdinand the Bull, plays catch with folks that got nothing better to do, and make wisecracks." Red jumped to his feet. "No stupid threshing-machine is gonna automate me out of a job," he vowed.

After Red Cowhage left, I closed the door. "Kitten plays catch?" I asked Shelly.

"As a gag, Lucky Luger programmed *The Rules of Baseball* into her," she said. "Kitten could pitch a marshmallow through a brick wall, and she fields like an acre of flypaper. At our last Fourth of July company picnic, Lucky let her pitch him. He held his bat out horizontal. Kitten

broke it in two with a pitched ball. There was talk for weeks afterwards about selling her to the Mets." Someone, again, was scratching at our door. I admitted Bem, who stalked around the presumably oil-scented patch of floor where Kitten had stood and spread himself out to glower at us. "If Pekingese could swear, we'd get an earful," Shelly said.

"Do you hear something, Shelly?" I asked.

She sat silent for a moment. "No," she said. "What was it; Doc Greene's wistful clarinet?"

"Something here in our office." I said. "The sort of noise a mouse might make. Maybe in my desk-drawer?" I tugged the center drawer all the way open.

The thumbtacks and paperclips that normally rested in the tray at the front of the drawer were clustered now at the back, squirming as though they wanted to burrow through the wood. "Get back into the lab, Shelly," I ordered.

"What's happening?" she demanded, backing away from the desk.

"That's what I'm going next door to see." I drew my gun and rounded the corner from our office into Doctor Greene's music-room.

The door was open. The lab was empty. The huge electromagnet with which Greene plotted victory over copper oxide was tilted back, aimed through the wall at the spot where I'd been sitting. I tugged my gun back into its holster through a magnetic-field sticky as quicksand, then switched off the big machine.

Who had turned the magnet on? Why?

I glanced over the spice-bottles ranged above Greene's kitchen sink. Powdered aluminum, in one of the glass-stoppered jars, looked like just what I needed. I spilled a little of the dust onto my palm, then went over to puff it onto the control-box of the electromagnet, around the scarlet ON button. A few smudged prints appeared, outlined in the silvery metal. "Shelly!" I shouted out the door. "Bring over a roll of Scotch-tape."

"May I ask," Doctor Greene asked, pointing at my middle the gun he held in his right hand, "what you're doing with my 100,000-gauss magnet?"

It was a showdown. Fortunately, before I attempted a Hollywood draw with my revolver, I saw that the gun in Greene's hand had a cord at one end, and a soldering-tip at the other. "What happens to people exposed to a hundred-thousand-gauss magnetic field?" I asked. Shelly handed me the transparent tape, and I set to work lifting the prints I'd found on the switch.

"My field is metals, not mammals," Greene protested. He put down his soldering-gun and peered over my shoulder. "Powdered aluminum?" he inquired.

"Yes. We call it a developing powder," I said.

"Did you stop to think that your lavish use of powdered aluminum will have short-circuits flashing around this laboratory every time I throw a switch?"

"No," I admitted.

"Let's see what sort of prints you picked up," Greene demanded. He glued down the Scotch-tape with its shadow of finger-prints, procurred a four-inch magnifier, and stuck his right fingertips beneath it, beside the tape. "Match, don't they?"

"Afraid so."

"Thus I stand convicted of operating my own electromagnet," Greene said. "I swear, Himmel, if you weren't a French-horn player, I'd bust you one right in the embouchure." He glanced toward his magnet. "Did you tilt it towards the wall that way?"

"No."

"Aimed right at you, eh?"

"Got me square in the breadbasket," I said. "My paper-clips were crawling through the wall."

"I don't wonder," Greene said. "Now, I don't want to be quoted —what I'm about to tell you is outside my specialty—but several investigators have reported that squirrel monkeys, subjected to a high magnetic field, responded with a change in heart-rhythm, a slowing of the beat, and black-outs. Mice in the same fix lost a quarter of their white blood cells and showed an increase in red blood corpuscles. Since I read all this, I've been having the old peripheral blood checked every single week."

"Doctor Greene, is nickle a magnetic metal?" I asked.

"You could say so," Greene admitted.

"Doctor Woodrow Wilson, who used to sit where I was sitting ten minutes ago, had a nickle ball-bearing built into his prosthetic mitral heart-valve," I said. "I don't suppose the killer counted on that additional help, but I'm sure he tore Wilson's heart out with this monstrous electromagnet of yours."

"Oh, my goodness," Greene groaned. He slumped down into the chair beside his music-rack and shook his head. "I'll never feel the same about her again," he said, staring at the magnet. "It's as though you were to learn that your best silverware had been used to cut up babies."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"No fault of yours, Sergeant Himmel. Will you hand me my clarinet-case, please?"

To the opening bars of Aaron Copland's *Clarinet Concerto*, Shelly Kelly and I tip-toed out of his laboratory. I glanced at my

wristwatch. Unlike my heart, it had stopped. "When day is done, and shadows fall," I told Miss Kelly, "I feel the need for alcohol. Join me?"

"If I do, I'll miss the bus back to Connorsville," Shelly said.

"If you do, I'll guarantee you a State Police escort." I promised. "Get Bem and the coffee-jug and we'll cut out." I hung up my white coat.

Shelly ransacked the office. "Can't find your thermos, Felix," she said.

"Skip it," I said. "Let's go eat us some olives."

Bem trotted ahead of us out the building, down the walk, and into the gatehouse. He sniffed at Lucky Luger's gold-brick, then led us on to the parking-lot. Shelly glanced in the window of my car as I leaned over to unlatch the door on her side. "There it is, on the floor in back," she said. "Your thermos bottle."

"How'd it get out here?" I asked. "No matter."

Bem seated himself between us, cheerfully confident that my plans included a steak for a Pekingese. I headed for the Constellation Club, a bar-restaurant at Sundown, a town so small that it seems to have been incorporated only to circumvent the Indiana law that prohibits roadside pubs. "So far as method goes," I said, talking shop, "it's two down and one to go." I rolled up my window. "Chilly."

Michelle scooted as close as Bem would let her. I freed my right hand from the wheel to warm her shoulder. "Somehow it seems more decent to bludgeon a man to death, or to shoot him, than to brew-up exotic bombs and stop his heart with a magnet," she said.

"When we nail our man, it's gonna be Murder One," I predicted. "Premeditation is implicit in this nasty-science-project of his." Bem scooted down onto the floor. "Pick up the darned dog, will you?" I asked. "He'll get in the way if I have to brake."

"What?" Shelly asked me.

The highway ahead of us was shimmering. Mirages danced up from the pavement. I slumped down as far as my seat-belt would give and squinted my eyes. Somehow, anticipating that first martini had made me a little bit drunk . . . "Shelly?"

"Mmm?" She seemed half-asleep.

Some idiot, tooling along on my side of the pavement, hooted as I swerved to the right to let him pass. Suddenly I realized that I'd been driving on his side. "Hoo, boy!" I said.

Shelly was snoring, a mellow and ladylike sound I found rather appealing. I chuckled. "Hey, Shelly-baby; get that rug off'n my feets, will ya?" Bem

was lying against my right ankle, inert and silent.

The Monon Railroad saved our lives, and the red crossing-blinkers that called attention to the freight that was crossing the road. I realized that I was being urged toward some mechanical decision, and wheeled down the window to watch those dancing spots ahead.

Clean air blasted against my face. Something wrong. I lead-footed the brake-pedal, skidded, then started stabbing at it. The flickering wall ahead of us loomed up fast. A fog of hot rubber fanned out behind us.

