OCTOBER 1959

THE saint® 35

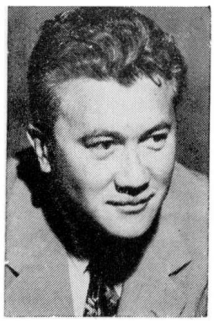
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

edited by
LESLIE CHARTERIS

In This Issue:

THE SAINT & THE UNPOPULAR LANDLORD

stories by CRAIG RICE ★ EDGAR WALLACE ★ MICHAEL INNES ★ WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT ★ BARRY PEROWNE



LIKE TIME, TIDE, and tax deadlines, publishing schedules wait for no man, not even a Supervising Editor. This is especially frustrating this month, when one of our most interesting and unusual items is THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT ELSINORE, in which the distinguished British author Michael Innes applies the viewpoint and methods of a detective writer to an old murder story by one W. Shakespeare. For in less than two weeks from now, as I write this, I myself shall be visiting Denmark for the first time, and will doubtless take the tourist tour of Elsinore and walk the battlements where Hamlet saw the ghost, which would almost certainly give me some brilliant personal observation to contribute to this introduction if only I could postpone it just a little while. But, alas, the presses will not wait, and so I can only commend Michael Innes' analysis to you on its own merits as one of the most original and entertaining literary exercises I can remember reading, and one which would have made the study of *Hamlet* much more amusing for all of us when the classics were being rammed down our regurgitating throats in school.

SWORD FOR A SINNER by Edward D. Hoch, is in its own way just as far off the beaten track, both in conception as in setting. By taking for his backdrop a remote southwestern village where diehards of the old (and not fictional) strange *Penitente* sect still perform the traditional rites of self-scourging and crucifixion, the writer has been able to develop some strikingly unusual characters and a mystery which genuinely grows out of the soil where he has planted it.

In a different sense, Barry Perowne's THE SECRET OF THE RED SAFE is also highly unusual, being the first story he has written for a long time, since he took on the task of continuing the adventures of Raffles, which has not featured that indestructible cracksman. It is only surprising to me that this author has been able to subordinate his creative talent for so long to perpetuating the saga of an adopted brain-child; and if his own newest offspring shares some of Raffles' felonious traits and skills, I do not think these chance similarities make him any less promising a character in his own right.

THE UNPOPULAR LANDLORD, frankly, is not a bit unusual, as a Saint story. But maybe after I've been to Copenhagen I too can come up with a new notion. At least, while I'm there I hope nobody remarks that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark.

Leslie Charteris

THE ® saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

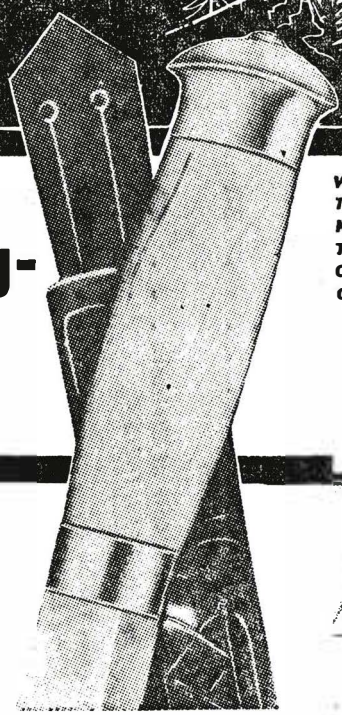
OCT. 1959
VOL. 12, NO 4

THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 12, No. 4. Published monthly by GREAT AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS, INC., 41 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $4.00, single copies 35¢, Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y. and Holyoke, Mass.

NORSE KING

SWEDISH PROFESSIONAL GUIDE'S

Hunting-Fishing-Camping Knife



WORLD'S SHARPEST, TOUGHEST, STRONGEST KNIFE FROM THE WORLD-FAMOUS CRAFTSMEN OF MORA, SWEDEN

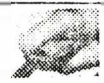
This is the sharp Mora Blade that has always stood between life and death in the cruel Northland—that has met the fierce attack of wild bear or wolf—the blade *relied on* to take game with one swift blow or throw; to cut wood for fire or shelter; to skin game; to be a rugged tool of every work—the weapon of last resort. It must be the BEST!

To guarantee this, famed craftsmen of Mora, using the world-renowned Swedish steels, developed their wonderful triple-laminated blade into the most practical, most versatile knife a sportsman ever carried!

REMARKABLE CONSTRUCTION

Famed Mora Blade has three layers (see illustration below)

Knife point is so sharp it drives through coin or metal. Blade edge is so tough it can drive through a bolt —even cut a nail in two!



inseparably welded together. The inner, center layer is a thin, incredibly hard sliver of alloy steel designed to take a razor-sharp edge. But if the whole knife were made of such steel, it would shatter at a hard blow. So the center hard core is sandwiched in between supporting slabs of tough, flexible, resilient steel.

NOTE SPECIAL NORSE KING FEATURES

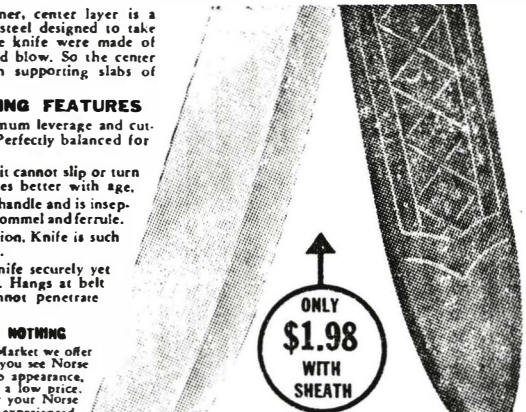
1. Blade length—ideal 4½" for maximum leverage and cutting pressure on point and edge. Perfectly balanced for accurate throwing.
2. Handfitting Swedish Birch handle—it cannot slip or turn in the hand. Easy to clean, polishes better with age.
3. Blade tongue exteeds clear through handle and is inseparably riveted through nickel-silver pommel and ferrule.
4. No hilt to get in way of cutting action. Knife is such perfect design the hand cannot slip.
5. Safety, quick-draw sheath. Holds knife securely yet is ready for instant one-hand draw. Hangs at belt—is never in the way. Blade cannot penetrate sheath to cut you.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE—YOU RISK NOTHING

To introduce this knife to the American Market we offer it at this low, low price of $1.98. Once you see Norse King you will wonder how such superb appearance, style and quality can be offered at such a low price. So we make this fool-proof offer. Order your Norse King knife today. Show it to the most experienced outdoorsmen you know. Use it for 60 days. Test it in any way you ever used a knife—and any you can dream up! If you are not satisfied that it is the greatest knife you ever owned, just return it for prompt refund. Mail coupon now!

THE SECRET OF THE MORA BLADE

Famed Mora blades are made from the finest cutlery steel in the world, hand-forged and tempered with the greatest care. Every blade has THREE layers (see illustration) inseparably welded together. The inner, center layer is a thin, incredibly hard sliver of alloy steel designed to take a razor-sharp edge. But if the whole knife were made of such steel it would shatter at a hard blow. So the center hard core is sandwiched in between supporting slabs of tough, flexible resilient steel. That's why we GUARANTEE THIS BLADE AGAINST BREAKAGE!



Triple-laminated blade is so strong & resilient, it will bend over 90° and straighten without breaking or damage.

Cutting edge can be honed to such razor sharpness that you can shave with it!

SPECIAL-OFFER COUPON — SEND NOW!

Use this coupon to order one or more Norse King Knives—on our NO-RISK OFFER. Use this knife for 60 days. Give it every possible test. If you are not convinced you want and need it—that you would never part with it—just return it and get your money back immediately. You risk absolutely nothing. Order today. Mail coupon.

WHAT USERS SAY ABOUT NORSE KING

"We have ordered a Norse King Knife from you and were so impressed we would like to have some of the same steel for our kitchen cutlery." J.R.S., Houston, Texas.

"I have already had two of your famous knives. I think they are very good knives, and they do everything it says it does in the magazine." J.F., Mount Vernon, Indiana.

EMPIRE

NORSE KING KNIVES ARE MADE EXCLUSIVELY FOR EMPIRE IN MORA, SWEDEN – AND SOLD ONLY BY US.

EMPIRE MDSG. CO. Dept.
4 N. Third Ave., Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

Please rush ____ NORSE KING knife(s) by return mail at $1.98 each, on your GUARANTEED OFFER. I am adding 25¢ to cover handling.

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

The Saint and The Unpopular Landlord

by
LESLIE CHARTERIS

Major Bellingford Smart had some rather novel ways of making himself obnoxious. This called for an equally original treatment. . . .

THERE were periods in Simon Templar's eventful life when that insatiable wanderlust which had many times sent him half-way round the world on fantastic quests that somehow never materialised in quite the way they had been intended to, invaded even his busy life in London. He became bored with looking out on to the same street scene from his windows every day, or he saw some other domicile on the market which appealed to his catholic taste in residences, or else he moved because he thought that too long an interval of stability would weaken his resistance to regular hours and *Times*-reading and other low forms of human activity. At these periods he would change his address with such frequency that his friends despaired of ever establishing contact with him again. It was one of the few aimless things he did; and it never provided any exciting sequels —except on this one historic occasion which the chronicler has to record.

Simon Templar awoke on this particular morning with that familiar feeling of restlessness upon him; and, having nothing

The Feud Between Landlord and Tenant Is as Old as the First Rented Cave. But the Saint Had a New and Fresh Approach to it.

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER.

else of importance to distract him that day, he sallied forth to interview an estate agent. This interviewing of estate agents is a business that is quite sufficient to discourage any migratory urges which may afflict the average man; but Simon Templar had become inured to it over the course of years. He sought out the offices of Messrs. Potham & Spode, obtained their services of Mr. Potham, and prepared to be patient.

Mr. Potham was a thin, angular man with gray hair, gold-rimmed spectacles, and a face that receded in progressive stages from his eyebrows to the base of his neck. He was a harmless man enough, kind to his children and faithful to his wife, a man whose income tax returns were invariably honest to the uttermost farthing; but twenty years of his profession had had their inevitable effect.

"I want," said the Saint distinctly, "an unfurnished non-service flat, facing south or west, with four large rooms, and a good, open outlook, at not more than five hundred a year."

Mr. Potham rummaged through a large file, and eventually, with an air of triumph, drew forth a sheet.

"Now here," he said, "I think we have the very thing you're looking for. No. 101, Park Lane: one bedroom, one reception-room—"

"Making four rooms," murmured the Saint patiently.

Mr. Potham peered at him over the rims of his glasses and sighed. He replaced the sheet carefully, and drew forth another.

"Now this," he said, "seems to suit all your requirements. There are two bed, two reception, kitchen and bath; and the rent is extremely moderate. Our client is actually paying fifteen hundred a year, exclusive of rates; but in order to secure a quick let he is ready to pass on the lease at the very reasonable rent of twelve hundred—"

"I said five hundred," murmured the Saint.

Mr. Potham turned back to his file with a hurt expression.

"Now here, Mr. Templar," he said, "we have No. 27, Cloudesley Street, Berkeley Square—"

"Which faces north," murmured the Saint.

"Does it?" said Mr. Potham, in some pain.

"I'm afraid it does," said the Saint ruthlessly. "All the odd numbers in Cloudesley Street do."

Mr. Potham put back the sheet with the air of an adoring mother removing her offspring from the vicinity of some stranger who had wantonly smacked it. He searched through his file for some time before he produced his next offering.

"Well, Mr. Templar," he said, adjusting his spectacles rather

nervously, "I have here a very charming service flat—"

Simon Templar knew from bitter experience that this process could be prolonged almost indefinitely; but that day he had one or two helpful ideas.

"I saw a flat to let as I came along here—just round the corner, in David Square," he said. "It looked like the sort of thing I'm wanting, from the outside."

"David Square?" repeated Mr. Potham, frowning. "I don't think I know of anything there."

"It had a Potham and Spode board hung out," said the Saint relentlessly. "Perhaps Spode hung it up one dark night when you weren't looking."

"David Square!" re-echoed Mr. Potham, like a forsaken bass in an oratorio. "David Square!" He polished his spectacles agitatedly, burrowed into his file again, and presently looked up over his gold rims. "Would that be No. 17?"

"I think it would."

Mr. Potham extracted the page of particulars and leaned back, gazing at the Saint with a certain tinge of pity.

"There is a flat to let at No. 17, David Square," he admitted in a hushed voice, as if he were reluctantly discussing a skeleton in his family cupboard. "It is one of Major Bellingford Smart's buildings."

He made this announcement as though he expected the Saint to recoil from it with a cry of horror, and looked disappointed when the cry did not come. But the Saint pricked up his ears. Mr. Potham's tone, and the name of Bellingford Smart, touched a dim chord of memory in his mind; and never in his life had one of those chords led the Saint astray. Somewhere, some time, he knew that he had heard the name of Bellingford Smart before, and it had not been in a complimentary reference.

"What's the matter with that?" he asked coolly. "Is he a leper or something?"

Mr. Potham smoothed down the sheet on his blotter with elaborate precision.

"Major Bellingford Smart," he said judiciously, "is not a landlord with whose property we are anxious to deal. We have it on our books, since he sends us particulars; but we don't offer it unless we are specially asked for it."

"But what does he do?" persisted the Saint.

"He is—ah—somewhat difficult to get on with," replied Mr. Potham cautiously.

More than that his discretion would not permit him to say; but the Saint's appetite was far from satisfied. In fact, Simon Templar was so intrigued with the unpopularity of Major Bellingford Smart that he took his leave of Mr. Potham rather abruptly, leaving that discreet gentleman gaping in some astonishment at a virginal

pad of Orders to View on which he had not been given a chance to inscribe any addresses for the Saint's inspection.

Simon Templar was not actively in search of trouble at that time. His hours of meditation, as a matter of fact, were almost exclusively occupied with the problem of devising for himself an effective means of entering the town house of the Countess of Albury (widow of Albury's Peerless Pickles) whose display of diamonds at a recent public function had impressed him as being a potential contribution to his Old Age Pension that he could not conscientiously pass by. But one of those sudden impulses of his had decided that the time was ripe for knowing more about Major Bellingford Smart; and in such a mood as that, a comparatively straightforward proposition like the Countess of Albury's diamonds had to take second place.

Simon went along to a more modern real estate agency than the honourable firm of Potham & Spode, one of those marble-pillared, super-card-index billeting offices where human habitations are shot at you over the counter like sausages in a cafeteria; and there is an exquisitely dressed young man with a double-breasted waistcoat and impossibly patent-leather hair, who looked as if he could have been nothing less than the seond son of a duke or an ex-motor-salesman, was more communicative than Mr. Potham had been. It is also worthy of note that the exquisite young man thought that he was volunteering the information quite spontaneously, as a matter of interest to an old friend of his youth; for the Saint's tact and guile could be positively Machiavellian when he chose.

"It's rather difficult to say exactly what *is* the matter with Bellingford Smart. He seems to be one of these sneaking swine who get pleasure out of taking advantage of their position in petty ways. As far as his tenants are concerned, he keeps to the letter of his leases and makes himself as nasty as possible within those limits. There are lots of ways a landlord can make life unbearable for you if he wants to, as you probably know. The people he likes to get into his flats are lonely widows and elderly spinsters—they're easy meat for him."

"But I don't see what good that does him," said the Saint puzzledly. "He's only getting himself a bad name—"

"I had one of his late tenants in here the other day—she told me that she'd just paid him five hundred pounds to release her. She couldn't stand it any longer, and she couldn't get out any other way. If he does that often, I suppose it must pay him."

"But he's making it more and

more difficult to let his flats, isn't he?"

The exquisite young man shrugged.

"All the agencies know him—we refuse to handle his stuff at all, and we aren't the only ones. But there are plenty of prospective tenants who've never heard of him. He advertises his flats and lets them himself whenever he can, and then the tenants don't find out their mistake till it's too late. It must seem amazing to you that anything like that can go on in this neighbourhood; but his petty persecutions are all quite legal, and nobody seems to be able to do anything about it."

"I see," said the Saint softly.

The solution of the mystery, now that he knew it, struck him as being one of the most original, and at the same time one of the meanest and most contemptible, forms of blackmail that he had ever heard of; and the fact that it skulked along under the cover of the law made it twice as sickening. He had no doubt that it was all true—even the worthiest of estate agents are not in the habit of turning down commissions without the strongest possible grounds, and Major Bellingford Smart's nastiness appeared to be common knowledge in the profession. There were some forms of unpleasantness that filled the Saint with an utter loathing, and the meanness of Major Bellingford Smart was one of them. Simon had an entirely immoral respect for the whole-hearted criminal who gambled his liberty on the success of his enterprises, but a livelihood that was gained principally by bullying and swindling fat-headed old women turned his stomach.

"He has quite a lot of property around here," the exquisite young man was informing him. "He buys up houses and converts them into flats. You'll see what sort of a man he is when I tell you that while his conversions are being carried out it's his habit to hire a room in the neighbourhood from which he can overlook the site, and he prowls around there at odd times with a pair of field-glasses to see if he can catch his workmen slacking. Once he saw a couple of men having a cup of tea in the afternoon, and went around and fired them on the spot."

"Isn't there anything he doesn't sink to?" asked the Saint.

"I can't think of it," said the exquisite young man slanderously. "A few months ago he had a porter at 17, David Square who'd stayed with him eleven years—I can't think why. The porter's wife acted as a sort of housekeeper, and their daughter was employed in the Major's own flat as a maid. You can imagine what a man like that must be like to work for, and this daughter soon found she couldn't stick it. She tried to give notice, and Smart told her that if

she left him her father and mother would be fired out into the street—the porter was an old man of well over sixty. The girl tried to stay on, but at last she had to run away. The first the porter and his wife knew about it was when Smart sent for them and gave them a month's notice. And at the end of the month they duly were fired out, with Smart still owing them three weeks' wages which they tried for weeks to get out of him until the son of one of the tenants went round and saw Smart and damned well made him pay up under the threat of putting his own solicitors on the job. The porter died shortly afterwards. I expect it all sounds incredible, but it's quite true."

Simon departed with a sheaf of Orders to View which he destroyed as soon as he got outside, and walked round very thoughtfully in the direction of David Square. And the more he thought of it, the more poisonous and utterly septic the personality of Major Bellingford Smart loomed in his consciousness. It occurred to the Saint, with a certain honest regret, that the calls of his own breezy buccaneering had lately taken his thoughts too far from that unlawful justice which had once made his name a terror more salutary than the Law to those who sinned secretly in tortuous ways that the Law could not touch. And it was very pleasant to think that the old life was still open to him. . . . .

With those thoughts he sauntered up the steps of No. 17, where he was stopped by a uniformed porter who looked more like a prison warder—which, as a matter of fact, he had once been.

"Can you tell me anything about this flat that's to let here?" Simon inquired, and the man's manner changed.

"You'd better see Major Bellingford Smart, sir. Will you step this way?"