We rocked to a halt. My front bumper was no more than spitting-distance from the orange refrigerator-cars that were rattling off to our left.

"Shelly!" I reached across her to open the door. I patted her face.

"Stobbit, Felix," she said, shaking her head.

Ahead, the caboose clattered over the crossing, and the red blinkers went dead. The cars behind me started hooting.

I pulled off to the berm, beyond the tracks. "Coffee," I told myself. I reached back to get the thermos jug from the floor in back. "Damn!" The can was so cold that my sweaty fingers had stuck to it. Opening the back door, I swaddled the jug in my handkerchief and lifted it out. The top was loose. A boiling fluid streamed out into the roadside ditch as I up-ended the thermos. I held my breath. Then I corked the bottle and tossed it back into the car, reciting every rude word boyhood on the farm and service in the Navy had taught me.

"Rough!"

"You said it, buddy." Bem was on Shelly's lap, now, his pop-eyes reflecting suspicion.

"I didn't spike your drink," I told him.

"Somebody did," Shelly moaned. "Did I say anything I shouldn't have?"

"We haven't had the first sip, yet," I said. My hands were trembling. Whether this was a symptom of carbon monoxide poisoning or simple nervous shock, I didn't know. "Let's get to Sundown and correct that lack."

Both of us innocently hung-over, we had coffee with our steaks. Bem guarded the car, beside which he wolfed his very-rare. "Poison gas in the thermos-jug," Shelly said. "Your program of coaxing the rats out of the wainscotting seems to have borne fruit."

"We were very nearly killed." I told her about the car I'd almost hit, and the train we had very nearly cut in half at sixty miles an hour. "Not having much experience with liquified carbon

monoxide," I said, "I'll have to guess. But we're on the murderer's heels, Shelly. He tried to turn us off this evening. There wouldn't have been any evidence of this killing, either; not unless the coroner thought to test our blood at autopsy. Even then, with the car chewed up by half a mile of fast freight, there wouldn't be any way to prove that we hadn't been gassed by a leaky muffler."

"Put some silver in the jukebox, Felix," Shelly said. "Punch several cheerful buttons."

I hired Al Hirt to trumpet at us, and returned to our table. "Shelly," I said, "I want you to take the rest of the week off."

"The game's getting too rough for you, eh?" she demanded. "Well, my answer is no. I'm not a quitter."

I took her hand, slowing up her progress with the steak. "Shelly, I have in mind a formal ceremony for you and me. It's not a double funeral." Hirt triple-tongued his way through "Trumpeter's Holiday," music roughly romantic as an ice-water shower.

Shelly Kelly smiled. "My college room-mate said I snore," she reported. "I think I should tell you that before you make any rash commitments."

"You snore, I play the French horn," I told her. "Noisewise, that leaves us one-all."

Shelly frowned down into her coffee-cup. "We'll be drinking oceans of this stuff together," she predicted. "Let me wash your offer down with something a bit more lively, Felix; and I'll give it the benefit of my best thought."

"If you'll give me a hint of the outcome, I'll bang on the table and yell for champagne," I said.

"Very well, Felix," she said. "You have my definite Let's See."

Al Hirt goes well with champagne. Later, when the Constellation Club's combo made its gig, we invited Bem in to dance with us. Much later, awash with enough coffee to assure that I could drive, but never sleep, again, we hustled down to Connorsville, where I grudgingly let Shelly say goodnight. Bem plodded up the steps to the apartment they shared, glaring daggers at me for having kept him out rousing till dawn.

I walked through the Loki Laboratories gatehouse later that morning with a feeling I'd known before only while watching GI movies on the late-late show: it was the scene where the squad-leader is advancing easy-footed through a field spiked with anti-personnel mines. Someone in this crazy place wanted me dead. A feeble ray of sunshine eased through my inner gloom. If I

were important enough to bump off, it could only be because I was probing near a nerve. Remembering then that Shelly would have gone with me, smeared across a cornfield by a westbound freight, I felt a surge of anger that washed through my sleep-denied brain.

"Aaah-Ooo-Gah!" A dieselhorn blasted through my head. I crawled up the hall's right wall. Kitten wheeled past at twenty miles an hour. "Be alert at all times," she said, adding what sounded like a chuckle.

I added several salty phrases to the tin cat's vocabulary, then went on into the office to brood through my notes.

"Item one," I told my audience, Shelly and Bem. "Red Cowhage wears a Mensa Society pin on his jacket, and is a solitary chess-player. If Red's not stupid, he's a fraud; if he's a fraud, he could be a killer, too."

"There's a weak link in that logical chain," Shelly observed. "Why need a con-man be a murderer?"

"Better him than nice people like us," I explained.

"I hear Cowhage whistling down the hall with the morning mail," Shelly reported. "If you want to interview him, now's your chance."

"I suggest that all girls and dogs leave the room first," I said.

"Both Bem and I can claw and bite," Shelly said. She seated herself like a statue of an Egyptian king, defying me to budge her.

Cowhage came in of his own accord. "No mail, Sergeant Himmel," he said. "Theres something I want to tell you, though."

"About your owning a Mensa pin and brains to match?" I inquired.

Red sat on the edge of my desk. "You've heard the quatrain that goes, 'Behold the happy moron, he doesn't give a damn . . .'"

". . . I wish I were a moron: My God! Perhaps I am!" I finished it.

"They had me on the books as a brilliant student," Cowhage said. "I was grinding away at my work—toward a Ph.D. in philosophy, something rare as gloves in a glove-compartment—when I felt myself sinking into that slough of despond the medieval saints named anomie. So I retired for a year, got myself the dumbest job I could find. I'm with it again, Sergeant Himmel. I'm heading back to Columbia in the fall."

"How nice for you," I said. "But why brief me on your intellectual *Wanderjahr?*"

"Because I had to talk to you about this." Red Cowhage took from his shirt-pocket a green metal wheel, a sharp-pointed asterisk some four inches in diam-

eter. "Your problem, to find the man who killed the Project Cosmos team, is the first puzzle outside chess that has exercised me since I retired from thinking," he said. "I know that I'm your prime suspect. Who can go everywhere? I can. Who's below suspicion? The whistling moron. Right?"

"You come most carefully upon your hour," I said.

"I found this wheel on the lawn, out by the rose-arbor, three weeks ago," Cowhage said, turning the green artifact in his hands. "Why was it painted green? I wondered. To hide itself in the grass, I decided. What was it for? I've opened books again, and I've discovered the answer."

"That thing killed Nakamura?" I demanded.

"A splendid inductive leap, Sergeant," Cowhage congratulated me. "Children in Japan, as you may not know, don't play cowboy any more; they play at Ninjutsu. The Ninja, invisible skulkers, bloody bawdy Robin Hoods, are invulnerable to poison. They can kill their enemies in a hundred ways, one of which," he said, taking one tine of the sharp-spoked wheel between the index finger and thumb of his right hand, "is this poison-tipped *shuriken.*" He flipped it. I had my gun out faster than you could say "Channel Fifteen," and the sound of my shot bounced off the walls before the disk hit the floor, hopelessly bent out of shape.

"I was only going to nail it into the calendar over there," Cowhage said. "The bee-venom that killed Dr. Nakamura has long since been washed away by dew and rain."

I pulled a scrap of paper across the desk and lettered the message: HOW CAN I TURN OFF KITTEN?

"All you can do," Cowhage announced aloud, "is cut the power to the whole Lab complex, and let her run out her batteries."

"The hell you say!" Kitten crashed through the office door, filling the air with confetti kindling. She headed toward me as though she intended to leap into my lap.

I stepped aside. *"Ole!"* Cowhage shouted.

"Get out to the car, Shelly," I yelled. I squeezed three shots into the robot's optical turret, then sprinted from the office, down the hall in the opposite direction to that Shelly Kelly (carrying Bem) and Red Cowhage had taken. I was headed to the tower to cut off Kitten's brains.

A steel stairway led past a window, up to Lucky Luger's laboratory in the bell-tower. Kitten hummed along behind me.

"*Aaah-Ooo-Gah!*" she bellowed. Three cans the size of spray-foam shaving-cream containers bounced down the stairs, sputtering. White fire flashed. The cans melted, welded themselves to the steel stair, burning it through. Thermite grenades, the robot's home-defense device. The stairway sagged like a sand-castle caught by the tide.

Kitten whipped out a tentacle to catch me around the neck. I cuddled my head in my arms and fell through the window. Outside, I was off and running without having time to check myself over for shrapnel wounds. Unable to scale the casement, Kitten turned to take the long way around. I had a very thin edge of seconds to get to the red, Amish barn run by Dr. Bingo Lane.

Lane was, as usual, displaying bare feet and knees. His pedipulator was hitched to a hoist, ready to go up into walking position. "I'm commandeering this vehicle," I shouted.

"No need to take it over at gunpoint, Felix," Lane told me, shoving aside the revolver I was brandishing.

"Kitten has gone crazy," I explained. "I've got to shoot up her computer, in the tower."

"Take off your pants, then, and your shoes," he directed.

"Eh?"

"The feedback mechanism in the follower-rack feels the movements of your feet and knees," he explained. Something over in the main building crashed.

I stripped off my shoes, socks, and trousers; and stepped into the control-box of Lane's pedipulator. The whole affair fit itself to me tightly as a pair of wet boots. "Don't think about driving it," Lane said. "It does the thinking: you just walk."

"Roger," I said. Lane triggered the hoist-switch, and I eased up toward the ceiling of the barn. I stepped out of the building.

"Catcher crew!" Bingo Lane shouted. I heard their jeep start up.

I walked on. It was a dream of glory, looming high above the world, striding ten yards with my most indifferent step. I saw Kitten, scrambling through the brick rubble she'd rammed through the wall. She saw me, too; and was rolling across a bed of tulips.

The slit-windows of the campanile were five paces away. Two shots would have to do the job. Two bullets to puncture Kitten's brain, to cut her off from her yachtsman master eight hundred miles east of us.

The windows were smashed with the butt of my .38. I rested my elbows on the pidgeon-redolent ledge outside. Where to aim? Panels of lights flashed in the laboratory, feeding Kitten instructions from the *Midas*

Touch. Whatever I hit, IBM would never forgive me. I chose a red light that seemed especially excited, and punched it out.

I glanced back over my shoulder. The jeep with the net was backing into fielding-position behind me. Pessimists.

Kitten rolled on, waving all six arms in promise of mayhem. "Kill! Kill!" she bellowed.

My State Police sedan, as though eager to join in the glorious confusion, was headed my way, too; bearing in its teeth an eight-foot strip of hurricane-fence. Shelly was at the wheel, and I saw Bem flash up behind the windshield as he leaped to watch.

No time to choose my target from the rich display before me. Kitten was gnawing at my right calf, and I was having trouble taking aim. An oscilloscope screen was writhing with green worms. I mashed 'em with my last shot.

I fell backwards. My sedan rammed dead Kitten in her right flank. Bem sprang from the car to leap upon his enemy. Then I was up to my ears in grass, with Shelly purring into one of them. "They missed me," I groaned.

"You bounced out of the net," she said. "Clumsy, are you all right?"

"I'll be fine." I hitched myself deeper into the pedipulator holster. "I'll be better, once you've brought me my pants."

"I'm sorry that I wrecked your car," she said.

"No problem," I told her. "I'll invite my Colonel to be best man, and as his wedding-present he'll write off the sedan."

It was Bingo Lane who ran up with my trousers. Panted again, I accompanied Shelly to look at Kitten.

Poor beast. Wedged between the cop-car and the catcher-jeep, she was silent as any anonymous pile of scrap. "I'd better call the Coast Guard," I said. "Get them to detain the *Midas Touch*. She's probably steaming into international waters this very moment."

"I doubt it," Shelly said. "I called the Coast Guard's Boston District office before I rammed Kitten. Let's get some coffee, Felix."

"Coffee, hell," I snapped, taking her arm. "We're going to buy ourselves a couple of blood-tests and a license."

The Colonel was all smiles, like cupid carved in granite. "Three murders solved and two aborted repay the state for the cost of the car you smashed, Miss Kelly," he told Shelly. He turned to me. "Felix, you've talked with Lucky Luger. What the devil was Project Cosmos?"

"That doesn't really matter, sir," I said. "The reason Luger killed the three doctors was that

he'd overheard their plans to leave Loki Laboratories. Kitten carried his long-distance ears, as well as his murdering hands. Luger demanded loyalty. He couldn't let those men leave him."

"Tell me about Cosmos, Himmel, or I'll strip your stripes," he said.

"Toothpaste, Colonel," Shelly said.

"You jest," he said.

"The formula will license for some ten million dollars a year," I explained. "Heinemann and Wilson, working with germ-free rats, discovered an enzyme that inhibits tooth-decay. One hundred percent fewer cavities, Colonel."

"Hoyotoko Nakamura supplied the huckster's touch," Shelly said. "He had his associates work up a colorless chemical that turns dirty yellow when exposed to saliva. It will make the consumer feel that his toothbrush is doing him good."

Bem looked toward us, toward the door, and wagged his tail.

"May I inquire, Sergeant Himmel, where you two . . . you three . . . are going on your honeymoon?" the Colonel asked me.

"Yes, sir," I said, opening the door and leading Shelly out. "You may inquire."

NOT ENOUGH PRISONERS

While the male prison population in England has tripled in thirty years, and now stands at roughly thirty thousand prisoners—women have been decreasing.

There are now fewer than one thousand women in prison in England. Holloway, Oscar Wilde's old prison, the biggest of the five prisons for women, was built to hold eight hundred prisoners. This spring it held two hundred and ninety-five women.

The Governor of Holloway (more about her in a moment) is anxious for the prisoners, so we are told, to make themselves at home. They are allowed as many photographs as they like, and can move their furniture around—which most do, the moment they move in. . . . "It's nice here," she says, "having the feeling of great long galleries. You can hear them coming along, singing and laughing as they work. Do you know, we made 156 tons of jam last year?"

Joanna Kelley, who worked in the Admiralty during the war, is Governor of Holloway. She likes Pinter, Ionesco and Osborne, and dislikes Noel Coward—making her, obviously, a rather unusual civil servant.

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

The innocent few who are of the opinion that life was simpler in great-grandfather's time will no doubt be distressed by Doris Miles Disney's superb recreation of the discovery of Hetty Eaton, in the late 1880's, that there could be evil in the world—brooding, all-enveloping evil. AT SOME FORGOTTEN DOOR (Doubleday, $4.50), starts with Hetty's visit to her dying father who, much too late, has realized that he has done the girl an injustice, and is determined to make amends—in the only way understood as such in the year of our Lord, 1886.