Simon was led round to an extraordinary gloomy and untidy office on the ground floor, where a man who was writing at a desk littered with dust-smothered papers rose and nodded to him.

"You want to see the flat, Mr. —er—"

"Bourne," supplied the Saint. "Captain Bourne."

"Well, Captain Bourne," said the Major dubiously, "I hardly know whether it would be likely to suit you. As a matter of fact—"

"It doesn't have to suit me," said the Saint expansively. "I'm inquiring about it for my mother. She's a widow, you know, and she isn't very strong. Can't go walking around London all day looking at flats. I have to go back to India myself at the end of the week, and I very much wanted to see the old lady fixed up before I sailed."

"Ah," said the Major, more enthusiastically, "that alters the

situation. I was going to say that this flat would be quite ideal for an old lady living alone."

Simon was astounded once again at the proven simplicity of womankind. Major Bellingford Smart's transparent sliminess fairly assaulted him with nausea. He was a man of about forty-five, with black hair, closely set eyes, and a certain stiff-necked poise to his head that gave him a slightly sinister appearance when he moved. It seemed almost unbelievable that anyone could ever have been taken in by such an obvious excrescence; but the fact remained that many victims had undoubtedly fallen into his net.

"Would you like to see it?" suggested the Major.

Simon registered a mental biographical note that Bellingford Smart's military rank must have been won well out of sight of the firing line. If that Major had ever gone into action he would certainly have perished from a mysterious bullet in the back—such accidents have happened to unpopular officers before.

The Saint said that he would like to see the flat, and Bellingford Smart personally escorted him up to it. It was not at all a bad flat, with good large rooms overlooking the green oasis of the square; and Simon was unable to find fault with it. This was nice for him; for he would have offered no criticism even if the roof had been leaking and the wainscoting had been perforated with rat-holes till it looked like a colander.

"I believe this is the very thing I've been looking for," he said; and Major Bellingford Smart lathered his hands with invisible soap.

"I'm sure Mrs. Bourne would be very comfortable here," he said greasily. "I do everything I can to make my tenants feel thoroughly at home. I'm on the premises myself all day, and if she wanted any help I'd always be delighted to give it. The rent is as moderate as I can make it—only three hundred and fifty per annum.

Simon nodded.

"That seems quite reasonable," he said. "I'll tell my mother about it and see what she says."

"I'll show her round myself at any time she likes to call," said Bellingford Smart cordially. "I don't want to hurry you in any way," he added, as they were going down in the lift, "but for your own sake I ought to mention that I've already shown another lady the flat today, and I'm expecting to hear her decision in a day or two."

At any other time that hoary old bait would have evoked nothing more than one of the Saint's most silent razzberries; but that morning he felt very polite. His face assumed the correct expression of thinly veiled alarm which attacks the veteran house-hunter's features when he visualizes his

prize being snatched away from under his nose.

"I'll let you know definitely some time this evening," he said.

The Saint's patience and caution could be infinite when he felt that way; but there were other times when he felt that to pass over the iron whilst it was hot was a crime that would lie heavily on his conscience, and this was one of them. His sense of the poetry of buccaneering demanded that the retribution which he had devised for Major Bellingford Smart should strike swiftly; and he spent that afternoon on a tour of various shipping offices with no other idea in his mind. The Countess of Albury's diamond crawled in second by several lengths. It meant taking risks of which in a less indignant mood he would never have been guilty; for Simon Templar had made it a rule in life never to attack without knowing every inch of the ground and the precise density of every tuft of grass behind which he might want to take cover; but the strafing of Major Bellingford Smart was a duty that could not be delayed for that.

Nevertheless, he did take certain elementary precautions, as a result of which three well-dressed and subtly dependable-looking men gathered in the apartment of one of their number and slaked their thirsts with Old Curio which the Saint had provided. This was at six o'clock.

The apartment was rented by Peter Quentin; and the other two were Roger Conway and Monty Hayward, who had been summoned by urgent telephone calls by a man whom they had not seen for many months.

"It seems years since I called out the Old Guard, souls," said the Saint, glancing at Rogers and Monty. "But this is one evening when your little Simon has need of you."

"What's it all about?" asked Monty expectantly; and Simon drained his glass and told them as briefly as he could about the leprousness of Major Bellingford Smart.

"But," said the Saint, "I am about to afflict him with much sorrow; and that's where you stiffs come in. We are going to settle down to a bridge party. Peter, your janitor saw me come in, and at about a quarter to ten we shall send for him and bribe him to go out and buy us some more ice—which will give him another chance to observe that I'm still here. But as soon as he's brought the ice, which I'm afraid I shall have to leave you toughs to use, I shall hop nimbly out of the window on to the roofs below, descend smartly to the area at the back, proceed thence to the street, and go about my business, returning in about an hour by the same route. As soon as I'm in, we shall ring for the janitor again and demand further supplies of

Scotch. He will reply that it's past closing time, and there will be some argument in which I shall play a prominent part—thereby establishing the fact that we have been together the whole jolly evening. And so we shall. We shall have been playing bridge steadily all the while, and there will be four markers all filled up with the identical scores to prove it—in addition to your solemn oaths. Do you get me?"

"What is this?" asked Roger Conway. "An alibi?"

"No more and no less, old dear," answered the Saint seraphically. "I spent this afternoon wading through passenger lists, and discovered that there actually is a Captain Bourne sailing on the *Otranto* from Tilbury at seven o'clock tonight, which saved me the trouble and expense of booking a passage in that name myself. So when Major Bellingford Smart tries to put over his story it will indubitably receive the polite ha-ha. You soaks are just here in case the episode comes to the ears of Claud Eustace Teal and he tries to work me into it."

Roger Conway shrugged rather ruefully.

"You're on, of course," he said. "But I wish there was more action in it."

Simon looked at him with a smile; for those two had shared many adventures in the old days, as also more recently had Monty Hayward; and he knew that both men sometimes looked back a trifle wistfully on those days out of the respectable surroundings that had subsequently engulfed them.

"Perhaps we may work together again before we die, Roger," he said.

Monty Hayward had another suggestion.

"What are you going to do to Bellingford Smart? Couldn't we all go after him and tar and feather him, or something?"

"I don't think so," said the Saint carefully. "You see, that would be against the Law, and these days I'm developing quite an agile technique for clobbering the ungodly by stictly legal means."

His method in this case was not so unimpeachably legal as it might have been; but the Saint had a superb breadth of vision that was superior to such trivial details. At half-past six the most unpopular landlord in London received a telephone call.

"Is that Mr. Shark?" asked the Saint innocently.

"This is Major Bellingford Smart speaking," admitted the landlord, shaking the receiver at his end, which did not seem to be working very well. In any case, he was rather particular about being given his full appellation. "Who is that?"

"This is Captain Bourne. You remember I saw your flat this

morning? . . . Well, I've had urgent orders to get back as quickly as possible, and I've had to change my plans. I'm catching the *Otranto* at midnight."

"Are you really?" said Major Bellingford Smart.

"I've told my mother all about the flat, and she seems to think it would suit her down to the ground. She's decided to take it on my recommendation; so if it's still available—"

"Oh, yes, the flat is still available," said Major Bellingford Smart eagerly. "If Mrs. Bourne could call any time tomorrow—"

"I rather wanted to see her settled before I left," said the Saint. "Naturally my time's rather limited, having to pack up in a rush like this, and I'm afraid I've several engagements to get through. I don't know if you could possibly call here about half-past ten—you could bring the lease with you, so that I could go through it—and my mother would sign it tonight."

Major Bellingford Smart had arranged to go to a threatre that evening; but the theatre would still be there the next day. And suitable tenants were becoming considerably harder to find than they had been.

"Certainly I'll come over at half-past ten, if that'll help you at all, Captain Bourne. What is the address?"

"Number eight-o-one, Belgrade Square," said the Saint, and rang off happily.

Major Bellingford Smart was punctual if he was nothing else. It was exactly half-past ten when he arrived in Belgrade Square, and Simon Templar himself opened the door to him as he came up the steps.

"I'm afraid we're having a bit of trouble with the lights," remarked the Saint genially. "The hall light's just fizzled out. Can you see your way into the sitting-room?"

He had an electric torch in his hand, and with it he lighted Major Bellingford Smart into the nearest room. Bellingford Smart heard him clicking the switch up and down, and cursing under his breath.

"Now this one's gone on strike, Major. I'm awfully sorry. Will you take the torch and make yourself at home while I go and look at the fuses? There's a decanter over in the corner—help yourself."

He bumped into Bellingford Smart in the darkness, recovered his balance, apologised, and thrust his flashlight into the Major's hand. The door closed behind him.

Major Bellingford Smart turned the beam of the torch around the room in search of a chair—and, possibly, the decanter referred to. In another second he was not thinking of either, for in one corner the circle of light

splashed over a safe whose door hung drunkenly open, half separated from its hinges: lowering the beam a trifle, he saw an array of gleaming tools spread out on the floor beside it.

He gasped, and instinctively moved over to investigate. Outside in the hall he heard the crash of a brass tray clattering on the floor, and straightened up with a start. Then heavy feet came pounding along the passage, the door burst open, and the lights were switched on. The hall lights outside were also on—nothing seemed to be the matter with them. For a few moments they dazzled him; and then, when he had blinked the glare out of his eyes, he saw that the doorway was filled by a black-trousered butler, with his coat off, and a footman with his tunic half buttoned. They looked at him, then at the open safe, and then back at him again; and there was no friendliness in their eyes.

"Ho," said the butler at length, appearing to swell visibly. "So that's hit. Caught in the very hact, eh?"

"What the devil to you mean?" spluttered Major Bellingford Smart. "I came here at Captain Bourne's invitation to see Mrs. Bourne—"

"Not 'alf you didn't," said the butler austerely. "There ain't no Mrs. Bourne 'ere, and never 'as been. This is the Countess of Halbury's 'ouse, and you don't 'ave to tell me what you are." He turned to the footman. "James, you go hout and fetch a copper, quick. I can look hafter this bloke. Just let 'im try something!"

He commenced to roll up his right sleeve, with an anticipatory glint in his eye. He was a very large butler, ever so much larger than Major Bellingford Smart, and he looked as if he would like nothing better than a show of violence. Even the best butlers must yearn sometimes for the simple human pleasure of pushing their fists into a face that offends them.

"You'll be sorry for this," fumed Major Bellingford Smart impotently. "If this is the Countess of Halbury's house there must be some mistake—"

"Ho, yes," said the butler pleasantly. "There his a mistake, and you made it."

There followed a brief interval of inhospitable silence, until the footman returned with a constable in tow.

"There 'e is," announced the footman; but the butler quelled him with a glance.

"Hofficer," he said majestically, "we 'ave just caught this person red-'anded in the hact of burgling the 'ouse. 'Er ladyship is at present hout dining with Lady Hexmouth. 'Earing the sound of footsteps, we thought 'er ladyship 'ad returned, halthough James remarked that it was not 'er ladyship's custom to

let 'erself hin. Then we 'eard a crash as if the card tray in the 'all 'ad been hupset, and we noticed that the lights were hout, so we came along to see what it was."

"I can explain everything, officer," interrupted Major Bellingford Smart. "I was asked to come here to get a Mrs. Bourne's signature to the lease of a flat—"

"You was, was you?" said the constable, who had ambitions of making his mark in the C.I.D. at some future date. "Well, show me the lease."

Major Bellingford Smart felt in his pocket, and a sudden wild look came into his eyes. The lease which he had brought with him was gone; but there was something else there—something hard and knobbly.

The constable did not miss that change of expression. He came closer to Major Bellingford Smart.

"Come on, now," he ordered roughly. "Out with it—whatever it is. And no monkey business."

Slowly, stupidly, Major Bellingford Smart drew out the hard knobbly object. It was a very small automatic, and looped loosely round it was a diamond and sapphire pendant—one of the least valuable items in the Countess of Albury's vanished collection. He was still staring at it when the constable grabbed it quickly out of his hand.

"Carrying firearms, eh? And that talk about 'aving a lease in your pocket—just to get a chance to pull it out and shoot me! You've got it coming to you, all right."

He glanced round the room with a professional air, and saw the open window.

"Came in through there," he remarked, with some satisfaction at the admiring silence of his audience of butler and footman. "There'd be a lot of dust outside on that sill, wouldn't there? And look at 'is trousers."

The audience bent its awed eyes on Major Bellingford Smart's nether garments, and the Major also looked down. Clearly marked on each knee was a circular patch of sooty grime which had certainly not been there before the Saint cannoned into him in that very helpful darkness.

On the far side of the square, Simon Templar heard the constable's whistle shrilling into the night, and drifted on towards the refreshment that waited for him.

The Secret of the Red Safe

by
BARRY PEROWNE

"KEITH," said Basil Ivor, "would you care to have a shot at cracking a safe to oblige a judge?"

A plump, pink man with a perpetual smile, Basil Ivor owned an antique shop of high quality in Mayfair. Keith Kelly and I, on our way to have dinner together, had dropped in, at Keith's suggestion, for a drink with Basil Ivor in his beautifully furnished apartment above the shop.

At Basil's question, Keith lighted a cigarette. Shaking out the match, he said to me, "How d'you like that for a proposition, Jerry?"

I did not know Keith very well. I had met him through Basil Ivor. A friend had advised me to consult Basil in the matter of some valuable silver which happened to have come into my hands in rather curious circumstances. I was hard up and needed to sell the silver without having to answer a lot of tiresome questions.

Basil Ivor had relieved me of my difficulty. Later, he had introduced me to Keith, who was from the other side of the Atlantic and

Barry Perowne will be remembered as the author of a series of stories (we've published several in The Saint) *built around the personality of, to quote Leslie Charteris, "that dean of delightful thieves," first created by E. W. Hornung. But here is a story that is* not *about the great cracksman.*

knew nobody much in London. Basil had suggested that as I had certain useful social connections and belonged to the right clubs, I might find it possible to be of the same small service to Keith.

I had been only too glad, for I liked him very well. About thirty, four years older than myself, he was a dark-haired, gray-eyed, rather good-looking chap, easy to get along with. I had enjoyed his company during the few weeks I had known him. He had told me nothing about himself, though. Naturally, since I had met him through Basil—who was, I had every reason to believe, a receiver of stolen property—I hadn't been able to help wondering a bit about Keith Kelly and what he was doing in London.

All the same, when Basil shot out his abrupt question about safecracking, and Keith passed it on to me, it was rather more than I had bargained for. It made my collar feel suddenly tight. I eased it with a finger, wondering what the devil to say.

Basil Ivor chuckled. "Our young friend Sir Jeremy Shee seems slightly embarrassed, Keith," he said. He leaned forward and patted my knee. "Don't worry, Jerry. It so happens that odd things sometimes come to my ears. I've heard—only heard, mind you—that the proposition I mentioned *may* be put to a man called Warren Grapner. Ever heard of him? Scotland Yard rates Grapner as the cleverest safecracker in England—though he's had convictions. The most recent was for a country house job. He slipped up, was caught on the job, charged before the Magistrates' Bench in the locality, committed for trial, and went down for five years."

Basil rose, took up the cock-

tail-shaker to refill our glasses.

Keith looked at me with his friendly smile. He was leaning back at ease in his chair. "You don't object to the subject of this conversation, Jerry?" he said. "You don't find it distasteful?"

"On the contrary," I said. In point of fact, now that I had got over my initial shock, I felt rather complimented. They knew I was hard up, that nothing went with the baronetcy I had inherited except a mortgaged old country house. I was beginning to realize that something was in the wind, and that they had decided at last that I was a man who could be trusted—and perhaps even let in on it.

"This judge I mentioned," said Basil Ivor. "He's not a real High Court judge. He's just a country magistrate. He sits on that Bench that sent Grapner for trial. Grapner completed his sentence recently, and I've heard that during the past few days this country magistrate's been in London looking for Grapner. He's been visiting Grapner's known haunts, questioning his acquaintances, telling them they needn't hesitate to say if they know where he is, as the magistrate only wants him to do a confidential job for him."

Keith laughed. "That doesn't necessarily mean that this magistrate wants a safe cracked, Basil."

"True," said Basil Ivor. "Still, it's rather intriguing. And the reason I brought the matter up, Keith, is that I've learned that this magistrate, when he's in London, stays at his Club. Our young friend Sir Jeremy here is a member of the same Club. I was wondering whether you happened to know him, Jerry—James Barribar, J.P., head of the Barribar Metalworks and Carnival Tackle Company?"

"Good Lord!" I said, startled. "Old Barribar? I've played billiards with him occasionally."

Basil Ivor rubbed his hands together. "What a useful fellow you are, Jerry! Now, tell us—what d'you know about James Barribar?"

"Only that the yard of his Works is a favourite winter quarters for the carnival showmen, the fairgrounds people," I said. "Old Barribar's probably the only magistrate in England who's always on the side of the showmen. They call him 'Squire' Barribar. When seasons are wet and times hard, the smaller, more old-fashioned outfits like to go into winter quarters in his yard because he sees to it that they pull out, come Spring, with a slap-up job done on their equipment, whether they can pay on the nail or not."

"Well, well!" said Basil Ivor. "A philanthropist!"

"I've heard at the Club," I said, "that the Squire's a bachelor, with a niece who keeps house for him, and two young nephews in the business with him. Oh, and I've heard that when the carnival

outfits start pulling out for the fairgrounds, he's so darned proud of the job his Works have done on them that he always has a house party to see the tackles leave."

"Ah!" said Basil Ivor. "A house party, eh? That's very interesting. Now, surely, at this time of year, the outfits should just about be beginning to pull out of winter quarters. So that annual house party must be about due to convene." He exchanged a glance with Keith Kelly, then looked at me. "Jerry, doesn't it make you curious—this urgent quest of James Barribar, a Justice of the Peace and all, for the services of a safecracker like Warren Grapner?"

"It's certainly very odd," I said, puzzled.

"You bet it's odd," said Basil Ivor. "Now, look, Jerry, you were going to dinner with Keith. Why don't you take him to your Club? We know Squire Barribar's in London at the moment. You might run into him at the Club, get him into a game of billiards, let him win, get him in a good mood, introduce Keith to him as a transatlantic friend very interested in the carnival business. Who knows, Jerry? A little judicious hinting might get the pair of you invitations to that house party. How about it?"

Keith Kelly tapped out his cigarette in the ashtray. "After all, Jerry," he said, in his pleasant way, "it couldn't do any harm, could it?"

I looked at him. I really liked him very much. And he was a stranger within our gates. One could hardly refuse him anything. I rose.

"Well, all right," I said. "At the same time, I warn you that old Barribar's a bit of a rough diamond—one of the old school. So don't expect anything to come of it."

Strangely enough, however, the following Friday found Keith Kelly and myself driving down to the Barribar country place to join the old Squire's house party. We were using Keith's car. It was brand new, an Italian sports job. He had bought the car through me, and I appreciated it, as I picked up a bit of commission now and then by introducing customers to a car agency place in Piccadilly. Not that my earnings amounted to more than a drop in the ocean of my financial difficulties.