Hester Mary Eaton Whittemore discovers, in time, the truth about her parents—and her husband, the husband of her cousin when she first meets him—and flees into the night, in an ages-old search for peace and sanity. Doris Miles Disney's thirty-fourth novel is, as I said, a superb recreation of the lives and times of those who preceded us, not so long ago after all, and a refutation of those who insist that those times were simpler and less complicated. The truth is of

The writer, editor of THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, an anthology of spy stories just published by Award Books, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the 1963 Critic's Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.

course that manners—and surface mores—were no doubt different. But, apart from that, human nature *was* the same. . . . Think about this for a while—think back to your own pasts—and you'll find this is so.

By way of contrast, on the other hand, George Baxt's A QUEER KIND OF DEATH (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)—while this too deals with people who could have been found in great-grandfathers time (in (Berlin) — represents an interesting departure in this genre, a socio - documentary departure which will no doubt outrage many and confirm still others in their doubts about the circles in which Ben Bentley and Seth Piro move.

We like to deceive ourselves and insist that the world known to these two and to their friends, and to Seth Piro's estranged wife Veronica, is both unimportant and of little influence on our times. To think so is of course comforting, but not very realistic. The influence cannot be felt —nor can it be tasted— nor can it be held in one's hand and an attempt made to bend it, or to break it.

It would be more correct to say that this is something in the air—an aspect of what many like to describe as the sickness of these times. In our generation the world known to these young men has been tacitly recognized as a phenomenon of these times, in common with mob violence and acts of individual and senseless and almost witless violence. There are historical precedents for viewing these developments with considerable alarm, but I say this with some hesitation because the lessons of history are never very popular . . .

As for Pharoah Love, the detective, I am afraid he belongs in this world - within - a - world known to both murderer and murdered.

Pierre Audemars' A TIME OF TEMPTATION (Doubleday, $3.50) deals with an investigation carried on by M. Pinaud, of the Sûreté, "in the days", to quote the author, "when M. Pinaud still had difficulty in reconciling the world as he wanted it to be with the world as it was."

The world as it was—or, to be exact, as he found it—was an example of how little progress and civilization, as these are understood elsewhere, will at times touch people living in comparatively isolated communities. As a result, the world of the De Graufins is destroyed once M. Pinaud returns to Arascon, to investigate the death of his young colleague. There are no doubt readers who will insist that

this world dominated until then by the De Graufin family could not possibly exist in our enlightened times, but to do so would be unwise. We know much too little about life in our own state, or in our country—or for that matter about life in our own cities—to be that certain that time has not stood still, elsewhere. . . .

Alfred Stanford's THE MISSION IN SPARROW BUSH LANE (Morrow, $3.95), has been hailed as an exceptionally effective novel of suspense in wartime London. The American navy commander who narrates the story is faced with the problem of establishing the loyalty of his secretary, with whom he is increasingly in love—as the truth about her becomes clear. . . . Interesting.

Josephine Bell's NO ESCAPE (Macmillan, $3.95) is the story of young Dr. Timothy Long's discovery of some of the undercurrents of life in Metropolitan London. Thoroughly pleasant. Do read this.

The Sherlock Holmes Tour of London, originally scheduled for May of this year (it had been planned to attend the Annual Awards Dinner of the British Crime Writers Association), had to be postponed until this Fall in view of my illness. It is now planned to leave from New York early in October.

Features of the tour will include a visit to the "Sherlock Holmes", meetings with Holmes aficionados and, it is hoped, with officials at Scotland Yard, and a two-day excursion to Dartmoor, the scene of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES. Members of the tour will explore Soho and search for books in the same bookstores Sherlock Holmes might have known. . . . For further information, I suggest that you write directly to Mr. Peter Berkman, P.O. Box 211, Howard Beach Station, Jamaica, New York 11414.

It is welcome news that Francis Beeding's DEATH WALKS IN EASTREPPS has been reissued (W. W. Norton, $3.95), with an introduction by Vincent Starrett, who writes that it has remained in his memory for half a lifetime. The novel, first published in 1931, deals with a series of murders in a quiet English seacoast village. A convenient suspect is accused of the murders, tried and convicted—and executed. And proven innocent after his death. . . . Do reread this!

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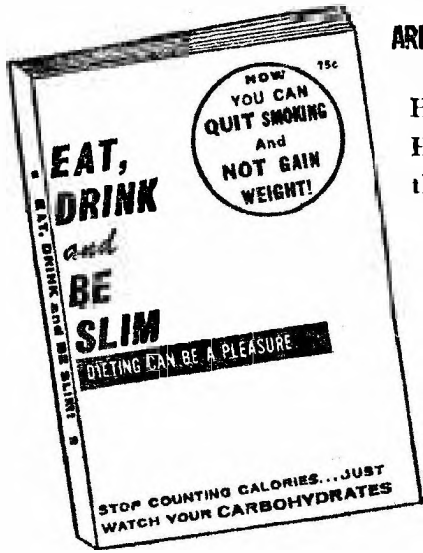

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of letters in cypher

by Francois de Callieres

Secrecy being the life of negotiations, the art of writing in unknown characters has been invented, for concealing the knowledge of what is written from those who intercept the letters; but the industry of mankind, which is refin'd by necessity and interest, has found out rules for decyphering these characters, and penetrating by that means into the secret of other people's letters. However, although there are decypherers that are very eminent in their way, and who have reaped great advantages by their art, yet I may venture to say it here upon good grounds, that they owe the esteem they have gain'd solely to the negligence of those who give bad cyphers, and to that of Ministers, and their Secretaries, who make not a right use of them.

After having examined this matter thoroughly, together with

Francois de Callières was "a gentleman of great experience in publick negotiations, and who has had a great share in the Transactions of Europe for some time past. He was sent by the late French King to several courts of the North, upon affairs of great importance. He was the person chiefly intrusted by him to settle with the Dutch the preliminaries of the peace of Ryswick; and for that end was sent into Holland, where he resided incognito near two years before the Congress was opened for the Treaty of Ryswick, when he took upon him the publick character of Ambassador and Plenipotentiary. And since that time he has been imploy'd in the quality of Privy Counsellor, and Secretary of the Cabinet to the French King."

From: Francois de Callières' THE ART OF NEGOTIATING WITH SOVEREIGN PRINCES, 1716, George Strahan, London

the rules of decyphering, I am convinced that a letter well couch'd in cypher, and that in a good cypher, is not to be decyphered without treachery; that is to say, unless one finds means to corrupt some secretary, to give a copy of the key of the cypher. And one may assuredly defy all the decypherers in Europe, to be able to decypher cyphers that are very easie to those who have the key to them; when they are made, as they ought to be, upon a general model, which it is an easie matter to give, and out of which an infinite number of different keys may be made of a cypher that cannot be decyphered. I do not speak of certain cyphers, invented by Professors in an University, and founded upon rules of Algebra or Arithmetick, which are impracticable by reason of their too great length, and of the difficulties in using them, but of common cyphers which all Ministers make use of, and with which one may write a dispatch almost as fast as with ordinary letters.

It would be necessary therefore, to prevent the decyphering of letters, that every Minister should take the pains to make for himself a good key of a cypher, and to leave a copy of it at the Secretary of State's office, with the person who has the trust of decyphering the letters; instead of using the cypher that is given him out of the Secretary's office, which is usually very easie to be decyphered, and is often common to several other Ministers of the same Prince, so that if any one of their secretaries sells the key, it may be made use of to decypher the dispatches of those Ministers who are in different countries; which may occasion great inconveniences, and do considerable prejudice to the affairs of the Prince whom they serve, by the discovery of his most important secrets.

It would be proper also, to direct every Minister to put the things which require secrecy into a letter by itself; the whole written in cypher, and not to suffer their secretaries to write, as they commonly do, a part of their dispatches without cypher, and to content themselves with interrupting the sequel by some words in cypher, so that which is written in plain words, without cypher, serves by the cohesion of the discourse, to help one to guess at the meaning of what is wrapt up in cypher, and to let one know in what language the dispatch is written, which cannot be guess'd at, when the whole letter is in cypher. And the Minister will do well, not to insert in the minute of his letter in cypher, anything but what is essential, and to cut off all superfluous words, that he himself may not lose his time in composing

his cypher, nor occasion the loss of it to those who have the charge of decyphering his letters, and who conceive a just indignation against him, when they find nothing in them that deserves the pains which the decyphering gives them.

THE THIRD DEGREE IN SOUTH AFRICA — A JUDGEMENT

We are indebted to the April 1966 issue of *anti-apartheid news*, published in London, for the details of a judgement handed down by the Supreme Court, in Cape Town, in the matter of the application of Mr. Bernard Gosschalk, a Cape Town architect, for an order calling on the head of the Security Police in the Western Cape, to refrain from exerting any unlawful pressures on Gosschalk "to influence him to answer questions or to make a statement. In support of his application an affidavit had been submitted by his wife, who had visited him a few days after his arrest under the so-called "180-day no-trial Act."

"In view of the conflict between the affidavits for the applicant and the respondents" (to quote *anti-apartheid news*) "the judge ordered that oral evidence be heard on the manner of detention of Mr. Gosschalk," after the case had been heard in connection with which he had been questioned. In the meantime, the Security Police were ordered to refrain from further interrogation of Gosschalk.

There was no question, the Judge ruled, of the police being precluded "in law" from interrogating a person without his consent. "The invasion of the rights of the individual necessarily involved in police interrogation must, however, be strictly limited."

"Obviously they are not entitled in order to induce a detainee to speak, to subject him to any form of assault or to cause his health or resistance to be impaired by inadequate food, lack of sleep, living conditions or the like. Nor may they resort to methods of interrogation commonly referred to as the 'third degree' to refer to a severe and prolonged cross-questioning designed to overcome the powers of resistance of the person being interrogated."

It would be interesting to hear the opinion of the head of the Security Police in the Western Cape. . . .

H.S.S.

fifty cubits high

by Lewis H. Kilpatrick

THE air was warm for late autumn on the Kentucky frontier. Jonathan Bartlett, his brown hair clubbed behind his head, his youngish face shaved, sat on a stool at the table in his cabin's one room, the door open before him. On the pine table, fashioned by his own hands, were a buckskin bag and heaps of assorted money. There were Spanish mill dollars, folds of worn Continental paper, English silver and a few gold crowns, and some of the new Republic's coins that had found their way to the Western wilderness.

"Here is much, very much," Jonathan smiled to himself—"but not quite enough. The harvest was good this year. Our people now trade in the towns and get cash money for some of their produce. By early spring we shall have enough for our journey to the Tidewater."

He was putting the money back into the bag when he heard a rare sound. He looked sharply out the doorway and down the trail leading from Lulbegrud Creek.

"A stranger comes — and

Lewis Kilpatrick returns with this story out of our own past when — for the moment — the frontier was quiet. The Indians had left the settlers in peace that year. The English were far away, up in Canada, and the settlers were too poor to tempt the occasional highwayman, who preyed mostly on "those newly arriving"...

afoot," he said, used to talking aloud in his loneliness.

He hastily finished stuffing the money into the bag, tied the thong tightly and glanced about.

A few logs burned low in the rock fireplace. He had replaced the hearthstone under which he kept the treasure. It would take too much time to pry it up again. He rose quickly, with another searching look down the trail, and crossed the puncheon floor to one of the two pole-beds fixed against the walls. Lifting the cornshuck tick, he put the heavy bag on the woven hickory splints beneath it and the buffalo robe covering. Then, with a moccasined foot, he raked ashes over the loosened hearthstone. A long flintlock rifle rested on pegs above the fireboard, but he did not reach for the weapon.

"Hail, friend!" he called from the doorway, again smiling.

"Hail to you, Mister Bartlett!" came the instant response.

The sun was lowering over Wild Grape Knob behind the man. Even at a hundred paces, Jonathan did not recognize him.

The stranger was thickly set with muscle and wore a short reddish beard. His eyes, under heavy brows, held a glint of green. His rimmed hat was almost new, his shirt of a fabric rare on the frontier and he was shod in boots of fine leather. But his jacket and britches were of deerskin and a pack was slung across his broad back.A pistol and unsheathed knife were at his steel-studded belt; he carried a rifle, ready, with both hands. Yet he fetched no freshly killed game, as was the custom of a visitor in that country.

Jonathan held out his hand.

"My friend, you are welcome here. There is none to harm you. The Indians have left us in peace this year, the English are now far north in Canada and we settlers are too poor to tempt highwaymen. Such rascals prey mainly on those newly arriving, who possess cash money and valuable goods. I am your servant, sir."

The stranger took a hand from his flintlock and grasped Jonathan's briefly. His bearded mouth grinned.

"You live alone, Mister Bartlett—but you do have company on occasion. People gather here from miles around to hear you read the Scriptures and be led in prayer. Once you were garbed in clerical robes instead of homespun and Indian shoes."

Jonathan flushed as they turned in to the cabin. This stranger knew much of him but told nothing of himself.

"You have come far, sir?"

The stranger laid his rifle on the table and shrugged off his pack. He kept the pistol and knife at his belt.

"I come from the Kentucky

River," he said. "My horse went lame a few miles back and I shot him. You have a spirited gelding named Satan, I hear."

"Yes—" Jonathan's thoughts flashed to the animal in the log stable at the rear of the cabin.

"But—your name, sir?" he demanded. "Who are you to know so much of me?"

The stranger chuckled and his greenish eyes narrowed.

"I make it my concern to learn of others and their affairs. As for my name, I use several for convenience. You may call me—"

"Haman Graw, the highwayman!" Jonathan stepped back a pace and stared at him. "I never saw you before, but your likeness is painted throughout Kentucky in human blood. Your fellow outlaw, Rudd Dennis, was found near Lexington a month ago, stabbed to death. You doubtless stole that very hat you wear, that linen shirt, those English boots—"

"Their owners have no further use for them." Haman laughed shortly, then sobered.

"But I do not come to harm you, Mister Bartlett. You are a heady man who preached and taught some of the beliefs held by Mister Jefferson and Tom Paine. Your Assembly unfrocked you for such free thinking. You came West, but left your fair Doshia Colfax at her father's home in Tidewater. I know that story, too."

Jonathan sank to a stool at the table. Haman tossed his hat to the nearest bed and took the second stool, his rifle on the pine boards between them.

"Do not speak light of my betrothed." Recovering himself, Jonathan squared his jaw. "I love her dearly. She and her father share my views. I go this coming spring to fetch her here as my wife."

"Then you will found a church."

"Yes." Jonathan's mood changed. He relaxed. "It shall be a fine church, built on a deep hewn stone foundation of choice and well-seasoned timbers. It shall be raised out yonder on the knoll beside Lulbegrud Creek. It shall be in the form of a cross, each of the twelve corners for a disciple. Yes, we shall build a church for all men!"

Haman shrugged. "Twelve corners, one for each disciple. Judas, too?"

"He served a prophetic purpose, however wickedly. He repented before he hanged himself." Jonathan hardened his tone: "The first Haman had no such grace. King Ahasuerus ordered him hanged on a gallows 'fifty cubits high.'"

Haman stiffened. "The rope has never been twisted that will circle my neck."