On our way down to Barribar's, I tried to pump Keith as to what had brought him over to England, but all I got out of him was that a change of air had been advisable for him.

"Police trouble?" I ventured, glancing sidelong at him.

He smiled, his eyes on the road. "Quite the reverse, Jerry," he said.

I concluded that he'd run foul

of gangsters or something over there. I let the matter drop. I could tell that he was a chap who'd been at a good university. He was a gentleman, that was enough; I felt at home with him, had done so from the first.

It was a nice afternoon. The sunshine had a hint of springtime warmth; the countryside looked good and the hedgerows were budding. We were approaching the Barribar place along a winding lane when Keith shifted gears, slowing down.

"What's all the noise ahead there?" he said.

Next moment, as we rounded the bend, we came face to face with an enormous traction engine. Hogging the entire width of the lane, the toiling monster shone green and scarlet with fresh paint picked out with lavish gold-leaf. Its elaborate wooden cab-cover, supported by highly polished rods of solid brass, was a blinding yellow.

"It's a show engine," I shouted to Keith, above the din. "This is one of the carnival tackles just out of our host's yard."

He nodded, turned the car into the space before a five-barred gate, switched off. The towering engine, with the driver and fireman grinning down at us, lumbered past with majestic deliberation, making the ground shake, breathing a baleful heat at us from its firebox, and towing a trundling line of gigantic, tarpaulin-covered fairground contraptions. Following the tow was a procession of horse-drawn caravans, some large, some small, but all dazzling with fresh paint, wisps of smoke drifting from their chimneys, kids yelling greetings at us as they dangled their legs from the rear platforms.

"Quite a sight, Jerry," Keith said. "I didn't know engines like that still existed."

"Merrie England," I said. "These old carnival outfits are about all that remains of it. Barribar's is almost the only works left that still handles these old steam tackles. I told you the Squire belonged to the old school."

We weren't sure of the exact whereabouts of the Squire's house. But presently we came to the Works, and Keith suggested that we go in and inquire where the house was. Over the Works gateway, alongside a village green dotted with caravans and tethered horses, arched a wooden noticeboard:

BARRIBAR METALWORKS & CARNIVAL TACKLE CO.

We strolled in under the arch. Keith was wearing tweeds, but from something about the way that black, crisp hair of his was cut anyone could have told that he wasn't English. I was wearing cavalry twill myself, hacking style, and a Tyrolean hat. I liked a touch of colour, personally.

We stood looking round the

yard. More show engines stood glittering in the sunshine. From rambling old engineering sheds of galvanized iron sounded the roar of bellows and clang of sledgehammers. I glimpsed dim interiors where furnaces glowed, showers of sparks flew, bars of white-hot metal were being manhandled with tongs, and merry-go-rounds undergoing tests revolved at great speed, their painted swans and horses rising and falling rapidly on rods of twisted brass, though with no accompanying blare of music. It seemed a bit uncanny.

"Sir Jeremy Shee?" a clear voice called. "Mr. Kelly?"

We both looked round. In a corner of the yard was a large cluster of caravans. On the rear platform of a handsome van painted red and gold stood a fair-haired girl wearing jodhpurs and a sweater. Neither did her figure the least harm. She was holding a cup and saucer and was smiling at us. An old crone with a gaudy shawl over her head was leaning from the caravan, her bony elbows resting on the half-door.

I raised my hat as we walked over to the caravan.

"I guessed who you were," the girl said. "My uncle told me to watch out for you. He's around here somewhere, showing some of our other guests round the Works. I'm Ruth Barribar. I'm so glad you could come." She handed the cup and saucer to the old crone. "Thanks very much for the tea, Dolores."

"We were just admiring," Keith said, in his easy way, "the variety of work done here. Am I mistaken, Miss Barribar, or is that a *safe* of some kind over there?"

Startled, I followed his glance. From a building marked PAINT SHOP, a gang of men were lugging out a low-wheeled iron trolley. On the trolley was the most conspicuous safe I had ever seen in my life. It was painted fire-engine red, had a combination lock and brass levers, and bore on its door a gold-leaf monogram: P. S. M.

"It's not our usual kind of work," Ruth Barribar said. "It's a special order for a showman customer of ours. His caravan was robbed at Nottingham Goose Fair last year. All his takings were in it. For the past forty years, he's had all his metal and steam tackle work done at our Works here. He thinks there's nobody like us. So he asked my brother Ronald, who runs our drawing-office and is a clever inventor, to design him a burglar-proof safe and have it built here in the Works."

"And that's the safe?" Keith asked.

"Yes," said Ruth. "It's painted that colour because it'll travel in the showman's caravan and he wanted it to match the rest of his tackle. He operates merry-go-

rounds—Plaskett's Scarlet Monsters."

She descended the steps from the caravan.

"Let's go and find my uncle and the rest of the party," she said.

I didn't dare look at Keith Kelly as we accompanied our hostess across the yard.

That night, Keith and I sat down to dinner with the house party, some twenty strong, round the table in Squire Barribar's big dining room. Except for Ruth, her brothers Roy and Ronald, her brothers' young wives, and a few friends of hers, most of the people were getting on in years. They were the Squire's friends. It was very much *his* party.

On one wall of the room was a large, framed map of the midland counties, peppered with pin-flags of different colours. Seeing me look at it curiously, a middle-aged man opposite me—he was a Dr. Jackman, the local practitioner—leaned forward.

"The flags, Sir Jeremy," he said, "mark the whereabouts of various carnival outfits whose tackle our host keeps an eye on. When they're on the move, they send the Squire a postcard each night, reporting progress, and Ruth posts the map up to date for the Squire to see when he comes down to breakfast."

The old engineer and magistrate, at the head of the table, was stocky and rubicund, with a gray-stubbled, bullet head. Knowing that he was a stickler for the old ways, I was not surprised when at the end of dinner Ruth and the other women left us men at the dining table.

The Squire passed the port decanter.

"Now, then," he said. "I've got something to get off my chest. I know very well it's an open secret that me an' my nevvies here have been havin' differences of opinion. To put a stop to the rumours flyin' round the neighborhood about the future of the Barribar Works, here's the long an' short of the matter. Roy an' young Ronald here, my nevvies, want Barribar's to branch into other fields of engineerin' besides carnival tackle. Well, it's natural that clever, college-educated boys should want to branch out. Their dad, my late brother, would be proud of 'em. They're my heirs—they an' Ruthie—an' *I'm* proud of 'em, too. But here's how it is, look."

His faded blue eyes glanced round at us with a hint of defiance.

"They want to tool-up with new machinery," he said, "an' they need new workshops to do it. Fair enough. I told 'em there's a nice bit o' land for sale over near the county town, ten miles away, and they'd do best to go and build over there, an' leave me an'

my foreman and my old chaps that've been with me a lifetime to handle the steam tackle here, same as ever. But no, that don't suit their book. Roy, who runs our business office, reckons the businesslike thing to do is to modernize the Works here, rather than start from scratch yonder. Right, Roy? Ronald?"

The nephews nodded. They looked pretty good fellows to me. Roy had a vigorous, efficient air. Ronald, the draughtsman and inventor, obviously was intelligent and amiable. They looked at the old man with a kind of rueful, amused affection, as though they hardly knew what was to be done about him.

"Now, then," said the Squire. "Roy's a born organizer. He don't like the showmen. He's always grumblin' about caravans clutterin' up the yard all winter, showmen's kids underfoot, and whatnot. Let him start reorganizin' here, an' I know very well the new engineerin'll get priority over the carnival work. This is very near the last place in England where steam tackle gets a fair deal, but give Roy his head an' my old showmen friends'll soon begin to feel they ain't welcome to come into winter quarters in Barribar's yard any more. An' I won't have it!"

The Squire refilled his glass, passed the decanter on.

"We was arguin' the toss about it again round this very table," he said, "some weeks back. The boys were talkin' about some o' young Ronald's patents they want to start manufacturin'. They reckon they got a good thing in a safe he designed for a showman customer. It's got a new idea incorporated in it, which Ron's patented. He's a gifted engineer, I grant him that, an' that safe he's built for Pat Plaskett is a proper tartar.

"But I'm a magistrate," said the Squire. "I sit on the Bench at the town yonder. I know somethin' about criminals. Clever? You wouldn't believe! When my nevvies claimed they'd submitted Ronald's safe to every conceivable test an' was satisfied it was burglar-proof, I said I could tell 'em straight, speakin' as a magistrate, that there was one test of a safe that mattered—the test of a clever safecracker. Know what my nevvies done?"

Round the table, we all—except for the nephews—shook our heads.

"The young rascals," the Squire said. "They knew I was het under the collar about the workshops argument, an' that I'd had a brandy or two. Quick as a flash, Roy said he an' Ronald would lock five hundred pound apiece o' their own money in that safe, an' if I could produce a cracksman who could get at it, he could keep it—an' they'd go an' do their new buildin' over near the town yonder. But if the cracksman tried an' failed, then

the boys was to have their own way at the Works here. Hot mood I was in, quick as a flash I took 'em on." The Squire mopped his brow. "I been worryin' ever since!"

"Now, look, Uncle James," Ronald said, with amused exasperation, "we've told you again and again that if you'd rather wash out this whole affair—"

The Squire's jaw set. "If I say a thing, I abide by it. Always have, always will. An' I'll give ye a run for your money. There was a fellow brought up in front o' me once. I sent him for trial. Scotland Yard reckons he's the cleverest safecracker in England, though they've only pinned a fraction of his jobs on him. He's not long out o' prison an' I had a bit o' trouble findin' him. But I've done it an' he's goin' to have a go for the thousand pound. Now, here's what's been arranged about this test. First, the safecracker's to be allowed the workin' time he could normally hope for, this time o' year—midnight to six a.m. Next, me an' my nevvies have agreed the test shall be on neutral ground, an' Dr. Jackman here—"

"I've put my house," the doctor said, "entirely at the disposal of the contending parties. I've a suitable room for the test—a windowless boxroom-closet opening off my hall. The safe can be put in there. The room has only the one door."

"This is Friday," said the Squire. "Come Wednesday next, the last of the carnival tackles'll have pulled out. So we're goin' to hold the test Tuesday night, make it kind of the highlight of my house party. I've arranged everythin' with the safecracker. He's told me I shall see nothing of him till midnight Tuesday, when he'll ring the bell o' Dr. Jackman's house. He'll be masked. He insisted on it. He don't want to be recognized on some future occasion. By the same token, he don't want his technique watched, so he'll be shown straight to the room with the safe and locked in with it. He'll accept my word, as a magistrate, that the thousand pound is in the safe. If he can get at it, between midnight and six a.m., he walks out with the money—unmolested. Right, Roy? Ronald?" The Squire rose. "Then let's join the gals," he said, "an' you can tell 'em about it."

I slept fitfully that night. Before dawn, I heard the rumble and chug of show engines. They were getting early on the road, each with its tail of caravans. I found it a queer thought that, with times changing so fast in Merrie England, those few remaining old steam monsters depended, for the right to return for a few more years to winter quarters in their last stronghold, Barribar's yard, upon the skill of a safecracker.

I smiled grimly to myself, thinking, "The last of the dinosaurs—"

When I went down to breakfast, only Ruth was in the dining room. She was looking through a pile of postcards smudged with coal-dust and lubricating oil. She seemed a bit upset. She looked pale and stern.

"Keith been down yet?" I asked her, as I helped myself handsomely to kidneys and bacon at the sideboard.

"He's had breakfast and gone out somewhere," Ruth said curtly.

She took her postcards over to the map and was rearranging the pinflags on it when the Squire stumped in, wearing breeches and leggings.

"Mornin'," he grunted at me. He went to study the map, putting a calloused hand affectionately on Ruth's slim shoulder as he did so. "Plaskett's Scarlet Monsters still creepin' along all right, then," he said. "Pat Plaskett ain't wrote in panickin' for tube-expanders? H'm!"

My fellow guests drifted in—and out again. I myself hung about the house, keeping an eye open for Keith Kelly. It was nearly lunchtime before his Italian sports car came humming up the drive like a hornet. He drove round to the garage at the back. I walked round there to meet him. He was just getting out of the car.

"Where the devil have you been all morning?" I asked him.

He offered me a cigarette, looked at me meditatively. "Jerry," he said, "a crook like this Warren Grapner, who gets himself caught and jailed—would you call him clever? Would you have confidence in him, count on him—the way the old Squire's counting on him?"

It hadn't struck me in quite that light. I had to admit, "You have a point there, Keith."

"Thank you, Jerry," he said. "I think I have. So I've been out having a look around, getting the lie of the land. I also put through a call, from a telephone-box at the crossroads, to our mutual friend Basil Ivor. He has one or two men who work for him—good, reliable boys. I asked him to see if his boys could manage to locate Grapner, up there in London, and kind of hustle him under cover for a few days—anyway, till after Tuesday. Let me give you a light for that cigarette, Jerry."

My hand shook so much that I could hardly steady my cigarette in the flame of the match he held for me. He lighted his own cigarette.

"If you're like me, Jerry," he said, as he flicked away the match, "you haven't any real confidence in Warren Grapner to do this little job for the Squire. And all that matters to the old man is that the safe gets cracked. It's immaterial to him who cracks it."

"That's true," I muttered. I could feel my heart pounding.

"I felt sure you'd agree," Keith said. "Of course, a thousand pounds—three thousand dollars, Jerry—is no fortune. But the man who cracks that safe is entitled to the money. He takes it under license, you might say."

"Perfectly legitimate," I agreed, my throat dry.

"Unquestionably," said Keith. "So I've left it with Basil that he's going to put through a call to that box at the crossroads at ten o'clock tonight. If his boys have managed to spirit Grapner out of the way, then Basil'll have one of the boys drive down to that crossroads tomorrow night with a few tools I shall need. Then I think we shall be all squared away, Jerry. We house party guests are bound to spend some time, Monday and Tuesday, looking around the Works, riding on the merry-go-rounds being given a final test, and so on. It ought to be easy enough for me to sprain an ankle, stepping off a merry-go-round, so that I shan't be able to come with the party to Dr. Jackman's on Tuesday night. You follow me?"

"Very clearly," I said. I looked him straight in the eyes. "The vital point is, though—can you *cope* with that safe, Keith?"

"I'll be very frank with you, Jerry," said Keith Kelly. "There's only one thing that troubles me slightly about that safe—and that's its colour."

At that moment, from the house, sounded the rising clamour of the luncheon gong.

"We'd better go in," Keith said.

Shortly before ten that night, as I was playing bridge—there were several bridge tables going—I missed Keith. Nowhere was he to be seen. I knew he must have driven over to the telephone-box at the crossroads to wait for the call from Basil Ivor. It was all I could do to keep my mind on my cards. Within twenty minutes, he was back, as casual and pleasant as ever. But when I met his gray eyes across the room, I knew we were in business.

I felt an extraordinary confidence in him. I never had had a friend in whom I felt such confidence. There was something about him. The mysterious feeling in the pit of my stomach on the Tuesday evening, when, after dinner at the Squire's, the whole house party set out in various cars for Dr. Jackman's house, was quite illogical. It was due entirely to my own nervous nature. Nothing inherent in the situation—which in fact seemed set up for us, made to order—warranted my inward tremors.

Keith wasn't with us. Unfortunately, he had sprained his ankle in the Works that very morning and, not feeling too good, had preferred to stay behind and turn in early.

It was a fine, clear night of stars. Over the tall chimney of the Works furnace, a red glow pulsed sullenly. Lights moved about as the last remaining showmen worked around their great carnival engines, preparing to get early on the road.

Dr. Jackman was standing hospitably at his front door to receive us as, one after another, our cars pulled up in his drive. His house had a large, comfortable hall with a broad staircase curving up to a fine old gallery landing.

"Well, Doc," the Squire said, "my nevvies brought the boodle yet?"

"No," said the doctor, "but the safe's here. Your nephews, with some men from the Works, brought it over this afternoon and put it in my boxroom, where I keep the overflow from my library. Your nephews are dining together at Ronald's house, and they said they'd come over with their wives well before midnight --bringing the money. Now, everybody -- there are bridge tables and television in the drawing room there. There are drinks galore on the dining-room sideboard. Please don't neglect them. You younger folks, there's the record-player. The floor of the hall here is parquet, so if you want to dance, go ahead."

Everybody was a bit excited, and the party was well under way when, at eleven o'clock, the doorbell rang. The doctor answered, to admit the Barribar nephews with their attractive wives.

The Squire came out of the dining room, where, with his particular cronies, he had been investing the sideboard and making a fog of cigar-smoke.

"Ah, there, boys," he said. "Haven't got cold feet, then? Let's see the colour of your money."

Roy opened a briefcase he carried. He showed us ten packets of banknotes.

"Straight from the bank," he said. "A thousand pounds. Come on, Ron, let's put it in the safe."

My palms felt moist as the nephews crossed to a door under the curve of the staircase. There was a light-switch to the left of the door, a key in the lock. Roy flicked the switch. He opened the door, disclosing a small, windowless room lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. In the centre of the parquet floor stood the extraordinary, fire-engine red safe. There was no other article of furniture.

We all gathered around the doorway of the room in a tight, craning knot, to watch Roy and Ronald kneel before the safe. Ronald pulled open the massive door. Roy put the ten packets of banknotes in the safe, then put the briefcase in as well.

"Uncle's cracksman'll need that," he said, looking round at us with a grin. "Maybe!"

The two of them were utterly

confident. They turned their backs to us to secure the safe, then stood up, Ronald pocketing the safe key, and they came out, Roy closing the door of the room. A buzz of excited talk broke out. Everybody kept looking at the ormolu clock on the high oak mantel above the fireplace.

I was having a dance with Ruth, who was pale and stern and obviously disapproving of the whole business, when the clock sounded the first chime of midnight.

Simultaneously, the doorbell shrilled. Everybody stopped dead. Everybody except the doctor who, while the clock still imperturbably chimed, went to open the front door.

A man stepped in. He wore a black overcoat and black felt hat, his face was entirely covered by a black silk muffler in which eyeholes had been cut, and the ends of the scarf were tucked into another muffler, a white silk one, at his throat. In his black-gloved left hand he held a tool roll. His right was deeply, distrustfully, in the pocket of his overcoat.

The clock ceased chiming. The music played softly. For an instant, no one moved. Then the Squire, stocky and rubicund, a red carnation in the lapel of his dinner-jacket, his face grim, stumped forward to the newcomer.

"This way," the Squire said curtly.

The old engineer and magistrate had not a doubt in the world that the masked man was Warren Grapner. I alone knew that he was my transatlantic friend Keith Kelly. I could hardly breathe as I watched him follow the Squire to the door under the curve of the staircase. The Squire, his hand on the light-switch, paused and looked at the masked man.

"Now, d'ye need anythin'?" the Squire said harshly. "Few sandwiches? Drop o' brandy?"