Jonathan thought a moment.

"It was you who murdered your fellow Rudd Dennis?"

Haman muttered: "He was a rascal. I now have his share of our rich plunder. It is on a flatboat hidden up a creek from the Kentucky River, guarded by my dull-witted but faithful slave, black Tebo. When I finish here, we take that boat down to the Ohio and on to the Spanish port of New Orleans. There I will enjoy the remainder of my life with feasting and wine and wenches."

He rose and took up his rifle, but stood it in a corner by the fireplace.

"The sun goes down, Mister Bartlett. I am hungry. Prepare me some food."

Jonathan fixed a stew of squirrels he had barked on Wild Grape Knob that morning. He went to a homemade cupboard and spooned hominy from a large earthen bowl. He mixed cornmeal with water and a dash of precious salt for bread.

"While the stew is cooking," he said, "I must go to the stable and feed Satan."

"Feed him well. Your gelding will have to journey fast and far tomorrow."

When Jonathan finished caring for the animal, he left the stable door open and the pasture bars down.

"You are safer chancing a wolf or bear," he said, patting Satan's black neck, "than between the knees of Haman Graw."

Returning inside the cabin to the hearth, he found that the ashes had been swept back from the front stones. The loosened stone, beneath which he usually hid the buckskin money bag, had been lifted and replaced clumsily. The doors to the cupboard were ajar.

He had little appetite for supper, but while Haman ate hungrily, he talked:

"It was on Wild Grape Knob that Daniel Boone and his company first looked out upon the fertile rolling meadowlands. The knob is sheer on the other sides, with a slope only from this eastern valley. Tangles of wild grape vines adorn the trees under the cliffs. It is a sight of purple beauty this season of the year.

"Colonel Boone, coming down from the knob that time, camped with his company on this creek. He named it Lulbegrud, a place taken from Master Swift's book of fancied travels which the Colonel admired. He—"

Haman yelled. "I am weary and will go to bed. Which is yours, Mister Bartlett?"

Jonathan pointed to the one under whose tick he had hidden the buckskin bag.

"That is the bed most comfortable for a visitor," he said truthfully.

"I will sleep in *your* bed."

Haman took his rifle from the fireplace corner and laid it on the floor beside him. He removed his boots and the grimy shirt, but kept on his belt with the pistol and knife.

"Will you kneel with me in prayer?"

Haman grunted and stretched out on his back. Jonathan went to the fireboard. He took down a large Bible, bound in leather and fastened with two silver clasps.

"Shall I read to you from the Book of Esther about that first Haman?"

"No!" Haman shut his eyes against the firelight, but Jonathan knew his inner mind was ever alert. That was why the highwayman still lived.

Jonathan smiled to himself as he lay down in the darkness. He prayed. Sleepless, he heard the crackling of cornshucks as Haman felt through and under the tick beneath him. He would not have been conscious of the buckskin bag under his own back had he not known it was there.

"The pasture bars are down—your horse is gone!" cried Haman, coming into the cabin while Jonathan was preparing breakfast. "You tricked me, Mister Bartlett!"

Jonathan shrugged over a brewing of herb tea. "Satan does not trust his most faithful disciple. You will go as you came, Haman Graw, afoot."

They ate breakfast in silence, Jonathan forcing himself to eat food he did not crave.

"Now, Mister Bartlett," said Haman when he finished, "we come to the point of my visit. You have a goodly store of money, entrusted to you by the people of your congregation. Where is it?"

Jonathan, standing at his side of the table, looked straight into Haman's eyes.

"You did not find it under the hearthstones. Nor was it in the cupboard or the bed on which you slept. Nor, as I have seen you studying the floor, is it beneath these pegged down puncheons."

Haman gripped his rifle with both hands and glowered at him.

"The trails and roads from Cumberland Gap to the Ohio River are stained with blood I have let. My name is a legend well earned. Where is that treasure, holy man?"

Jonathan fingered the handle of the half-full pewter pitcher of herb tea.

"It is the people's money, sir, hard earned and given at a sacrifice. It goes to purchase appointments for our church. A silver chalice, a baptismal basin, altar clothes and—yes—candlesticks and a crucifix, that all men may worship there according to their beliefs. The money is not

mine to give you."

Haman growled:

"Damn such prattle!"—and aimed the rifle from his hip. Jonathan clutched the pitcher handle and dashed the tea at the rifle's lock. A spark from the flint struck wet powder. He knew the pistol's priming was wetted, too.

Haman started at him, then grinned and lowered the rifle.

"You did me a favor by saving your life. Dead, you would still have your secret. Wounded—You are stout-hearted and would endure much torture."

He leaned the rifle against the table and drew the knife from his belt. Jonathan, the table between them, glanced above the fireboard. Haman moved toward the hearth.

"I unloaded your rifle while you were out at the stable last eve," he mocked. "I dare not tarry longer lest one or more of your neighbors come. I will have your treasure *now*."

The knife pointed at Jonathan, he reached his other hand to the fireboard. He grabbed the silver-clasped Bible and thrust it toward the flaming logs.

"Hold!" Jonathan stepped quickly forward, then halted within inches of the blade. "Will your evil stop at nothing, Haman Graw? Do spare the Holy Book!"

Haman, his eyes glinting green, put the Bible closer to the flames.

"Where is that treasure, Jonathan Bartlett?"

Jonathan hesitated, swallowing at a tightening in his throat. He gestured toward the buffalo-robed bed.

"Beneath the tick yonder," he whispered hoarsely. "Take it and go."

Haman tossed the Bible to the hearth. Jonathan stooped and picked it up, brushing off the ashes with his homespun sleeve. He replaced it reverently on the fireboard and turned.

Haman had the buckskin bag. Gloating, he cut the thong with his knife and divided the money by pouring some of it into each boot. He shouldered his pack and took up his rifle.

"I will spare you your life, holy man. You would not try to kill me for mere cash money. And I will be far away before you can muster your distant neighbors—"

He paused in the open doorway.

"Aye, there is your gelding grazing up the knob! I have my dead horse's bridle in this pack. Fare you well, Mister Bartlett!"

Jonathan, numbed, watched him go out the door and off the trail up the hillside. Indeed he would not take a human life just for gold and silver. Haman spoke truth there.

"But I bark squirrels," he thought aloud, "stunning them with bullets aimed at the limbs

close to them. I can harry a man—

"Evil is ever too sure of its wit. He who has long escaped punishment grows careless. Haman should have reloaded with dry powder before he turned his back to me. Yes, that is the people's money."

Haman was still chasing the gelding when Jonathan, his clubbed hair bare, reached a sycamore at the base of the slope.

"The knob is sheer on the other sides. At the summit, he must chance a leap into the vine-tangled trees below the cliffs if hard pressed.

"Aye, Satan does not love his own. He leads him further up the hill."

His first bullet struck the ground just behind Haman. The highwayman swung about. He crouched and worked at the lock of his rifle. Satan, used to his master's shooting, pricked his ears, whinnied and started down toward him.

Jonathan dodged to another tree and sent his second bullet close to Haman's left ear. Haman cursed loudly. Still fumbling with his rifle and powder horn, he raced further up the slope. A bullet ripping his pack sped him on. There were only scrub pines and oaks above the timber line.

Jonathan moved cautiously from tree to tree. "He does not know my real intent. My conscience is clear, so my mind is too. The wicked flee even without pursuit. He fears me now—"

Haman's rimmed hat was knocked off as he made for a large boulder. His reddish hair and beard were a tempting target. Behind the boulder he got his pistol loaded—and fired. The bullet fell short of Jonathan's tree.