The masked man shook his head. The Squire flicked down the light-switch, opened the door. The safe shone red; its levers gleamed brassily. The masked man walked into the little room. The Squire shut the door on him, turned the key in the lock, tossed the key to Roy.

"You keep it," the Squire said, and stumped back to the dining room.

I still was standing with my arms lightly about Ruth, as the dance had left us. I felt a tremor go through her.

"You're shaking," I said.

She gave me a look of pitiable anxiety. I hadn't realized how desperately she was on the side of the Squire and his showmen friends, and their doomed, old, trundling great show engines, and I was glad that Keith Kelly and I were on the same side.

"Go and sit in the drawing room, Ruth," I said. "I'll bring you a drink."

I needed one myself. In fact, in the dining room, I had a couple, in quick succession. Then I took one to Ruth. I could not stay with her. I had to get back to the hall. Almost everyone was there, looking at that locked door, and arguing, and betting like hell.

A skittish blonde suddenly took it into her vacant head to creep to the locked door, listen at it—looking at the rest of us with a finger to her lips—then stoop and peek through the keyhole. Honestly, I could have booted her, she was poised just right for it. But she turned with a silly grimace of disappointment.

"The beast!" she said. "He's hung his hat over the keyhole!"

I felt relief. It was only a small thing, but it seemed to me a straw in the wind, a significant indication that Keith Kelly knew his stuff. My confidence in him rose. I let my mind toy, just for a moment, with speculation as to what cut he would give me, of the thousand pounds, for having taken him to my Club and introduced him to the Squire. My role mightn't seem important, at first glance, but it was none the less a very necessary one. I felt sure Keith would be generous, as his countrymen usually were, and recognize my small services appropriately. I certainly could use the money.

But the night was wearing on. Around two-thirty, the Squire came to the dining-room door, glass in hand, and took a hard look at the locked door under the curve of the stairs. Then he looked at his nephews, who were off in a corner of the hall, muttering together. Frowning, the old man went back to his pals round the sideboard.

I followed him. I was in the dining room there, bracing myself up with a drink, when suddenly from the hall sounded the scream of a woman. I went rigid. A chill fled up my spine. Next moment, I headed a rush, by the Squire and everyone else in the dining room, back to the hall.

That hare-brained blonde stood pointing at the locked door.

"He's coming out!" she squeaked. "I heard something in the lock. He's coming out!"

Somebody turned off the record-player. All eyes were on the locked door. In the electric silence, a slight scraping sound was audible from the lock. It was being picked from the inside. I felt a trickle of sweat down my face as I heard the wards turn back.

Unhurriedly, the door of the room opened. The masked man stepped out. In his black-gloved left hand he held his tool roll and Roy Barribar's briefcase. His right hand was again, distrustfully, deep in his overcoat pocket. He walked forward deliberately, and the people fell back, staring, to make a gangway for him. He went straight to the front door, opened it, walked out into the

night, closing the door quietly behind him.

All eyes turned to the door of the room under the curve of the stairs. The door stood wide open. In the small room, the door of the red safe, too, stood wide open. The safe was empty.

"Ten minutes to three," someone said. "He's done the job in two hours and fifty minutes flat. He's won for you, Squire!"

The old man walked over slowly to his nephews. For a moment, the two young men and the old one looked at each other. Then Ronald forced a smile, held out his hand.

He said, "Congratulations, Uncle James."

Considering that it was his safe, his invention, it was the gesture of a good fellow, a good sportsman. And the old man took his nephew's hand gratefully and held it hard.

"Ron," the Squire said, "I can't imagine what you're going to tell old Pat Plaskett about the 'burglar-proof' safe you designed for him. But, boy, remember this —trial an' error, trial an' error, that's what makes an engineer."

Roy, too, shook his uncle's hand. "When we build the new workshops over near the town," Roy said, "Ronald'll have another go at designing a safe for Mr. Plaskett. Don't worry about that, Uncle James."

"Roy," the Squire said, "you two boys have never given me a minute's worry. Not to signify. I knew what I was doin' when yer dad died an' I took you two—an' Ruthie—under my roof. I'm a good picker. An old fool in some ways, maybe, but a good picker. I pick good 'uns."

He drew a deep breath.

"Well, there 'tis," he said. "You've had your safe tested an' it's cost ye a bob or two. But I reckon ye've learned somethin' from it, an' I know *I* have. But bear in mind, boys—the Works'll be yours, anyway, when I'm gone. An' I'm gettin' uncommon old, no denyin' it. I can't stay up all night, like I could when I was your age, damme. Now, where's my Ruthie?"

"I'm here, Uncle," she said. Her eyes were shining.

The Squire put a hand on her shoulder, looked round at the rest of us.

"Let's get up home, my friends," he said. "You, too, Doc. Ruthie an' some o' these gal friends of hers can fix us a platter of eggs an' bacon as big as a show engine's windin'-drum."

As the cars drove back around the village green, a faint, gray pallor was fanning over the eastward sky. The furnace glow above the Works chimney had grown dull. There was no chug and rumble of show engines. The Works looked forlorn. The archaic monsters were gone, had taken the road to the carnival grounds. But I knew they'd come

back, the old, chugging, gaily-painted engines, the showmen with their caravans, their womenfolk and their kids. For a few more years, anyway, they'd all come back to winter quarters in their last stronghold, Barribar's yard.

When we reached the Squire's house, I nipped unobtrustively upstairs to Keith Kelly's room. He was there, pacing up and down, smoking a cigarette. Exultant, I closed the door, turned to him.

"What a triumph!" I said. "Keith, what a triumph!"

He looked at me impassively. "What was said after I walked out with the money, Jerry?"

I told him—word for word, as nearly as possible. He nodded slowly, pacing the room. He stopped and looked at me.

"Jerry," he said, "the briefcase with the thousand pounds in it is done up in a brown paper package. It's addressed to Roy and Ronald Barribar, and it's lying at this moment on the doormat of the Works office, under the letter-slot."

He lighted a fresh cigarette from the stub of the one he was smoking.

"For the love of Mike, man," he said, "don't look at me that way!" He paced the room. "I never liked the colour of that safe," he said. "Red, Jerry! Red for warning. A red safe and a girl. What a fatal combination!"

"A girl?" I said. I felt stunned for a moment.

"Ruth," he said. "Ruth Barribar, of course. In that locked room, I thought this whole thing out. Roy and Ronald and Ruth are the old man's heirs. They can do as they please at the Works when he's gone, and he's pretty old. Ruth hated this thousand-pound challenge business from the first. You could see what a shock it was to her. So Ruth got at her brothers about it, of course. She must have gone at them like a tiger cat."

"What are you talking about?" I said, bewildered.

"Pride," Keith said. "You have yours, I guess, Jerry. I have mine, too. Or what kind of creatures would we be? Look, man—Roy and Ronald are a hundred per cent confident that their safe is burglar-proof. They put the thousand pounds into it because they'd gone too far to do otherwise. But Ruth must have shamed them into realizing that, with the few years remaining to him, the old man *must* be made happy. So I got the shock of my life when it took me just two seconds to discover the secret of that red safe—the secret that stops us cold, Jerry."

"But what *was* the secret of the red safe?" I said blankly.

He looked at me with a wry smile.

"It wasn't locked," said Keith Kelly.

The Bad Luck Murders

by
CRAIG RICE

"My wild Irish Rose, the sweetest flower that grows—" John J. Malone leaned his elbows on the bar and sang it softly, under his breath. It would be only a matter of time, he knew, before some barroom baritone would join in. Then a third voice would be added, and a fourth. One more round, and they'd tackle some really ambitious offerings.

The pudgy little lawyer was celebrating, and with good reason. Only that afternoon one of his favorite clients, one Max Lipsitch, had been acquitted on the charge of maintaining a gambling establishment. Praise had been lavish and the fee large. Malone made a mental resolution not to take any of the fee to Max's place. He'd learned by experience that the wheel was crooked.

The celebration had begun with a tour of the better nightclubs. From there it had moved to Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, after the redhead from the chorus of a current hit show had abandoned Malone in favor of a more prosperous companion. Now it

Craig Rice, as we've said before, was an unusual woman—frank, outspoken, generous, unpredictable, in many ways a living embodiment of the temperaments about which she wrote. Some may protest that Chicago was never like this, but this would be a rash statement. Chicago–New York–London–New Orleans and other towns, are not states of mind but groupings of the same.

had reached the third, and next to the final stage, among the West Madison saloons, where whiskey came two drinks for a quarter and it wasn't safe to take your hand off your glass long enough to light a cigar.

My Wild Irish Rose failed to produce results. Malone ordered another drink, resolving to try again, louder, in a few minutes. Perhaps those two bums on his immediate right, who were splitting two bits worth of whiskey between them. No, they were deep in talk.

". . . but I tell you, when Bad Luck Bradley does you a favor, you're done for."

Malone abandoned his song project and shamelessly eavesdropped.

The younger of the two bums expressed his scorn with an ugly word. "Look what he did for that Williams guy. Had his teeth fixed, bought him clothes, got him a swell job—"

"Yeah! Whatever's happened to him?"

There was a little silence before the younger man said, "Why—I don't know."

"There you are," the old bum said. "Bad Luck Bradley buys you clothes, gets you a job—and that's all anyone ever hears of you. Nobody knows where you've gone."

"If you two stewbums ain't gonna buy another drink, then scram," the bartender said.

Malone swung quickly around on his stool. "May I buy you another drink, chums?" he said.

The offer was accepted promptly, but with the natural reserve and suspicion of the West Madison Street habitué. It took three drinks, and fifteen minutes of idle conversation, before the suspicion was sufficiently allayed for Malone to ask casually:

"Say, who's Bad Luck Bradley?"

The two bums froze silent, glancing first at Malone, then at each other. The little lawyer waited, but without much hope. Evidently the acquaintance hadn't progressed as far as he thought.

"Who's he?" one of the bums said at last.

Almost simultaneously, the other one said, "Never heard of him."

Malone shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know him. Just heard the name somewhere."

Tension was eased a little after that, but it wasn't long before the older man said, "Well, thanks for the drinks, mister," and slid off the barstool. The younger one added, "See'ya again," and the two left.

Malone sighed. He should have known better. The West Madison Street bum was a difficult person to extract information from, wary, suspicious, and secretive. Bartenders and taxi-drivers were always easier sources.

The musical plans were completely forgotten now. He leaned

on the bar and addressed the man behind it.

"Did I say the wrong thing to those guys? Who is this Bad Luck Bradley?"

The bartender went on polishing a beer glass. "Don't ask me. They say he's a sucker for a touch. Probably just flophouse talk. Have one on the house?" He spoke cautiously, not looking at Malone.

"Thanks," Malone said.

"You know how superstitious these bums are," the bartender added, warming up a little. "They say if you take a favor from Bad Luck Bradley, you're done for. Just superstition."

Malone nodded, agreeing with him. He reflected, though, that so widespread a superstition usually had some reason for being. This was none of his business, but he was curious.

He polished off the raw, fiery whiskey and decided it was time to go home. He swung halfway around on the barstool, changed his mind, and swung back.

A girl had come in and taken the stool beside him. That would have been enough to cause him to stay, until she was safely out and in a taxi. West Madison Street was no place for an unaccompanied girl, especially a pretty one in expensive clothes.

A second look at the girl would have made him stay, anyway, regardless of place or circumstances. She was what he privately called a "warm blonde," with dark gold hair, brown eyes, dark lashes and a peach-colored skin. She had the face and figure of a cover girl. She wore a bright red wool dress, red suede sandals—in spite of the snow and slush outside—and a fur coat. Her voice, when she ordered a rum and coke, was uncultured but pleasant, and she didn't give the impression she'd led a cultured life. Finally, she looked worried.

She took a gulp of her drink, lit a cigarette, and signaled the bartender to come over.

"Listen you, can you tell me something, Who's Bad Luck Bradley?"

Malone and the bartender looked at each other. The girl caught the look and turned to Malone.

"What's the gag, buddy?"

"No gag," Malone said, "and a nice girl like you shouldn't be in a joint like this."

The bartender, instead of being insulted, agreed with him.

"I'm not here because I like the atmosphere," she said. "I'm here because I'm looking for somebody. Maybe you two guys can help; if you can, I'll be very grateful." She took a photograph from her red suede purse. "Have you ever seen him around this saloon?"

Malone had never seen the face before, but he studied it with interest. It showed a weakly vicious young man, with an unpleasant leering smile, light hair and dark eyes. Strangely, it resembled the

blonde girl, though there was nothing even remotely weak or vicious about her.

"Sorry," Malone said, giving it back. "Kin of yours?"

"Brother," she said, handing the picture to the bartender.

"I've seen him," the bartender said, nodding. "Been in here a few times. Once in a while he had dough, but most of the time he was cadging drinks." He broke off and said to the girl, "Sorry, lady, I didn't mean—"

"That's okay," she said. "You don't have to tell me anything." She put the picture back in her bag. "I'm trying to find him. No luck so far. A flophouse keeper said that Bad Luck Bradley might have got him, but he wouldn't tell me anything more. So, I'm still looking."

"Lady," Malone said gallantly, "let me help."

She looked at him thoughtfully. John J. Malone was hardly a prepossessing sight. His thinning black hair was mussed, and he'd acquired a small cut over one eye during a brief discussion with a taxi-driver. His collar was unbuttoned, his tie had worked up under one ear, and there were cigar ashes on his wrinkled vest.

"Thanks," she said, "but who are you?"

"I," Malone said magnificently, "am a lawyer. I am the best damn lawyer from the sunny shores of Maine to the rock-bound coasts of California. I have never lost a client yet, and if anybody can find your brother, I can. My name," he added, almost as an afterthought, "is John Joseph Malone."

"I've heard of you," she said. "Okay, you're on." She finished her drink. "If we just keep combing the dives and flops around here, we're bound to run him down."

The bartender was interested now. He, too, had heard of John J. Malone. Not a bad idea to get on the right side of a guy with Malone's City Hall connections. He parked his elbows on the bar, and began offering suggestions.

The suggestions were good ones, but the girl had been to most of the places mentioned already. Finally he rubbed his chin and said, "Well, there's a place run by the city, two blocks up and on a side street. The bums don't go to it except as a last resort, because they make 'em wash and register for jobs. And Bad Luck Bradley goes there regularly—"

The girl's eyes met Malone's. "It's worth trying," the little lawyer said.

Out on the sidewalk, Malone looked at the muddy slush and at the red sandals. "Your shoes," he began.

"The hell with it," she said. "I got twenty more pairs at home. By the way, my name's Gerda Powell."

"Short for Gertie?" Malone

asked innocently. She gave him a wicked grin and didn't answer.

They walked in silence down the gaudy shabbiness of West Madison Street and along the dismal and underlighted side street. At the door of the shelter, the girl paused.

"By the way, it's nice of you to help."

"Think nothing of it," Malone said, happily. He was wondering how soon he could ask a few personal questions and suggest a dinner date. "Anyone would be touched at the spectacle of a lovely girl trying to find her brother."

To his surprise, she laughed. It was a shrill, harsh, unpleasant laugh. "You don't get it, mister. I'm not trying to help my little brother who's down and out, through no fault of his own. He's the world's prize louse, and all I want to do is fix it so he can't cause any more trouble. He just got out of jail last week, and that's the sixth time since he was fifteen and went to reform school. He was paroled when my old man died, and a week later he stole my old lady's insurance money and scrammed. She took sick and died before I even could get there. Once I thought he'd reformed, he convinced me he was on the up-and-up, and I took him in. He beat it with every piece of jewelry in the place, and then tried to blackmail one of my boy friends. If I find him, the chances are good that I'll kill him." She looked straight at Malone. "Does that clear things up?"

"Completely," Malone said calmly. "If you do, I'll get you an acquittal. Have you got any money?"

"I have, and nobody's keeping me either. I own a chain of beauty shops."

That was why the name had been faintly familiar. Malone remembered the little shops with modernistic fronts, and GERDA'S written across the plate glass.

He opened the door for her and they went into the dreary building, clean, and smelling of cheap disinfectants. There was nothing in the hall but a registration desk. To the left an open door revealed a slightly more cheerful room with a few wicker armchairs, an upright piano, and a table piled with magazines. Above the door a plaque read, "*Recreation Room. Donated by B. L. Bradley.*"

"B. L. Bad Luck." Malone shuddered slightly, and crossed his fingers.

The man at the desk didn't seem surprised to see John J. Malone and a girl in a fur coat come in. He'd been there too long to be surprised at anything. Yes, he remembered the young man of the photograph. He'd stayed there three days. That was as long as anyone was allowed to stay in the shelter. No, no idea where he'd

gone when he left day before yesterday. Maybe some of the boys in the recreation room would know.

The "boys" in the recreation room were all either very young men, obviously down on their luck for the first time, or decrepit old bums who were too tired to care whether they stayed in the city shelter or a two-bit flop. It was one of the latter who remembered Joe Powell.

"Bad Luck Bradley got him a job." He spat on the floor. "Too bad, lady. You'll never see him again."

"Nonsense," Malone said.

The bum turned away and went on reading a battered magazine.

"Where can we find Bad Luck Bradley?" Malone demanded.

Another man spoke up. "You will find him right here, if you wait. He drops around every night and dishes out cigarettes."

"We'll wait," Gerda Powell said firmly. She sat down in one of the wicker chairs, oddly incongruous in the shabby room. Malone lit a cigar and sat down in the chair nearest to her.

It was a half hour or so before the man known as Bad Luck Bradley came in. Malone looked at him curiously. There was certainly nothing about his appearance to suggest that he was a carrier of misfortune. He was a plump, middle-aged man with an amiable, rosy face, friendly blue eyes, and white, curly hair. He trotted in cheerfully, an armful of cigarette cartons under his arm.

"Well, good evening, my friends."

There was only a murmured and perfunctory greeting in answer. A couple of the older bums turned their faces away. Bradley didn't seem to notice.

He put the cartons down on the table and said, "I tried to get all the different brands. And I know you boys always need a little spending money, so I left a couple of dollars apiece for you out at the desk."

There were a few muttered "Thank you's." Gerda Powell got up, walked across the room and said, "Mr. Bradley?"

He looked at her curiously and said, "Yes."

She took the photograph out of her purse and handed it to him. "That's my bother. I'm looking for him. They told me you got him a job."

"Oh, your brother. Quite a resemblance." He handed back the picture. "Too bad."

"What do you mean, too bad?" Malone asked.

"I'm afraid," Bradley murmured, "your brother is not a very—very responsible type. Yes, I did get him a job." He sighed. "He impressed me as a worthwhile and merely unfortunate young man. I outfitted him, got him a shave and a haircut, gave him some money for expenses, and told him to

come to my office yesterday morning. He never showed up."

"Have you any idea—?" Gerda began.

Bradley shook his head. "None whatsoever. He must have taken the money and—skipped. I'm really very sorry."