"Holy man, your aim is poor even for a preacher!" Haman taunted. "I should not have left you alive—but now I will surely kill you!"

Jonathan called:

"Repent, Haman Graw! Repent, throw down your arms and I will spare you!"

"You spare me—!" Haman laughed. "Spare me here only to have me hanged by the law! You pious fool, I will not spare you—!"

As his pistol showed again over the boulder, Jonathan's bullet clipped chips off the rock near it, bringing a pained cry from Haman. The highwayman zigzagged on up toward the bald limestone summit. Twice he stumbled.

"Those stolen coins in his boots gall his feet," Jonathan murmured. "And I have him facing east, hatless, part blinded by the sun."

He kept his bullets thudding just a few feet behind him. But Haman now had managed to

prime his rifle with dry powder. Crawling from the last tree to a scrub pine, Jonathan's head jerked back with a bullet through his clubbed hair.

He glanced down to the valley. Satan stood near the cabin door, ears alert, muzzle pointing.

"Come on, holy man!" Haman yelled. "I shall await you over the crest! I know your cunning now! You do not mean to kill me—!"

He sprang up at a half-crouch and ran across the bald summit toward the cliffs.

"Hold!" Jonathan cried. Then he aimed his rifle—"Jehovah, thy will be done—" and squeezed the trigger.

That bullet grazed Haman's right leg. He jerked erect and leaped toward the nearest cliff. Jonathan reloaded swiftly. Haman stumbled, plunged—screamed. Jonathan stepped into the open and strode forward. He heard no further sound.

He peered over the cliff. He sighed heavily. He lowered the hammer of his rifle and rested the butt on the ground.

"Full fifty cubits high—Hanged by the neck on vines meant only for wilderness beauty and ripe fruit. I shall get my ax and spade," he said, "cut him down and give him a Christian burial."

A REWARD FOR VIRTUE?

In England, earlier this year, a man and his wife, out driving, were overtaken by a car with the same registration number as their own. The other car must be stolen, the man said to his wife, and chased after the other car, picking up a policeman on the way.

The car was stopped.

It belonged to the man who was driving it.

But it was discovered that the man who had, like a good citizen, done the chasing, was actually the one who was driving a stolen car.

He had bought it second-hand, three months earlier, in good faith, from a dealer who in turn had sold it in good faith . . .

The police told him that they were very sorry, but they must take his car away and return it to the original owner.

There was no legal compensation . . .

open season

by James M. Ullman

THANKS to a three-beer lunch, Al Miller was in a jovial mood as he and his friends walked into the hardware store for ammunition. The place was packed with other hunters in the small North Woods town for the opening of the deer season. Al circled the crowd and approached a rack of rental guns.

He picked up a rifle, whirled, and aimed it at one of his companions.

"Hey, Lou," he called. "Bango!"

Al chuckled at his own witticism. But his smile faded when a stranger stepped forward and snatched the gun from his hands. The stranger, an inch taller than Al, was broader in the shoulders and much narrower at the waist. A star on his chest proclaimed "SHERIFF."

"Mister," the sheriff said heavily, "don't you *ever* point a gun at anything you wouldn't want to shoot."

Carefully, the sheriff replaced the gun in the rack.

"Sure." Al frowned. Conversation in the store died away; everyone stared at Al. "But it

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James Michael Ullman is the author of GOOD NIGHT, IRENE, and the earlier THE NEON HAYSTACK (both Simon & Schuster). The earlier novel won the Inner Sanctum award and was awarded a scroll by the Mystery Writers of America as one of the best first mysteries published that year.

wasn't loaded, chief. I looked . . ."

"I don't care if you looked a hundred times. What you did just now is the biggest darn fool stunt anybody can pull with a gun." The sheriff paused. He added: "You're not up here to hunt, I hope."

"Well, I am," Al said, his broad face reddening. "I'll hunt. And I'll spend dough in this town. Real dough, from the big city. I should think you'd be more considerate . . ."

"Let's see your rifle."

"What?"

"Let's see the gun you intend to hunt with. If you're dumb enough to point a gun at a man, you might be dumb enough to carry a loaded gun in your car, which is against the law."

"Well, I'll be . . ." Scowling, Al walked outside. The sheriff followed. So did Al's three friends and some other men who had witnessed the incident.

Al opened the car trunk and hauled out his gun case. He unzipped it and began to hand the weapon to the sheriff. Quickly, the sheriff knocked the muzzle skyward.

"If it's loaded," the sheriff enunciated slowly, "where you had it pointed just now, you just risked killing any one of a dozen people."

"But this *can't* be loaded. I just bought it. It's never been fired, see?"

Al held the rifle out. The sheriff took it. He worked the action.

"An autoloader," the sheriff mused. "And a magnum to boot. A whale of a gun—*if* you know how to use it. And a lot more powerful than a reasonable man needs to stop a deer in the brush at fifty yards. Ever fire anything like this before?"

"I don't see . . ."

Expertly, the sheriff snaked the magazine from the rifle. He held the rifle out in his left hand, the magazine in his right.

"Quick, now," the sheriff ordered. "Put that magazine where it belongs."

Al took the gun. He tried to shove the magazine back in, the way the clerk at the store in the city had showed him. But somehow, it wouldn't fit.

"Ain't *that* something," the sheriff drawled. "You never fired this gun and you can't even load it. But you're willing to hike around my county shooting at deer, ain't you. And I bet you'll carry a bottle of booze to fog your brain even more than it's fogged already."

Angrily, Al shoved the gun back into the case and zipped it shut. His voice trembled as he asked: "You gonna charge me with anything?"

"No," the sheriff admitted. "But if you'll take my advice, you'll go back to the city without

firing a shot. You're what I call a gun boob. Sending you into the woods with a loaded, high-powered rifle in your hands is like putting a blind man behind the wheel of a car on a city street . . ."

The sheriff turned. Contemptuously, he walked away.

Al slumped in the car's back seat. Lou drove. The four city men were headed for the lodge in which they would spend the next two nights.

"Where," Al demanded, "were *you* guys when that hick sheriff tied into me?"

Nobody answered.

"That sheriff," Al went on, "is a maniac. A psychopath. You shoulda seen the weird look in his eyes. He belongs in his own jail."

Again, no reply. Then: "Al," Lou said slowly, "pointing that gun at me *was* stupid. And I'll tell you something else. We talked it over while you were buying your ammunition. You've never hunted with us before. And after what we saw, we don't think you should hunt with us now, either."

"What's that?"

"It's nothing personal. But maybe you should follow the sheriff's advice. You ought to practice with your new gun on the range a few times before you take it out hunting."

"Oh, brother! Some friends you are. You think I'll sit in the lodge reading hick newspapers all weekend? After all the dough I spent for a license and a deer tag? Nuts! You guys do what you want. Me, I'll rent a jeep or something and head out alone."

"That's dangerous . . ."

"I've hunted alone before. Plenty of times." Al leaned forward. His eyes gleamed. "And I'll tell you what. I'll put up a hundred bucks, against a hundred from each of you, that I get a deer first. Three-to-one odds, that's fair." Al paused. "Well, what about it? Or are you guys even more chicken than I already think you are?"

"All right," Lou said angrily. "Dammit, it's a bet . . ."

Al smiled. He rubbed his hands together. But inwardly, he did not feel nearly that confident.

By ten in the morning, Al was pooped. He had tramped for miles without seeing a trace of a deer. In the distance, now and then, he heard other hunters banging away.