"So am I," she said grimly. She turned to Malone and said, "Well, I guess we've come to a dead end."

"Maybe," the little lawyer said. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully for a minute. "Let's go back to civilization and buy a drink. And if you'll meet me somewhere tomorrow morning, maybe I'll have some ideas."

He took two steps toward the door, then paused and turned back. "Pardon the curiosity, Mr. Bradley. But what do your initials stand for?"

The philanthropist frowned, puzzled. "Bruce Lawrence. Why?"

"Just idle curiosity," Malone said.

"Why bother me," Daniel von Flanagan of the Homicide Division asked wearily. "It's strictly for the Missing Persons Department." He glared at Malone, looked admiringly at Gerda Powell, and added, "I'm a busy man."

"Missing Persons is no good," Malone said. "All they do is take a name and description and do a routine investigation. But if *you* take it to Missing Persons, and put a little pressure on, maybe they'll do some work."

The big, red-faced police officer tried not to beam at the implied compliment.

"We hate to bother you," Gerda Powell said, "But—" She smiled at him.

Von Flanagan coughed and said, "No bother. Glad to help."

Malone grinned. It was what he'd expected. This morning Gerda Powell had on a bright blue, close-fitting dress with a big silver pin. Her gray sandals exactly matched her kidskin coat.

Von Flanagan squinted. "Funny, these stories you told me about Bradley. The ideas that bums can get!"

"I found out a little about him this morning," Malone said, lighting a cigar. "He's a retired broker, a rich philanthropist and a very unlucky man. Maybe that's what started the stories. He has a beautiful young wife who's a helpless invalid. His stepson by a former marriage was killed in an auto crash lately. And his brother died about six months ago when his house was burned down. Everything bad seems to happen to him. That—plus his initials being B. L. . . ." He paused. "Good thing I'm not superstitious myself."

"Neither am I," von Flanagan said quickly.

Malone scowled thoughtfully. "It's a damn funny thing, though. He seems to be on the up-and-up.

But when a guy gets jobs for flophouse bums, and invariably they disappear—"

"Yeah," von Flanagan said. "Only I don't know how—"

The telephone interrupted him. He picked it up, said, "Yeah?" and sat listening, saying only, "What?" "Uh-huh," "Which district?" and finally, "What address?" Suddenly he raised his eyebrows, looked at Malone, and said into the phone, "No, I'll go over myself."

He put down the phone and said: "Here's another funny one. Some guy phoned the fifth district station and said to come right over, he was going to be murdered. Then he hung up, or somebody hung up for him. They traced the call, though. It came from Mr. J. A. Truax's house on North State Street, and Mr. J. A. Truax is Bad Luck Bradley's nephew."

Malone and Gerda Powell looked at each other. "It may not mean a thing," Malone said, "but we're going with you."

The three arrived at the address just thirty seconds behind the squad car. It was von Flanagan who rang the bell.

It was several minutes before a thin, gray-haired woman in neat, housekeeper's black opened the door. Her eyes widened at the sight of the police.

"Somebody here sent for the cops," von Flanagan said.

She shook her head, her face bewildered. "Oh, no, sir. There must be some mistake."

"Ain't this the Truax house?" one of the squad car cops said. She nodded, and he said, "This is the place all right. We're going in."

"Wait," she said, wringing her hands. "Wait, I'll call the doctor . . ."

Von Flanagan said, "What the hell?" and waited.

A moment later a tall, dark-haired distinguished-looking man came to the door. "What seems to be the difficulty here?"

"Who are you?" one of the cops said.

"I'm Dr. Stark. I was Mr. Truax's physician."

"*Was?*" Malone said.

The doctor nodded. "He died—three hours ago—of injuries received in a skiing accident yesterday."

"Where's the body?" von Flanagan demanded.

"It's already been taken away—to the chapel at 1419 North Woodring Street."

Von Flanagan wrote it down, and then said, "Look, somebody phoned from this house for the police and said he was being murdered."

"Impossible," the doctor said. "There's been some mistake. I assure you, no one has made any telephone calls from this house, and there's been nobody but the housekeeper and myself." He

smiled. "However, if you care to search . . ."

"We do," von Flanagan said. He pushed on into the house, followed by the squad car cops.

The search was a thorough one, took half an hour, and revealed nothing. The house was in perfect order. There was nothing to indicate there had been a murder, attempted murder, or even a call to the police. There was nothing to do but apologize and leave.

The squad car cops were already down the steps when Gerda said brusquely, "Say, while I'm here . . ." She pulled out the photograph and said, "Look, Doc. Ever see that map before?"

He eyed it curiously and said, "Why?"

"He's my brother," Gerda said, "and I'm looking for him. Mr. Bradley gave him a job, fixed him up with some clothes and dough, and he scrammed. Have you any ideas?"

The doctor looked at the picture for a long time, then at Gerda for a longer one. "It's possible I may be able to find out. If you'll give me your phone number, I'll inform you if I am able to learn anything."

"Thanks," she said, "that's very kind of you." She wrote down the phone number and handed it to him. Malone managed to look over her shoulder and memorize it, while she was writing.

"Sorry to have troubled you," von Flanagan said. He led the way down the steps, his broad face an ominous shade of crimson. He waited until they were in the car before he said, "Following up a call like that would be a routine district matter. You come in with some cockeyed story about some rich guy who goes around making bums disappear and I fall for it and end up asking silly questions and getting sillier answers." He gave Malone a nasty look. "I hope some time you get arrested so I can personally give you the third degree."

"You do," the little lawyer said smoothly, "and I'll tell your wife about that time in South Chicago when you left a glove—"

"That's blackmail," von Flanagan growled, "and I've got a witness. I could arrest you right now."

"You could," Malone said, "but you won't." He turned to Gerda and said, "You see how easy it is to cooperate with the police?"

She smiled at him wearily, said nothing.

Malone leaned forward and said to the driver, "Inspector von Flanagan has to investigate a murder in Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar. So, let us out there and beat it. He'll take a taxi back to the office." He beamed at the sulking von Flanagan and said, "the least I can do is to buy you a drink."

The taxi pulled up at the Clark Street entrance of Joe the Angel's.

Gerda Powell leaned forward and said, "I'm not getting out here, driver. You can take me to 1766—"

"You can't do this to me," Malone began.

Von Flanagan tactfully started across the sidewalk.

"—and you aren't going to walk off like this. You asked me to help find your brother, and I'm going to find him, alive, dead or indifferent."

One corner of her mouth smiled. "Forget it. It looks like he's got in another jam, and I hope this is a fatal one. If he hasn't, well, I've been thinking it over and I've decided all I have to do to find him is stay home. Sooner or later he'll turn up to make a touch. I've enjoyed knowing you, Mr. Malone, and thanks for the help."

"Wait a minute," Malone said, shoving the cab driver away from the door. "Don't forget my fee. After all, when you hire a lawyer—"

"Send me a bill," she said. This time both corners of her mouth smiled.

"I'll give it to you right now," Malone said. "By way of fee, let me take you to dinner tonight, at L'Aiglon."

This time her eyes smiled, too. "Maybe I'd better retain you on a permanent basis," she said. "I'll meet you in the L'Aiglon bar at seven."

Von Flanagan was waiting just inside the door. "Next time you want to impress a dame—" he began indignantly.

"You're all wrong," the little lawyer said in his smoothest voice. He shoved the police officer on through the bar and said, "We'll take a booth. You're not supposed to drink on duty."

Von Flanagan slid into the booth, muttering something about Malone's upbringing, when the waiter arrived. "Gin and beer."

"Make it two," Malone said. He leaned across the table and said, "How could a man who's been dead for three hours call up the cops and yell for help?"

"Some practical joker," von Flanagan growled.

" 'Some practical joker' is the police department's favorite alibi," Malone said. He gulped his gin, chased it down with a small beer, and shuddered. "Except that you traced the call and found it really did come from Truax's house. And Truax is dead, and after he was dead he called the cops and said he was going to be murdered. And he was a nephew of Bad Luck Bradley, who seems to have the evil eye."

"I don't believe a word of it," von Flanagan said. He mopped his brow with a slightly shaking hand. "I told you before, I'm not superstitious."

"This guy was making practice jumps because he was going to

enter a championship meet," Malone went on relentlessly. "He seems to have been an expert. Not very many people were around. No one was paying very much attention at the time of the accident. He was making a pretty simple jump—easy stuff for an expert—when he—*fell.*"

"If you're implying he was pushed," von Flanagan said, "who pushed him?"

"That's for me to ask, and you to find out," Malone said coyly.

"He was hurt in an accident out at Fox Grove," von Flanagan said. "Died of the injuries. Couldn't have been murdered. He was dead before that phone call came in. And, anyway, who the hell would have wanted to murder him?"

Malone lit a fresh cigar, gazed at the ceiling, and said nothing.

"He didn't have a wife or girl friend or enemy, as far as we can find out," von Flanagan went on. "He didn't have much of any money. Carried a thirty thousand dollar life insurance policy, with his uncle, B. L. Bradley, as beneficiary. Can you imagine a rich guy like B. L. Bradley murdering his nephew for a measly thirty thousand?"

"You never know," Malone said. "It takes all kinds of people to make a world. While you were doing what you like to call investigating at the undertaking parlor, I did a little work on the telephone. All the members of the Bradley family who've kicked off lately, one way or another, carried good-sized insurance policies, with the old man as beneficiary. Thirty grand may not be much to a guy like him, but thirty grand here, fifteen grand there, twenty grand another place—it adds up, as the chorus girl said when she told how she got the mink coat."

"Nonsense," von Flanagan said. There was no conviction in his voice.

"Perfect nonsense," Malone agreed. "But it would be fun to find out where old man Bradley was when the accident occurred. Or maybe Bradley's wife."

"She's an invalid," von Flanagan said. "Never leaves the house." He sighed, and said, "All right, we'll go there. But if you get me into another dead end—"

"If I do," Malone said, "I'll pay for the taxi." He let von Flanagan pay for the drinks, though.

The Bradley mansion was a big, old-fashioned mansion a block from Lake Shore Drive. Bad Luck Bradley's study, where he received them, was a dark, gloomy room, lined with books. The philanthropist himself, plump and pink-faced, seemed a little out of place, Malone thought. He should have had a chintz-hung room with big windows and a lawn outside.

Mr. Bradley was delighted to be of any possible service to the

police. He regretted, however, that he wasn't able to tell much about the terrible accident to his favorite nephew. He'd been out of town when it happened.

The insurance policy? Well, a year or so ago—no, maybe less—Jack Truax had borrowed thirty thousand dollars from him. Lost that in his business, poor devil. The policy had been taken out by way of security.

Von Flanagan apologized for the intrusion, glared at Malone, and rose.

"Mr. Bradley," Malone said suavely, "Would you mind if we interviewed Mrs. Bradley?"

"Why . . ." Bradley paused and frowned. "I'll ask Dr. Stark. He's with her now. I don't know . . ." Suddenly he looked anxiously at von Flanagan. "You don't think there was anything strange—about Jack's death?"

"Of course not," the officer said.

"Purely routine check-up," Malone added hastily. "In case of accidental death — you understand."

"Oh, yes," Bradley said. "Yes, naturally." He frowned again. "I'll ask Dr. Stark . . ."

Dr. Stark was a little dubious about the interview with Stella Bradley. Of course, if it was necessary—well, be careful not to upset or excite her. He led them upstairs to her room, paused at the door.

"I'm sure you understand," he said in a very low voice. "She—Mrs. Bradley—well, she's far more ill than anyone knows. Certainly far more than her husband knows. I think—*she* realizes the truth, but just the same . . ." His handsome face contracted momentarily into a pained grimace. "She's still so young. And she was so lovely." He opened the door and ushered them in.

It was a large, luxurious room, shadowy and quiet. The walls were gray and had a few paintings, good ones. The curtains of thick rose damask were drawn over the windows. Walking on the blue and rose carpet was like walking on a new-mown lawn. There was a strange odor in the room, an odor of perfume and medicine, cosmetics and chloroform, fresh-cut flowers and hospital alcohol.

Stella Bradley sat in a chair near one of the curtained windows, a dusty-pink afghan over her knees. She looked up and smiled at them as they tiptoed across the room. Her face was lovely and very pale, almost blue-white. In the semi-darkness it was impossible to tell if her hair was ash-blonde or silver.

There was something about her that bothered Malone. He felt that he'd seen her before. Her, or someone who was very like her. Von Flanagan was speechless, and even in the dusky shadows, his broad face was red. Malone scowled. Obviously, it was im-

possible to ask Stella Bradley where she'd been at the time Jack Truax met his accident. It was just as impossible even to think that—Malone drew a long breath, walked boldly up to her chair and took her hand.

"This is an unpardonable intrusion," he said softly.

"Quite all right," she whispered. She smiled at him faintly. The smile, too, reminded him of someone. He couldn't think for the life of him who it was.

None of the questions he'd intended to ask fitted the occasion. Von Flanagan was standing, tongue-tied and embarrassed, fumbling with his hat. Malone had to think of *something*. "Tell me," he said, "do you know any reason why Jack Truax would have wanted to take his own life?"

Her blue eyes widened with surprise. "Jack? Never! He was so alive. So happy. The very day of his—accident—he came in to see me, on his way to Fox Grove. He was vital and gay, and—joyous. He told me he was sure he'd win the championship at the ski meet. He kissed me on the cheek here—" one frail hand trembled up to touch her white face—"and made some silly little joke, and went away to—" her voice became a little moan—"to his death."

There was a little silence in the room. Dr. Stark signaled them toward the door with his eyes. Malone bowed over her and said, "Thank you. You've been very helpful."

Out on the street in front of the Bradley mansion, von Flanagan said furiously, "This is twice today you've stuck my neck out. The second and last time. The next time you start having delusions, call a doctor, not the police." He leaped into the waiting taxi, slammed the door in front of Malone's nose and shouted one last, profane comment through the window as the cab drove off.

Malone shrugged, looked after the departing cab, and walked over to Clark Street to take a streetcar, by way of personal chastisement. By the time he'd reached his hotel and began a leisurely bath, he'd come to the conclusion that von Flanagan was right. Well, anyway, he had a date tonight with the most fascinating girl . . .

He cut himself shaving, and spent fifteen minutes fumbling with his tie in nervous anticipation.

At five minutes to seven he was in the L'Aiglon bar. He ordered a whiskey sour and sat watching the door.

It was seven-fifteen when he ordered a second whiskey sour and sent a boy out for newspapers. Women were always late, and Gerda Powell would be no exception.

When seven-thirty came he began to suspect she was going to

stand him up. He called for a third drink and went to the telephone booth.

Gerda Powell's maid answered the phone. "Mist' Malone? Miss Powell she say, if yo' call, she's goin' be a li'l late. She was jes' fixin' t'leave when somebody call her. She say yo'll unnerstan' when she tell yo' how come, ann she ain' goin' be mo'n half a hour late."

Malone started on his third drink. It was now seven-forty-five. The half hour had already stretched a little. He resolved not to wait for her longer than eight o'clock.

Meanwhile, he unfolded the newspapers and began glancing through them. The tragic death of Jack Truax, society sportsman, popular bachelor and ski champ, was all over page two. There were photographs of Jack Truax, photographs of Bad Luck Bradley, wealthy philanthropist, and Stella Bradley—the latter photograph having been taken before her illness.

Malone looked at the pictures for a long time. Then he called the bartender and completely upset the refined equilibrium of L'Aiglon by ordering a double rye with a beer chaser.

Seeing the pictures, he'd realized the resemblance that had bothered and troubled him. Stella Bradley—save that her hair was a pale blonde—looked like Gerda Powell. Jack Truax looked just a little like the photograph of Gerda Powell's brother.

Malone gulped his rye, paid his check, and headed for the phone booth. He called Dr. Stark's residence. The doctor wasn't in.

"Where can I reach him, right away?" Malone said. He managed to get a convincing quaver into his voice. "We didn't expect the baby quite so soon, but—"

The efficient female voice at the other end of the wire said, "Just a minute." Then, "You can reach Dr. Stark at the Bradley home. I'll give you the number."

Malone said, "Never mind," hurried out of the phone booth, out to the sidewalk, and hailed a taxi.

He might be wrong, he told himself. Indeed, he even hoped that he would be wrong. But he didn't dare take a chance on it.

The taxi stopped in front of the Bradley house. Malone flung a bill at the driver and ran up the steps. He didn't have any plan of action in his mind, he just had to be there. It was Bad Luck Bradley himself who opened the door.

"I'm looking for Miss Powell. Gerda Powell. I think she came here to see Dr. Stark."

"You must be mistaken. I don't know any Miss Powell. Dr. Stark—he's—" The philanthropist's face was gray and beaded with sweat. "I'm sorry—you'll have to excuse me . . ."

Malone shoved his foot

through, pushing Bradley back, and went into the hall. "I've got to see Dr. Stark," he said.

"You can't. He's—there has to be an emergency operation. On my wife. Her chances aren't good. He couldn't even move her to a hospital. They're going to operate right now. Upstairs. You can't see him now. Not until it's over. Don't you understand?"

"You're damned right I don't understand," Malone said grimly. "And that's why I'm going upstairs."

He'd reached the bottom of the staircase before Bradley tackled him. He sprawled on the floor, picked himself up, and butted Bradley in the stomach. Bradley rose to his knees. Malone landed a blow on his jaw. The white-haired man collapsed quietly on the floor, and Malone raced up the stairs.

The house seemed to be deserted. Not a servant in sight. The little lawyer tried one door after another, finally opened one into a room that was blazing with lights.

"You can't come in here," Dr. Stark's voice said.

Malone went in anyway and kicked the door shut behind him. The room—evidently a guest bedroom—had been made into an improvised operating room. Blinding lights were streaming down from the ceiling. There was a stretcher-table in the middle of the room, on it a white-swathed mummy with a gauze binding over its mouth. There were two nurses and Dr. Stark.

"I'm sorry—Mr. Bradley wanted me to come up and see how it was going . . ."

"Tell him everything's all right," Dr. Stark said. His eyes were deepset and anguished. "Frankly—don't tell him this, his heart is bad, and he's mentally unstable—there isn't much hope."

Malone said, "Oh!" The lovely invalid in the wheelchair, with the pink afghan over her knees. The pale tragic face. Now, not much hope. "I'll not—tell Mr. Bradley." He took a few steps toward the operating table. A pair of terrified brown eyes stared at him from over the gauze bandages. A wisp of the pale, blonde-gray hair showed under the head-covering. There was horror in the eyes, and desperate appeal. Then the lids closed.

"Good luck," Malone whispered. His voice was hoarse. "I'll —stay with Mr. Bradley—till it's over." He fled into the hall."

Stella Bradley's eyes were blue. Gerda Powell's were brown. There was that resemblance . . .

Malone had once had a client who was an expert shoplifter. He came away from the improvised operating room with a pair of rubber gloves and a surgeon's knife.

He put on the gloves. There was a floor lamp in the hall, plugged into the wall. Malone slashed

savagely at the wire. There was a blinding flash, and the upstairs lights went out.

In the downstairs hall there was another light. He short-circuited it with another slash of the knife, and the front downstairs lights went out. A third light shone in the kitchen and he disposed of that. There were anxious cries from upstairs and feet running in the hall.

Malone grabbed the phone in the butler's pantry and hastily dialed von Flanagan. "The Bradley house. Murder. Get here fast." Then he dived down the back stairs into the basement.

Malone grabbed the box of live fuses on top of the box and hurled it through the window. In the same moment little, soft, whispering footsteps came up behind him. He started to whirl around, but a blow came down on the back of his head, bright whirling sparks flashed before his eyes, and he fell into a pit of darkness.

The first voice he heard was von Flanagan's. It had an anxious note in it, but it said, "Don't worry, he'll be okay. Malone's tough."

Then Gerda Powell's voice said, "Oh! Please! Do something! Call an ambulance! Call a doctor!"

Malone opened one eyelid an infinitesimal fraction of an inch. Gerda Powell still had on the operating gown, and the gauze headcovering. Her face was white, and lovely. The gown didn't come together all the way, and he confirmed his earlier conviction that her figure was as lovely as her face.

"You'd better go get your clothes on," he said, "because you have a dinner date, and you're late for it. Remember?"

"Poor old Bad Luck Bradley didn't have a thing to do with it," Malone said. "He was just an unknowing stooge." He dug a fork into his salad. "That dame, Stella Bradley, was the real brains behind the racket. Dr. Stark was just taken in like a minnow in a net."

Von Flanagan said, "That's all very fine, but I still don't understand—"

"They were going to murder me tonight," Gerda whispered. "That Dr. Stark phoned me and said my brother was at the Bradley house. I went there, they bound me and bleached my hair. Then they tied me on the operating table. I was to be operated on, and—die." She choked over her drink.

"Never look at the past," Malone said hastily, "when the future is so bright." He waved at the waiter and said, "Bring three more, while we wait for the dessert." Then he lit his cigar and said, "Poor old Bad Luck Bradley thought he was being a philanthropist. While behind his back

Stella Bradley and her boy friend, Dr. Stark, did the dirty work. They picked bums who faintly resembled someone else, did some hairdye jobs, and arranged accidents, cashing in on insurance policies. Those accidents all happened to kinfolk of Bradley, who'd taken out policies with him as beneficiary. Your brother—" he turned to Gerda—"happened to look like Jack Truax. Truax pretended to be hurt in a skiing accident. Someone looking like Truax died of injuries inflicted by Dr. Stark. Your brother happened to get loose long enough to phone for help, but it was too late."

"But the insurance money went to Bradley," Gerda said.

"Sure," Malone said. "And Bradley had a lovely blonde niece in New York, who was his only living relative. He really did have that niece once, but she's probably in a concrete coffin in the bottom of the East River now. Stella Bradley was able to manage a double life, the time she presumably spent in sanatoriums, she really spent building up the phony character as Bradley's niece."

"If I owe you an apology," von Flanagan said, "you can take an I.O.U. for it, and try to collect."

He rose, held out a hand to Gerda, and said, "Dance?"

Malone strolled up to the bar, ordered a drink, and stood watching approvingly. She was lovely, very lovely. Her hair was like a silver mist. She danced like a flower in the wind. Von Flanagan would probably go home pretty soon now. Then he and Gerda would begin to make plans.

He killed a little time losing four dollars in a crap game with the bartender. When he looked around again, Gerda was gone, and so was von Flanagan.

The doorman was surprised and helpful. "The young lady? She left fifteen minutes ago, with Mr. von Flanagan."

Malone went back to the bar. Life was altogether sour. Still, there was a guy two stools down who looked as though he might sing a healthy baritone and there was a promising looking tenor over at the pinball table.

The little lawyer sighed, called for drinks, for the house, and began singing, softly, and under his breath.

"Did your mother come from Ireland—"

It would only be a matter of time he was sure before someone would join him.

Mysterious Affair at Elsinore

by
MICHAEL INNES

EVERYBODY knows that the Elsinore affair remains unsolved. And the chances of any striking success must now seem slender. It is difficult not to suspect that by this time a good many of the clues have disappeared. Where, for example, is that arras behind which the Lord Chamberlain Polonius ensconced himself? I cannot very confidently accept the proposition that it was possible to view this important exhibit in the collection of Danish art recently on show at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It seems to me more probable that what we saw there was merely a similar arras. And while that, of course, might have its value—it would be serviceable in a reconstruction of the crime—we cannot lean on it too hard. That, indeed, is just what Polonius himself did, with fatal consequences.

The truth is (and we may as well face it squarely) that the matter went disastrously from the start. Here we must place the blame squarely upon the shoulders of Prince Fortinbras of Norway. "Take up the bodies," he

What really did happen at Elsinore? Who was murdered? Who wasn't? Michael Innes now has three separate reputations, as an academic expert in English literature, as a writer of radio scripts, and as the man who has very few rivals for the topmost place among British writers of detective fiction.

From: THREE TALES OF HAMLET, by Michael Innes and Rayner Heppenstall (1950 Gollancz, London)

ordered peremptorily. But, as we all know, the bodies must on no account be moved. Whenever to-day (as constantly happens) the body of a baronet with a dubious past is discovered in the library at midnight, and outside the french windows (it is astonishing how fond baronets are of french windows) lies an untrodden carpet of snow, and the ashen-faced butler is dropping his tray with all that whiskey and all those glasses, and the baronet's wife is stalling off a blackmailer in her boudoir and the cousin from Australia is tampering with the concealed safe in the billiard-room: when these common incidents in the life of the English landed gentry have yet once more transacted themselves, this one golden rule is to be observed: nobody must move the body. Even when the butler, hastily recruiting himself from the unspilled brandy, falls writhing in the agonies which must follow upon the imbibing of prussic acid; even when the blackmailer has a heart-attack and tumbles deftly and compromisingly out of the boudoir window; even when the concealed safe, disclosing itself as in fact an infernal machine, blows the bad-hat cousin sky-high: even then the bodies, be they mounting up like the snow-drifts in the spreading park outside, must on no account be moved. Yet even such a complicated holocaust as this is as nothing to that which confronted the authorities at Elsinore; and it is all the more deplorable, therefore, that this reckless order should have been given, and that thereupon four captains should have borne Hamlet like a soldier to the stage—a heavy-footed proceeding much like that of letting a squad of local constables loose on that all-important snow.

But consider further. We can by no means be assured that of the numerous persons presently to be buried all were already dead. For example, it is known that King Claudius, after being run through by Hamlet, declared firmly that he was but hurt, and it is impossible to believe that Hamlet succeeded in forcing down his throat sufficient of the poisoned wine to have any very immediate effect upon one of so robust a constitution as the late King Hamlet's brother. Moreover, I am myself strongly of the opinion that Hamlet's gesture in thrusting the goblet in Claudius's teeth was substantially symbolical, not to say theatrical; and I think that this explanation will cohere very well with our sense of the generally excitable and fanciful disposition which this young man clearly owned. It thus appears very likely that Claudius's death was lingering, and that some dying statement might well have been secured from him, if only in an agonal whisper, had not Fortinbras destroyed this pos-

sible clue also, by ordering, in so critical a moment, that the soldiers' music and the rite of war speak loudly, thus drowning any possible communication of this sort beneath the blended uproars of a peal of ordnance and a military band. Nor can I refrain from remarking here upon another adverse effect of this action. It might be very useful to be able to determine what kind of poison had been employed in the goblet prepared for the fencing match. Now, everybody knows about that faint odour of bitter almonds that hangs over the baronet's library and may well have hung revealingly over the hall of the castle at Elsinore. But whether it in fact did so or not we shall never know, since the stench of gunpowder occasioned by the salvoes which Fortinbras caused to be fired off would have made any such faint fume undetectable.

But I come now to what is, after all, the grand disappointment we must face in endeavouring at this late date to solve the mystery. There was one witness—one active participant, indeed—from whom much might have been expected. Let me remind you of the words in which Horatio is reported to have replied to the assertions of the soldier Marcellus on the subject of certain paranormal phenomena traditionally associated with Christmas. "So have I heard," Horatio said, "and do in part believe it." Nothing could better illustrate, we may feel, the temperament of the born detective. To believe a little of everything you hear, and to disbelieve the rest: this is the royal road in successful criminal investigation.

We might, then, have high hopes of Horatio on this score alone, and it is surely with justified excitement that we learn a further fact. This clear-headed young man was commissioned by Hamlet himself to inquire into the whole affair and make a report to the crowner at the inquest.

For I take it that, in the command "Report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied," the words "crowner and his jury" were either actually added by the dying Hamlet and have been lost from the report, or were trembling upon his lips when he was prevented from delivering them by that rash action of Horatio's in making a grab at the poisoned cup. Be this as it may, here we have Horatio commissioned to clear up the mystery. And he was confident that he could do it; indeed, that he had all the threads already in his hands! For he proposed, you will remember, to explain, unequivocally and almost immediately, how those things came about. His hearers, he said, would learn

Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,

Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in the upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on the inventors' heads.

And all this, he reiterated with sober confidence, could he truly deliver. The more we study this speech, the more must we be struck by its specific, detailed and analytical cast. Horatio was not proposing to speak vaguely of horrors, mysteries, wonders all ill-understood; he clearly believed that he had it in his power to achieve a logical elucidation of the whole complex affair.

And yet there is no record of any further activity on Horatio's part! This enigma I hope that I shall presently be able to solve. There is, of course, one commonly received explanation. Horatio, it is said, went abruptly cagey at the prompting of literary vanity. "Tell my story," Hamlet had exhorted him. And the form of words which this injunction accidentally took upon Hamlet's lips had the consequence of suggesting to the bookish student from Wittenberg the idea of literary composition. He therefore saved up the inside information which he undoubtedly possessed and declined any further immediate explanation. This theory is, in a manner, borne out by the facts—or so it would appear. There is Horatio's eventual book to witness to it. Let me turn to that for a moment.

"The Life and Letters of Hamlet the Dane, together with Miscellaneous Recollections and Reflections, in six volumes, by Horatio, Lord Chamberlain to his late Sacred Majesty, King Fortinbras of Denmark," is universally allowed to be a disappointing book. Indeed, to speak quite frankly, I doubt whether so abysmally dull a treatment of a promising subject was to appear again until Bishop Christopher Wordsworth's biography of his Uncle William was published in 1851. Of new light upon the Elsinore affair there is absolutely none. The narrative is wandering and obscure, the arguments adduced are prolix and often self-contradictory, and Hamlet's story is virtually submerged beneath torrents of that tedious and moralising which seems almost to have been an occupational disease among Lords Chamberlain at the Danish court.

These may appear to be harsh words. Yet they do no more than match our irritation in face of this wretched state of affairs. It would seem to be undeniable that literary vanity prompted Horatio to sit tight upon his biography of Hamlet until the mists of senescence had closed over his memories and perceptions with all the fatality of those engulfing vapours which enshroud the sing-

ularly comfortless castle of Elsinore in Sir Laurence Olivier's film. Well, there is no help for it, and from this barren aspect of our subject we may now turn away. I must warn you, however, that there is one facet of what we may term the Horatio-fiasco to which I shall come back presently.

I think it is very commonly believed that Hamlet's story, having unfortunately come down to us largely through works of entertainment, lies hopelessly obscured beneath the devices of sensational fiction. And most notable among these is that ghost which is declared to have appeared before the young prince on the battlements, announced itself as his father's spirit, and told the dreadful story of fratricide in an orchard. We, who seek to deal with what Dr. Johnson finely calls "vehement real life," are disconcerted by this appearance in the records of what the same critic terms phantoms that strut upon a stage. In our haste to rationalise the ghost (as we must of course, do) we rationalise it wrongly. Or so I hope to prove.

The ghost, it is said, was a mere hallucination of Hamlet's—a projecting into the outer world of some disordered inward vision. If we accept this we may well suppose that Claudius's obscure displeasure at "The Murder of Gonzago," the play which is said to have been presented before him, had nothing to do with a guilty conscience; and that the whole train of events, whatever it may have been, had its origin not in any crime of Claudius's but in a mental aberration of his nephew Hamlet's. Against this very colourable reading of the matter there seems at first little to oppose except certain fragmentary reports that Claudius was subject to fits of religious depression in which he could be heard to confess to some heinous crime. And when we ask why Hamlet should imagine the ghost and its story we are at once assisted by the findings of modern psychology. Hamlet was in the grip of the Œdipus complex, and the ghost and its story were a sort of dream or phantasy, giving body to certain of his own infantile and unconscious desires. The ghost, we may say, was an archetypal father-figure, of a sort generated when the human family was a blood-soaked affair: one of such phantoms as are perpetually rising to haunt us from hiding-places thousands of generations deep.

I will at once admit that this interpretation appears attractive; for if it does not absolutely avoid superstition it at least avoids any superstition that has been current for very long. And yet it appears to me hazardous lightly to swop for this modish phylogenetic

phantom the commonplace old ghost of Hamlet's father which the documents in the case so inescapably confront us with. The ghost is eminently a questionable shape; if we decline speaking terms with it we cannot claim to be confronting the evidence fairly. For there is much testimony that in the early stages of the affair not only Hamlet himself (whom I have indeed admitted to be of a somewhat unstable nervous constitution) but also a number of substantially disinterested persons—persons, so far as can be ascertained, without previous interest in spiritualism, psychical research, or anything of the sort—were firmly convinced of the nocturnal appearance at Elsinore of a veridical phantasm of the dead. Moreover the phantasm was *heard* by these people; nothing is stronger in the testimony than that they several times heard it utter the word "Swear"—while one account even avers that it was heard not merely to repeat this single word but to deliver a whole sentence: "Swear by his sword"—a circumstance even more difficult to reconcile with any theory of simple auditory hallucination.

I cannot, then, accept the theory that there was no ghost. At the same time I am obliged to believe that there was, up to this point, no *crime*. And my grounds for this are as follows. Everybody who was present at the playing of "The Murder of Gonzago" concurs in declaring that Claudius sat quite unmoved through a precise rehearsal, in the form of a dumb-show, of the play that was to come. Now, how could he have done this had the representation been, all unexpectedly, the very picture of a ghastly fratricidal deed of his own? Moreover, when he did break up the play he had ample occasion for doing so in the offensive behaviour of his nephew Hamlet not only to himself but to a young lady of the court, Polonius's daughter Ophelia. Thus Hamlet's "mousetrap" cannot be held to have caught anything, and the whole case against Claudius as a criminal breaks down.

And yet a number or persons claimed to have seen and heard old King Hamlet's ghost; and from this apparition Hamlet himself had a substantial account of his uncle's guilt, coupled with demands for vengeance. How is this to be explained? If we are to arrive at the truth we must closely examine the train of events which this apparently supernatural revelation set in motion. And particularly we must ask ourselves this question: whom did this train of events ultimately benefit? It is perhaps not too much to say that, as soon as I have asked you this, the first outlines of the truth—the horrible and surprising truth—begin to form themselves before you.

Old King Hamlet then was dead, and the succession to the throne of Denmark had been securely settled. The monarchy, as you know, was elective in character; and on this occasion the late king's son, young Hamlet, had been passed over in favour of an older and altogether more experienced ruler, the late king's brother Claudius. But although young Hamlet may have been in some discontent about this, there is no reason to suppose that he was inclined actively to dispute it. For his preoccupations at this time seem to have been personal in character, and it was his mother's second marriage (undutiful and indecently hasty, as he conceived it) that had chief place in his mind. This no doubt disposed him to think ill of his Uncle Claudius in general. But state affairs were, as I say, in a substantially settled condition. It was widely felt that young Hamlet might yet, in the natural course of things, succeed to the throne; and Claudius indeed had in public audience designated him as what we should call heir presumptive, declaring him to be "most immediate to his throne... his chiefest courtier, cousin, and his son."

We must note, however, that Gertrude was by no means past the child-bearing age, and that if she brought Claudius a son, an alternative strong claim to the succession would thereby be established at once. And who else might have substantial hopes? Clearly, in an elective monarchy, the most powerful and politically experienced of the court nobles —in this case the Lord Chamberlain Polonius. And, if Polonius, then of course at one farther remove Polonius's only son, Laertes —whom at one time, indeed, we know the populace to have shouted for as king. Was there anyone else? I think it likely that there was. You will recall that when Polonius's daughter, Ophelia (having, as it was supposed, committed suicide), was brought to burial, the priest responsible for the service plainly regarded the dead girl with extreme disfavour. Was this solely because suicide was at that time regarded as mortal sin? I think not. Some other cause must have been operative to make this priest so churlish and venomous. And I suspect, on several grounds, that he had not long before been pressed into service to perform a hasty marriage of a clandestine character. In other words, had Ophelia lived, she might have borne to her secret husband, Prince Hamlet, a child who would also have had a strong claim to the Danish throne. Was there anyone *else* who might have had such a claim? Remember that those were rough old times, and that bastardy was no certain bar to an inheritance or succession. When we

admit this, we see at once that Claudius's natural sons, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, also had their outside chance. They possessed, it must be admitted, all the craft of their father, and do in fact remarkably instance in their characters the power of heredity. I do not think that, at the court of Elsinore, you could have mistaken them for other than what they were.

And now see what the situation is. All those people, and only those people, die violent and more or less mysterious deaths, who either (1) are on the throne of Denmark (Claudius) or (2) may succeed to it (Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern) or (3) may bear heirs to it (Queen Gertrude, Ophelia). And so we have only to ask ourselves this: who would come to the throne if all these persons were liquidated? The answer is simple: the man who did come to the throne when they were!

I embrace my fortune.
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me . . .

Can we doubt, once we have coolly considered the matter, that Fortinbras of Norway was himself the architect—the diabolically cunning architect—of the vantage he so promptly turned up to claim? Just think! No sooner is the way cleared—no sooner are Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, Hamlet dead or dying, than up pops this felow who has for months been mysteriously lurking about the environs of Elsinore—up he pops, I say, with an army, and brass band, and a battery of cannon; and he makes a great noise, and a speech announcing that he is the new king; and he has the bodies all carried away in huggermugger, "even while men's minds are wild," as Horatio innocently puts it. Or is it so innocently, we may ask ourselves? Had Horatio already been squared, and was Fortinbras secure in the knowledge that his future Lord Chamberlain, when it came to the point, would have nothing material to say to th'yet unknowing world? Indeed I think I can tell you just when Horatio came into the plot. For when we look back, in the light of all this new knowledge, to the affair of the ghost we see at once that Horatio's whole attitude must be gravely suspect. At the very first recorded appearance of the ghost we catch Horatio prevaricating to the sentinels. And to what end? To no other end than that of persuading them that the supposed ghost is really like the late King Hamlet!

Such was the very armour he had on,

When he the ambitious Norway combated,
So frowned he once, when in an angry parle
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
'Tis Strange . . . .