Wearily, Al sat under a tree, opened his flask, and drank. He sighed and closed his eyes. He remained in that posture for perhaps ten minutes. Then he reached for the flask again.

As he did so, a shot sounded high and to his right. The bullet splattered into the tree a few yards above Al's head.

Cursing, Al rolled clumsily around the tree and picked up his own rifle. He disengaged the safety; he fired once into the air, wincing at the booming detonation and violent recoil of the big magnum shell.

He hollered: "Hey, I ain't no deer! Come out here, or I'll pump a slug in *your* direction!"

For a moment, only wildly cawing birds and the rattle of a loose roll of birch bark flapping in the wind broke the North Woods silence. Then someone moved slowly through the thicket.

Like Al, he was in hunter's attire: a red jacket, insulated trousers, and boots. But where Al was middle-aged, heavy-set, and tall, the other man was young. of medium height, and thin. He wore rimless glasses and cradled a rifle in his arms.

Grunting, Al rose. He rested his own rifle on his shoulder and walked forward. He shouted: "You're pretty quick on the trigger, ain't you. A man's supposed to make sure the deer is a male before he shoots, you know. You didn't even wait to see if I was a deer. And suppose you *had* hit me? What would you have done next? Draped me over the top of your car and hauled me home?"

"I'm sorry . . ."

"You should be. Good grief!" Al stopped a few yards from the man. "That," he continued, "takes the cake. Very funny, too, in view of what happened yesterday. When the kooky sheriff bawled *me* out for the way I handle a gun. Wait'll I tell the sheriff about *you* . . ."

"I saw you move. I *thought* you were a deer." Carefully, the younger man rested his rifle on the ground. He sat beside it, pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his brow. "But I should have known better, you can't hardly get deer in this spot anyhow. And when I was squeezing the trigger, I realized you weren't a deer, so I pulled my shot high. No kidding, I'm as rattled by what happened as you are." Gingerly, the man rubbed the back of his neck, where apparently he had been stung by an insect. His eyes strayed to Al's overturned flask. "I guess I made you spill your water . . ."

"That was hundred-proof bourbon. The best."

"I'll make it up to you, honest. I'll buy you a jug in town. A couple jugs. But please, mister, don't tell that sheriff. I gotta live all year around with him. And if he decides he don't like you, he can be mean!"

"Don't I know it! I hope he locks you up and sets fire to the jail." Al put his own rifle down. He straightened, hands on hips, his anger evaporating somewhat at the man's obvious contriteness. "What's your name?"

"Toby Walton."

"I'm Al Miller. From Chicago." Thoughtfully, Al scratched his jaw. He asked: "What were you getting at just now? When you said you can't hardly find deer in this spot?"

"It's true. I've been hunting here since I was a kid, I oughta know. The best place I've found is a mile or so the other side of that rise, where the deer can come out into a marsh." Toby looked up. He ventured: "Say, are you *the* one? The fella the sheriff chewed out yesterday at the hardware store?"

"Yeah," Al admitted.

"I heard about it." Tentatively, Toby smiled. "But don't let him bug you, Mr. Miller. The sheriff scares a lot of out-of-towners with that speech. He does it to someone at least once every deer season. What you might call a ritual. But it ain't makin' him any more popular with merchants and such, who want hunters to come up here and spend money."

"I should think not." At the memory of how the sheriff had humiliated him, Al's face reddened again. "He must be a sadist . . ."

Toby chuckled. "I can appreciate your sentiments. Confidentially, he's bawled me out lots of times. Which is why I don't want to aggravate him any further. He even told me once never to hunt deer again. But you know why he's that way, don't you? Why he's insane about guns?"

"No."

"Well, he really *likes* guns. He even teaches gun courses to kids. But when he sees a grown-up man doing something with a gun he don't approve of, he goes berserk. It's because of his youngest daughter. A few years back, during the deer season, she wandered into the woods and a hunter killed her. They found where the hunter had been sittin' under a tree, with an empty booze bottle beside it. The hunter must have mistaken her for a deer. Just like," Toby added sheepishly, "I done to you just now . . ."

"What'd they do to the guy?"

"They never caught him. Everyone figures he walked up to her body, saw what he shot, and then ran out of there in a hurry. Probably he had a car parked by the road, and he drove back to wherever he came from."

"That's tough," Al conceded. "But it doesn't give him the right to persecute strangers." He paused. "Look," he said, a note of persuasiveness edging into his voice. "I'll make you a proposition. I have a bet with some guys as to who gets a deer first, see. So if you'll take me to this spot of yours, where the deer hang out, I'll forget about what happened just now. And if I shoot a deer today, I'll even buy *you* a jug."

"Glad to." Toby rose. He seemed relieved. He picked up his rifle. "It's the least I can do. And if I get the deer, I'll let you put your tag on it. I got ten days to get another one. Come on."

Al picked up his own gun. He walked back and got his flask.

"You know what?" Al asked.

"What?"

They started up the rise.

"The sheriff would have a fit, if he knew you were so itchy for a deer that you took a shot at me by mistake—and then the two of us went off hunting together!"

"By golly, he sure would." Toby grinned. "I'd hate to hear what he'd say if he came on us right now." Toby glanced at the city man. "Hey," he suggested casually, "point your gun up, will you? It was aimed at my head."

"Yeah, sorry."

"And I think the safety's still off."

"Thanks. I forgot."

"That's all right. I've done that often enough myself. What'd the sheriff chew *you* out for?"

"It was ridiculous. Just because I pointed this empty rifle at a guy . . ."

Al and Toby topped the rise. They headed into the shadow of a thick clump of pine trees.

A minute later, another shot rang out.

Toby had hiked about a half-mile along a gravel road, his empty rifle over his shoulder, when the sheriff came up behind him in the patrol car and braked.

The sheriff opened the door. Toby slipped the rifle into a case, dumped it on the back seat, and climbed in front.

"What happened?" the sheriff asked. "You were gone a long time."

"The darndest thing. I had him in my sights and was squeezing the trigger when a bee stung my neck. My shot went high. Miller was ready to start a gunfight, so I had to walk out and calm him down. It worked out much better, though. I shot him in the chest with his own gun as I was helping him through a barbed-wire fence. So instead of it looking like he was killed by a stray bullet, as we planned, people will think he killed himself climbin' through the fence with his gun in his hand. Plenty of gun boobs shoot themselves that way."

"Yeah. Well," the sheriff mused, "this won't bring your little sister back. But if men like Miller insist on goin' out there even after I try to scare 'em away, maybe we can keep other innocent people from getting killed." Speculatively, the sheriff's eyes narrowed. "Let's see. The season's only a day old and we bagged one boob already. At this rate, son, we might get us three or four. The best we did in any previous year is two . . ."

(Continued from Other Side)

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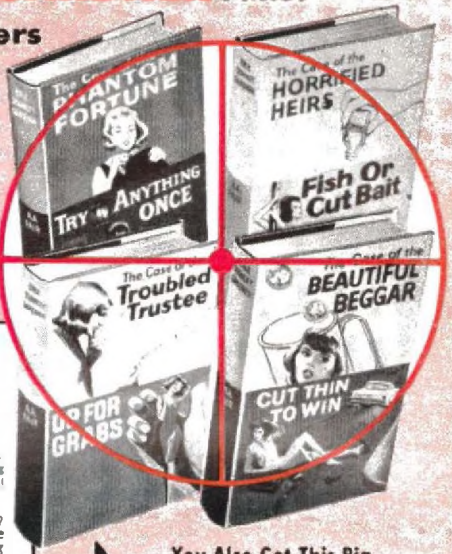

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