Well, it was indeed strange. For we find upon a little calculation that Horatio is here claiming to have been present at an incident which must have taken place when he was in his nursery —young Hamlet having been born, you may remember the reliable testimony of the gravedigger assuring us, on the very day that the ambitious King of Norway was defeated by King Hamlet. And again we know that Horatio only a little later, when endeavouring to persuade Hamlet that the supposed ghost indeed bore a convincing resemblance to the dead king, declared "I knew your father, These hands are not more like"—this only a matter of minutes after admitting that he had seen King Hamlet only once in his life, and that presumably in his own early childhood! I need waste no further words on this. It is painfully evident that when Fortinbras, roughly disguised to represent the ghost of old King Hamlet, took up his perambulations on the battlements of Elsinore, Horatio was already in the plot. No wonder that his book when he finally published it only made obscurity more obscure!

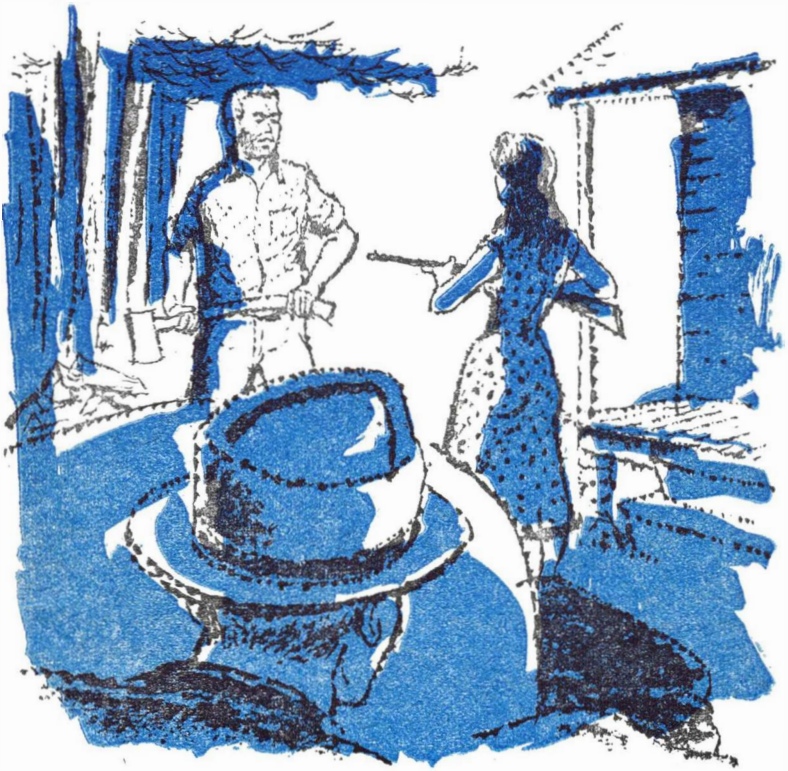
My hour—as this false apparition said—is almost come, and I need not expatiate on either Fortinbras's motive or opportunity. Remember only that King Hamlet had killed Fortinbras's father and (as the consequence, it was averred, of some obscure wager) possessed himself of a substantial portion of his territories. This was surely ground enough for an implacable resolution to revenge himself upon the Danish royal house. Remember too that young Fortinbras, like young Hamlet, seems to have been cheated of a throne by a usurping uncle, who vexatiously interfered with the young man's military plans. And remember finally that young Fortinbras, by first proposing an expedition against the Danes, and then agreeing to accept safe-conduct from them for the purpose of proceeding against Poland, was able to be right on the spot virtually throughout the whole vexed series of events which we have been elucidating. He was even lurking just round the corner, you will recall, when Hamlet was being shipped off to England; and I do not doubt that his machinations were responsible for both the adventure with the pirates and the surprisingly ruthless course to which Hamlet was prompted by way of liquidating his cousins, Guilden-

stern and Rosencrantz. For everywhere Fortinbras's intent is plain: it was simply to embroil in mutual suspicion, hatred and strategem all those who stood between him and the throne of Denmark. And so cunningly did he work that (although morally, of course, every fatality in the whole series must be laid wholly to his charge) he was yet himself, in all probability, directly and physically responsible for only one murder: the callous drowning of Ophelia.

And now I fear that I might almost say with Fortinbras:

The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.

To trace out this matter further is beyond my present scope, but its outline is tolerably clear. Claudius and Hamlet were alike more sinned against than sinning; and, but for the wiles of a subtle and determined adversary, they would doubtless have come to live together harmoniously enough, once the rather awkward matter of the hasty marriage had had time to settle down. As it was, they were entrapped into killing each other. Further, I will say only this. When I consider the sheer weight of paper and ink rendered obsolete by the simple discovery that I have been privileged to communicate to you to-night I am—let me be not ashamed to confess it—more than a little awed.



Stolen Trouble

by LEWIS H. KILPATRICK

"SUCH mischief happens down in the settlements," muttered burly Sheriff Clint Hawkins at his rolltop desk, "but not in these Kaintucky hills. Only a few people up here, like Jarvis McGuire, have enough cash money to tempt this sort of crime."

His sandy mustache twitched as he pushed back his slouch hat and again studied the crumpled note, scrawled in pencil on a sheet of ruled paper:

"Dear Pap— Im allright and I aint being hurt none. But you got to put 2 thousand dollar in bills in a empty lard can and shut it tight agin the water and put it in Red River just below Laurel fork Friday night. *If you do like I say*

—I can come free. two thousand dollars, Pap— Love, Mandy McGuire."

Clint got up from his swivel chair, strode from his office to the front door of the court house and called toward the jail yard, where two men were pitching horseshoes:

"Dave — Arnett! Dave — Arnett! Dave —*Arnett!*"

His lean, gray deputy, after a final pitch which clanged around the iron peg, came ambling after him into the office. Clint shut and locked the door behind them.

"A kidnapping!" Dave exclaimed when he read the note. He spat tobacco juice toward a box of sawdust and leaned over the desk. "When did you get this, Clint?"

"Jarvis fetched it a while ago," the sheriff replied grimly. "Said he found it under his front door early this morning. Mandy wasn't at home when he came in from a cattle trade last night, but he thought nothing of that. Allowed she often got restless and went off to a neighbor's without leaving him any word."

Dave shook his grizzled head. "It'ud take two-three fellers to carry off that big, severe gal. With her mammy long dead, she's more a man in ways than a female. That's why she's a old maid. Who does Jarvis think stole her?"

"He hasn't any idea—but I have. His 30.30 is missing, too. He figgers the kidnapper sneaked into the house yesterday evening, with Mandy there alone, and took the rifle-gun to capture her."

"She's a right smart fighter herself," Dave took a moment to gossip. "Jarvis hired several women, the Widow Wilcox among 'em, to keep house for him. But Mandy run 'em all away. Once I stopped there for dinner—and she done the cooking. It was the worst mess of victuals I ever tried to eat.

"Clint, have you telephoned the State Police? The Federals now like to get in on a kidnapping, too."

"I ain't told nobody," snapped Clint. "It's *me* who's high sheriff of Crag County. And only me, you and Jarvis yet know of this mischief. I want it kept that private for a spell."

He reached to a peg on the wall above his desk, took down a cartridge belt with a holstered .38 special and buckled it about his thick girth.

"Strap on your pistol, Dave, and get your horse. I'm riding

Kentuckian Lewis Kilpatrick, six feet plus in height, whose work and interests both involved him in considerable traveling, turned to writing after several years spent in social service and government work. And Sheriff Clint Hawkins of Crag County, Kentucky, is a decidedly interesting addition to the ranks.

out to the McGuire farm, but I want you to range around and see if you can find any track of Bart Fletcher."

"Bart Fletcher?" Dave repeated. "Why, that tow-headed cuss ain't been seen in these parts since he dodged the Draft Board. Even his own folks disowned him. What's he got to do with Mandy McGuire?"

"Jarvis said he's the only boy who ever talked to her serious. She favored him, of course, being lonely for a man. But Jarvis ran him off and told him never to set foot on his land again.

"No regular kidnapper stole that gal. Such a feller, for one thing, would 'a' asked a heap bigger ransom. Jarvis didn't find any automobile signs around his place, neither. So it's a mountain man we're hunting, Dave, one that ornery and hard up for cash money he'll take any fool chance."

As Clint Hawkins cantered out of the village county seat, he ruminated:

"Gossip sometimes does have virtue. I recollect now Jarvis did try courting Louella Wilcox after her man died. She was left poor, with only a scraggly farm, and he would be a good match for her. Yes, old Dave's a bachelor man, but he does have an ear for female talk."

The two-story frame McGuire home was flanked by barns and bins and fertile valley fields. When Clint dismounted and halloed from the yard gate, Jarvis came to the front door. His eyes were shrewd and his short black beard was trimmed to a sharp point.

"Have you learned anything?" was his first question.

Clint shook his head as he followed him into the house. "That's why I came here. I want to see Mandy's bedroom."

Jarvis hesitated at the foot of the stairs. "It's sort of untidy," he said. "I looked careful, myself, and there's no blood marks. I 'low she was took away unharmed as her letter told."

Clint heard a rattling of pans and dishes in the kitchen at the rear. "You got another housekeeper?"

Jarvis stroked his goatee and grinned. "It's the Widow Wilcox. She come by today on her way from visiting a cousin. Louella's right plump and sightly—and she's a prime cook."

"But Mandy hates her. How'd she know your gal ain't here?"

"Aw, women folks have a way of scenting each other, I reckon."

Clint shrugged and went with him up the stairs. He found Mandy's bed unmade, clothes hung on the footboard and chairs, and dust everywhere. He went to a table by the window. The table was cluttered with lurid picture magazines. Among them was a ruled tablet and a stub pencil.

"Are these the sort of books Mandy reads?"

"She's not much good at reading anything," Jarvis sighed behind him. "I never could make her get to school regular. A pappy just ain't no 'count at rearing a gal all by himself."

"These are all I want up here." Clint put the tablet and stub pencil into his pocket. "Jarvis, this is Thursday. You're told to seal that two thousand dollars in a lard can and float it on Red River tomorrow night."

Jarvis scowled. "That's a heap of cash money."

"Ain't your only offspring worth it?"

"Yes—but you're the law. I turned this trouble over to you. You're sworn to pertect me."

"It's Mandy we've got to pertect first," Clint retorted, starting back down the stairs. "I can't get enough deputies to cover both banks of the river for six miles to the county line. The kidnapper's apt to fish out the can anywhere below Laurel Fork."

Back in town, he was lighting the kerosene lamp on his desk that evening when Dave Arnett, jaded and glum, reported in from his search.

"Nobody I talked to has seen or heard tell of that Bart Fletcher," he declared, sinking wearily into a chair and pulling out a tobacco twist. "Some Kaintucky mountain folks will help a moonshiner or killer to hide out, but all of 'em disgust a draft dodger. Clint, I 'low that feller is far and away from Crag County. He didn't have nothing to do with stealing Mandy."

"Well, I figger he might have had help," the sheriff drawled. "Dave, your big ears hear a lot. Did Bart ever court the Widow Wilcox?"

Dave bit a chew from the twist. "A shiftless coward like him would hang around any female who'd lodge and victual him. The Widow's farm, recollect, is way at the head of Laurel Fork. It's far off any road and nobody much ever goes by there."

"We're going there. Get yourself some sleep and be ready to ride again two hours before sun-up. We're taking our Winchester repeaters and plenty of cartridges."

He had to hallo twice and loudly at the McGuire gate that early morning. With Dave beside him, he heard a woman's complaining voice in the house when Jarvis, wearing a nightshirt and carrying a lantern, opened the front door.

"Have Mis' Wilcox fix you a quick breakfast," said Clint after a brief salutation, "while you dress and saddle your horse. Me and Dave here want you to go with us. And, Jarvis, fetch that two thousand dollars."

Jarvis grumbled: "You all are

the law. It's your part to catch the kidnapper and free Mandy." He glanced over his shoulder. "Clint, me'n' Louella have business in town today. We aim to get us a wedding license." His eyes glowed in the lantern's light and he whetted his lips.

"Mice will frolic when the cat's away. Well, you'll have to stay a widow man for a day longer, Jarvis McGuire," Clint spoke sternly, "I'm ordering you in the name of the law to come along!"

His Winchester across his pommel, he led the way through the misty darkness after they left the county road and took a trail toward where Laurel Fork emptied into Red River. Jarvis followed sullenly, silently, behind him, with Dave at the rear. Reaching the mouth of the creek, Clint turned up the hollow. At its head, he knew well, was the Wilcox clearing, surrounded on three sides by high limestone cliffs. There was no escape from the clearing except along the way they were going.

"We'll leave the horses behind this paw-paw grove," he called back when they had gone a half-mile. "It's getting daylight and the mist will soon thin."

After they dismounted and tethered their horses, he warned: "Stay close behind me and keep quiet."

Jarvis muttered: "Louella's farm is just up a piece. What do we want there? She left her cabin house shut when she went off visiting."

Clint ignored the question. "Did you fetch along that ransom money?"

Jarvis reached to his right hip pocket. "I got a hundred dollar. That's enough to pay."

"Yes, maybe that will be enough." Clint, his Winchester at ready, followed the twisting trail for some minutes, then signaled for a halt. The mist was drifting away from them toward the head of the narrow valley; the first streamers of light brightened the forested mountain tops. He cupped a hand to his ear and listened.

Thwack . . . thwack . . . the sound of an axe came from the clearing.

"Somebody's there all right," he said in an undertone. "Dave—" The deputy slipped to his side, his own rifle at ready.

"They're making poor Mandy chop the breakfast wood," he growled. "Yet that proves she's still alive and hearty."

Jarvis grunted. "She's hearty enough. And it's the first wood she's ever chopped."

Clint gestured them behind a giant boulder. They crouched there, peering over the slimy rock. The clapboard roof of the cabin now showed dimly. There were muffled voices, a man's and a woman's.

"Dave, you go around and get back of the house. I'll cover 'em from here. Don't shoot unless Mandy or one of us is in real peril."

The deputy nodded silently and disappeared back into the brush.

"Jarvis, I've got to risk you. When I say the word, walk out bold toward the cabin. That'll fluster 'em. They ain't expecting nothing 'til nightfall and then down at the river. Smile easy if you can and act the sharp trader you are. Stand away from the kidnapper while you bargain with him. If Mandy's of a mind to get free, she'll dodge off into the timber while you're parlying. Dave will pertect her. Wait a few minutes," he cautioned when Jarvis exclaimed under his breath.

"Look, Clint!" Jarvis grabbed his elbow. "Do you see what I see?"

Clint, again peering over the boulder, saw a ghostlike man in the unfenced yard. He was at the woodpile and the ax was in his hands. He heaved audibly. His tow hair was rumpled; his unshaved face, flushed.

"He is Bart Fletcher. My Gosh!" Behind him, on the cabin steps, sat Mandy McGuire. She held a rifle across her knees, a finger near the trigger. Clint could make out her polka-dotted dress and her splayed bare feet. Her own hair, black and unbraided, hung about her shoulders.

"That's enough wood for now," she smiled, rising. "Tote it in to the cook stove—and I'll lock you in the closet again while I get breakfast."

"Aw, I ain't much hungry," Bart whined. "Mandy, please put down that rifle-gun and let me go."

"Just wait 'til after dark and we'll both go. Stingy as Pap is, he'll put a thousand dollar anyway in that lard can." Her gold front teeth shone in a broader smile. "With that much, honey, we'll hustle over the ridges and down to the settlements by daybreak. There, after we've been wed quick—"

Bart thudded the axe head on a log. "I don't want now to wed, I keep telling you. Mandy, you get on back home and let me go my own way."

She lifted the rifle barrel threateningly. "Bart Fletcher, you sneaked in while Pap was gone and started courting me. You asked me then to run off with you. Now if you balk, I'll march you to town and turn you over to Sheriff Hawkins for draft dodging."

Bart shivered and dropped the ax. "But this kidnapping foolishness was your idea. You didn't have much money handy and you wanted more. When we got here and I studied about it, I seen how I'd been trapped. Now you've got me captured. Mandy, please let me go!"

Clint chuckled behind the boulder and laid aside his Winchester. Jarvis swore, his pointed beard quivering as they stood up.

"You see now how it was. Bart's been denning up here with Louella Wilcox. He wanted your gal for her money and maybe to save him from the Army. Louella wanted to marry rich, too. So they fixed this up between 'em, not reckoning on Mandy."

"Sheriff Hawkins!" she exclaimed as he stepped out into the clearing. "And there's Pap!" Her expression darkened. "You all got no business here!"

"Thank the Lord!" gasped Bart, staring at them. "I sure am needing a sheriff."

"No, you won't get away from me!" she cried, swinging the rifle around, her finger again on the trigger. "I'll take you even from the law—"

Clint stopped short, Jarvis cowering behind him. He saw Dave Arnett, without his Winchester, come stealthily around the cabin at Mandy's rear. Dave paused, then sprang. He tightened one arm about her throat and grabbed the rifle with his other hand. A loud report banged harmlessly, resounding through the hills.

"Damn you!" she choked, struggling. "I'll bite — I'll claw—"

"Jarvis, pick up your rifle-gun she stole," ordered Clint. "Dave, treat her gentle. She leastwise was born a female."

He turned to Bart and reached to his belt for a pair of handcuffs.

"The Federals will get you after all," he grinned. "But I reckon you've learned there's a heap worse plight than soldiering in the Army."

SUPREME COURT RULES ON WHODUNIT

THE SUPREME COURT handed down a decision recently which showed the late Secretary of State Dulles had company in his love for mysteries. They decided that a North Dakota farmer had *not* shot himself in a silage shed but left unanswered the question of whether his shotgun had been accidentally discharged—or whether he'd been murdered. As a result of their setting aside an Appelate Court decision that the farmer had committed suicide, an insurance company would have to pay the widow double indemnity—for accidental death.

The opinion went into details about how the farmer had been a "jolly" man, who was seldom moody. He had money in the bank, and little financial troubles. The morning of his death he'd risen as usual, milked the cows, had a hearty breakfast, and waved goodby, presumably cheerfully, as his wife drove off to take a daughter to school. His body had been found on her return. He'd been shot in the head and chest. The shotgun lay near him in the shed.

The justices felt that he could not have shot himself. His "bulky gloves" had still been on his hands. There was no suicide note, and no hint of a suicide motive. The lower court had erred. . . .

"THE ENGLISHMAN KONNOR"

by EDGAR WALLACE

THE Three Just men sat longer over dinner then usual. Poiccart had been unusually talkative—and real.

"The truth is, my dear George," he appealed to the silent Manfred, "we are fiddling with things. There are still offenses for which the law does not touch a man; for which death is the only and logical punishment. We do a certain amount of good—yes. We right certain wrongs—yes. But could not any honest detective agency do as much?"

"Poiccart is a lawless man," murmured Leon Gonsalez; "he is going *fantee*— there is a murderous light in his eyes!"

Poiccart smiled good-humoredly.

"We know this is true, all of us. There are three men I know, every one of them worthy of destruction. They have wrecked lives, and are within the pale of the law. . . . Now, my view is . . ."

They let him talk and talk, and to the eyes of Manfred came a vision of Merrell, the Fourth of the Four Just Men—he who died in Bordeaux, and, in dying, completed his purpose. Some day the story of Merrell the Fourth may be told. Manfred remembered a warm, still night, when Poiccart had spoken in just this strain. They were younger then: eager for justice, terribly swift to strike. . . .

"We are respectable citizens," said Leon, getting up, "and you are trying to corrupt us, my friend. I refuse to be corrupted!"

Poiccart looked up at him from under his heavy eyelids.

"Who shall be the first to break back to the old way?" he asked, significantly.

Leon did not answer.

This was a month before the appearance of the tablet. It came into the possession of the Four in a peculiar way. Poiccart was in Berlin, looking for a man who called himself Lefevre. One sunny afternoon, when he was lounging through Charlottenburg, he called in at an antique shop to buy some old Turkish pottery that was exhibited for sale. Two large blue vases were his purchase, and these he had packed and sent to the house with the silver triangle in Curzon Street.

It was Manfred who found the gold badge. He had odd mo-

James Agate, in the Daily Express, *called Edgar Wallace "the Buffalo Bill of letters," while Edward Shanks, in* The Sunday Times, *called him "our great lost Dickens." Actually few writers—few famous men, in fact—have been mourned with almost a sense of personal loss by people in all walks of life.*

ments of domesticity, and one day decided to wash the pottery. There were all sorts of oddments at the bottom of the vases: one was stuffed with old pieces of Turkish newspaper for half its depth, and it needed a great deal of patience and groping with long-shafted buttonhooks to bring these to light. Nearing the end of his task, he heard a metallic tinkle, and turning the jar upside down, there dropped into the kitchen sink a gold chain bracelet that held an oblong gold tablet, inscribed on both sides with minute Turkish writing.

Now it so happened that Mr. Dorlan of the *Evening Herald* was in the kitchen when this interesting find was made, and Mr. Dorlan, as everybody knows, is the greatest gossip writer that ever went into Fleet Street. He is a youngish man of forty-something who looks twenty-something. You meet him at first nights and very select functions, at the unveiling of war memorials —he was a very good artillery-man during the war. Sometimes he called and stayed to dinner to talk over the old days on the *Megaphone,* but never before had he made professional profit out of his visits. "Poiccart will be indifferent—but Leon will be delighted," said Manfred as he examined the bracelet link by link. "Gold, of course. Leon loves mysteries and usually makes his own. This will go into his little story box."

The little story box was Leon's especial eccentricity. Disdaining safes and strong rooms, that battered steel deed box reposed beneath his bed. It is true that it contained nothing of great value intrinsically: a jumble of odds and ends from the torn tickets of bookmakers to two inches of the rope that should have hanged Manfred, each inconsiderable object had its attachment in the shape of a story.

The imagination of the journalist was fired. He took the bracelet in his hand and examined it.

"What is it?" he asked curiously.

Manfred was examining the inscription.

"Leon understands Arabic better than I—it rather looks like the identification disk of a Turkish officer—he must be, or must have been, rather an exquisite."

Curious, mused Dorlan aloud. Here in smoky London a jar or vase bought in Berlin, and out of it tumbles something of Eastern romance. He asked if he might muse in print to the same purpose, and George Manfred had no objection.

Leon came back that evening: he had been asked by the American government to secure exact information about a certain general cargo which was being ship-

ped from lighters in the port of London.

"Hard likker," he reported. "The raw material of profitable High-Jackery, Grand Larceny, and Murder."

Manfred told him of his find.

"Dorlan was here—I told him he could write about this if he liked."

"H'm!" said Leon, reading the inscription. "Did you tell him what this writing stood for? But you're not a whale at Arabic, are you? There's one word in Roman characters 'Konnor'—did you see that? 'Konnor?' Now what is 'Konnor?' " He looked up at the ceiling. " 'The Englishman Konnor'—that was the owner of this interesting exhibit. Konnor? I've got it—'Connor'!"

The next evening, under "The Man in Town," Mr. Dorlan's daily column, Leon read of the find, and was just a little irritated to discover that the thorough Mr. Dorlan had referred to the story box.

If the truth be told, Leon was not proud of this little box of his; it stood for romance and sentiment, two qualities which he was pleased to believe were absent from his spiritual make-up.

"George, you're becoming a vulgar publicity agent," he complained. "The next thing that will happen will be that I shall receive fabulous offers from a Sunday newspaper for a series of ten articles on 'Stories from my Story Box,' and if I do I shall sulk for three days."

Nevertheless into the black box went the bracelet. What the writing was all about, and where "the Englishman Connor" came into it, Leon refused to say.

Yet it was clear to his two companions that Leon was pursuing some new inquiry in the days that followed. He haunted Fleet Street and Whitehall, and even paid a visit to Dublin. Once Manfred questioned him and Leon smiled amiably.

"The whole thing is rather amusing. Connor isn't even Irish. Probably isn't Connor, though it is certain that he bore that name. I found it on the roll of a very fine Irish regiment. He is most likely a Levantine. Stewarts, the Dublin photographers, have a picture of him in a regimental group. That is what I went to Ireland to see. There is a big bookmaker in Dublin who was an officer in the same regiment, and he says 'Connor' spoke with a foreign accent."

"But who *is* Connor?" asked Manfred.

Leon showed his even white teeth in a grin of delight.

"He is my story," was all that he would say.

Three weeks later Leon Gonsalez found adventure.

He had something of the qualities of a cat; he slept noiselessly; the keenest ear must strain to

hear him breathing; he woke noiselessly. He could pass from complete oblivion to complete wakefulness in a flash. As a cat opens her eyes and is instantly and cold-bloodedly alert, so was Leon.

He had the rare power of looking back into sleep and rediscovering causes, and he knew without remembering that what had wakened him was not the tap-tap of the blind cords, for, the night being windy, this had been a normal accompaniment to sleep, but rather the sound of human movement.

His room was a large one for so small a house, but there could never be enough ventilation for Leon, so that, in addition to windows, the door was wedged open . . . He snuffled picturesquely, like a man in heavy sleep, grumbled drowsily, and turned in the bed; but when he had finished turning, his feet were on the floor and he was standing upright, tightening the cord of his pajamas.

Manfred and Gonsalez were away for the week-end, and he was alone in the house—a satisfactory state of affairs, since Leon preferred to deal with such situations as these single-handed.

Waiting, his head bent, he heard the sound again. It came at the end of a whining gust of wind that should have drowned the noise—a distinct creak. Now the stairs gave seven distinct creakings. This one came from the second tread. He lifted his dressing gown and drew it on as his bare feet groped for his slippers. Then he slipped out onto the landing and switched on the light.

There was a man on the landing; his yellow, uncleanly face was upraised to Leon's. Fear, surprise, hateful resentment were there.

"Keep your hand out of your pocket, or I'll shoot you through the stomach," said Leon, calmly. "It will take you four days to die, and you'll regret every minute of it."

The second man, halfway up the stairs, stood stock still, paralyzed with fright. He was small and slim. Leon waved the barrel of his Browning in his direction, and the smaller figure shrank against the wall and screamed.

Leon smiled. He had not met a lady burglar for years.

"Turn about, both of you, and walk downstairs," he ordered; "don't try to run—that would be fatal."

They obeyed him, the man sullenly, the girl, he guessed, rather weak in the knees.

Presently they came to the ground floor.

"To the left," said Leon.

He stepped swiftly up to the man, dropped the pistol against his spine, and put his hand into the jacket pocket. He took out a short-barrelled revolver and

slipped it into the pocket of his dressing gown.

"Through the doorway—the light switch is on the left; turn it."

Following them into the little dining room, he closed the door behind him.

"Now you can sit down—both of you."

The man he could place: a typical prison man; irregular features, bad-complexioned: a creature of low mentality, who spent his short periods of liberty qualifying for penal servitude.

His companion had not spoken, and until she spoke Leon could not place her into a category, for all women have an appearance of refinement—only their voices betray them.

"I'm very sorry—I am entirely to blame."

So she spoke, and Leon was enlightened.

It was a cultured voice—the voice you might hear in Bond Street ordering the chauffeur to drive to the Ritz.

She was pretty, but then, most women were pretty to Leon; he had that amount of charity in his soul. Dark eyes, thin arches of eyebrows, rather full, red lips. The nervous fingers that turned in and out one another were white, shapely, rather over-manicured. There was a small purple spot on the back of one finger, where a big ring had been.

"This man is not responsible," she said, in a low voice. "I hired him. A—a friend of mine used to help him, and he came to the house one night last week; and I asked him to do this for me. That is really true."

"Asked him to burgle my house?"

She nodded.

"I wish you'd let him go—I could talk to you then . . . and feel more comfortable. It really isn't his fault. I'm entirely to blame."

Leon pulled open the drawer of a small writing table and took out a sheet of paper and an ink pad. He put them on the table before the girl's unshaven companion.

"Put your finger and thumb on the pad—press' em."

"Whaffor?" The man was husky and suspicious.

"I want your fingerprints in case I have to come after you—be slippy!"

Reluctantly, the burglar obeyed—first one hand and then the other. Leon examined the prints on the paper, and was reasonably satisfied.

"Step this way."

He pushed his visitor to the street door, opened it, and walked out after him.

"You must not carry a gun," he said. As he spoke his fist shot up, and caught the man under the jaw, and the man went sprawling to the ground.

He got up whimpering.

"She made me carry it," he whined.

"Then she earned you a punch on the jaw," said Leon, brightly, and closed the door on one who called himself, rather unimaginatively, "John Smith."

When he returned to the dining room the girl had loosened the heavy coat she wore and was sitting back in her chair, rather white of face but perfectly calm.

"Has he gone? I'm so glad! You hit him, didn't you? I thought I heard you. What do you think of me?"

"I wouldn't have missed tonight for a thousand pounds!" said Leon, and was telling the truth.

Only for a fraction of a second did she smile.

"Why do you think I did this mad, stupid thing?" she asked, quietly. Leon shook his head.

"That is exactly what I can't think: we have no very important case on hand; the mysterious documents which figure in all sensation stories are entirely missing. I can only suppose that we have been rather unkind to some friend of yours—a lover, a father, a brother—"

He saw the ghost of a smile appear and disappear.

"No; it isn't revenge. You have done me no harm, directly or indirectly. And there are no secret documents."

"Then it is not revenge and it is not robbery; I confess that I am beaten!"

Leon's smile was dazzling, and this time she responded without reservation.

"I suppose I had better tell you everything," she said, "and I had best start by telling you that my name is Lois Martin, my father is Sir Charles Martin, the surgeon, and I shall be married in three weeks' time to Major John Rutland, of the Cape Mounted Rifles. And that is why I burgled your house."

Leon was amused.

"You were—er—looking for a wedding present?" he asked, mildly sarcastic.

To his surprise, she nodded.

"That is just what I came for," she said. "I have been very silly. If I had known you better, I should have come to you and asked for it."

Her steady eyes were fixed upon Leon.

"Well?" he asked. "What is this interesting object?"

She spoke very slowly.

"A gold chain bangle, with an identification disk. . . ."

Leon was not surprised, except that she was speaking the truth.

He jotted down the names she had given him.

"A gold bracelet," he repeated, "the property of—?"

She hesitated.

"I suppose you've got to know the whole story—I'm rather in your hands."

"Very much in my hands," he said, pleasantly. "It seems to me that you will get less discomfort in telling me now than in explaining the matter to a police magistrate."

He was geniality itself, yet she, womanlike, could detect a hardness in his tone that made her shiver a little.

"Major Rutland knows nothing about my coming here—he would be horrified if he knew I had taken this risk," she began.

She told him, haltingly at first, the story of her earlier life, of her engagement to a young Englishman who had been killed at Gallipoli.

"That is how I come to know Jack," she said. "He was in Gallipoli, too. He wrote to me two years ago from Paris—said he had some papers belonging to poor Frank. He had taken them from his—from his body, after he was killed. Naturally, Daddy asked him to come over, and we became good friends, although Daddy isn't very keen on—our marriage."

She was silent for a little while, and then went on, quickly:

"Father doesn't like the marriage at all, and really the fact that we are getting married is a secret. You see, Mr. Gonsalez, I am a comparatively rich woman: my mother left me a large sum of money. And John will be rich, too. During the war, when he was a prisoner of the Turks, he located a big gold mine in Syria, and that is what the inscription is all about. John saved the life of a Turk, and in his gratitude he revealed to him where the mine was located, and had it all inscribed on a little gold tablet, in Arabic. He lost this at the end of the war, and has heard nothing more of it until he read in the *Evening Herald* about your discovery. Poor John was naturally terribly upset at the thought that he might be forestalled by somebody who could decipher the tablet, so I suggested he should call and see you and ask for the bracelet back; but he wouldn't hear of this. Instead, he has been getting more and more worried and upset and nervous, and at last I thought of this mad scheme. Jack has quite a number of acquaintances amongst the criminal classes—being a police officer he very naturally can deal with them; and he has done a lot to help them to keep straight. This man who came tonight was one of them. It was I who saw him, and suggested this idea of getting into the house and taking the bracelet. We knew that you kept it under your bed—"

"Are you sure it was you and not Major John Rutland who thought out this burglary?"

Again she hesitated.

"I think he did in fun suggest that the house should be burgled."

"And that you should do the burgling?" asked Leon blandly.

She avoided his eyes.

"In fun . . . yes. He said nobody would hurt me, and I could always pretend it was a practical joke. It was very stupid, I know, Mr. Gonsalez; if my father knew—"

"Exactly," said Leon, brusquely. "You needn't tell me any more—about the burglary. How much money have you at the bank?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Nearly forty thousand pounds," she said, "I have sold a lot of securities lately—they were not very productive."

Leon smiled.

"And you've heard of a better investment?"

She was quick to see what he meant.

"You're altogether wrong, Mr. Gonsalez," she said, coldly. "John is only allowing me to put a thousand pounds into his exploration syndicate—he isn't quite sure whether it is a thousand or eight hundred he will require. He won't let me invest a penny more. He is going to Paris tomorrow night, to start these people on their way; and then he is coming back, and we are to be married and follow them."

Leon looked at her thoughtfully.

"Tomorrow night—do you mean tonight?"

She glanced quickly at the clock, and laughed.

"Of course, tonight."

Then she leaned across the table and spoke earnestly.

"Mr. Gonsalez, I've heard so much about you and your friends, and I'm sure you would not betray our secret. If I'd any sense I should have come to you yesterday and asked you for the tablet—I would even pay a good sum to relieve John's anxiety. Is it too late now?"

Leon nodded.

"Much too late. I am keeping that as a memento. The enterprising gentleman who wrote the paragraph told you that it is part of my story collection—and I never part with stories. By the way, when do you give your check?"

Her lips twitched at this.

"You still think John is a wicked swindler? I gave him the check yesterday."

"A thousand or eight hundred?"

"That is for him to decide," she said.

Leon nodded, and rose.

"I will not trouble you any further. Burglary, Miss Martin, is evidently not your specialty, and I should advise you to avoid that profession in the future."

"You're not giving me in charge?" she smiled.

"Not yet," said Leon.

He opened the door for her and stood in his dressing gown,

watching her. He saw her cross the road to the taxi rank and take the last machine available. Then he bolted the door and went back to bed.

His alarm clock called him at seven, and he arose cheerfully, having before him work which was after his own heart. In the morning he called at a tourist agency and bought a ticket to Paris—it seemed a waste of time to go to the office of the High Commissioner for South Africa and examine the available records of the Cape Mounted Police; but he was a conscientious man. The afternoon he spent idling near the Northern and Southern Bank in Threadneedle Street, and at a quarter past three his vigil was rewarded, for he saw Major John Rutland descend from a cab, go into the bank, and emerge a few minutes before the big doors closed. The major looked very pleased with himself—a handsome fellow, rather slim, with a short-cropped military moustache and a monocle.

Manfred came back in the afternoon, but Leon told him nothing of the burglary. After dinner he went up to his own room, took from a drawer an automatic pistol, laid a few spots of oil in the sliding jacket, and loaded it carefully. From a small box he took a silencer, which he fixed to the muzzle. He put the apparatus into his overcoat pocket, found his suitcase, and came downstairs. George was standing in the hallway.

"Going out, Leon?"

"I shall be away a couple of days," said Leon, and Manfred, who never asked questions, opened the door for him.

Leon was hunched up in a corner of a first class carriage when he saw Major Rutland and the girl pass. Behind them, an unwanted third, was a tall, thin-faced man with gray hair, obviously the surgeon. Leon saw them from the corner of his eye, and as the train pulled out had a glimpse of the girl waving her hand to her departing lover.

It was a dark, gusty night; the weather conditions chalked on a board at the railway station promised an unpleasant crossing, and when he stepped onto the boat at midnight he found it rolling uneasily, even in the comparatively calm waters of the harbor.

He made a quick scrutiny of the purser's list. Major Rutland had taken a cabin, and this, after the boat began to move out of harbor, he located. It was the aft cabin de luxe, not a beautiful apartment, for the ship was an old one.

He waited till the assistant purser came along to collect his ticket, and then:

"I'm afraid I've lost my ticket," he said, and paid.

His ticket from Dover to Calais was in his pocket, but Major Rutland had taken not the Calais but the Ostend boat. He watched the assistant purser go into the cabin de luxe, and peeped through the window. The major was lying on a sofa, his cap pulled down over his eyes.

After the assistant purser had taken his ticket and departed, Leon waited for another half-hour; then he saw the cabin go dark. He wandered round the ship: the last light of England showed glitteringly on the horizon. There were no passengers on deck: the few that the ship carried had gone below, for she was tossing and rolling diabolically. Another quarter of an hour passed, and then Leon turned the handle of the state-room door, stepped into the cabin, and sent the light of his little electric lamp round the room. Evidently the major was travelling without a great deal of baggage: there were two small suitcases and nothing more.

These Leon took out onto the deck, and walking to the rail, dropped them into the water. The man's hat went the same way.

He put the lamp back into his pocket, and, returning for the second time to the cabin, gently shook the sleeper.

"I want to speak to you, Konnor," he said, in a voice little above a whisper.

The man was instantly awake.

"Who are you?"

"Come outside: I want to talk to you."

"Major Rutland" followed onto the dim deck.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

The aft of the ship was reserved for second-class passengers, and this, too, was deserted. They made their way to the rail above the stern. They were in complete darkness.

"You know who I am?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," was the cool reply.

"My name is Gonsalez. Yours, of course, is Eugene Konnor—or Bergstoft," said Leon. "You were at one time an officer in the—" he mentioned the regiment. "In Gallipoli you deserted to the enemy by arrangements made through an agency in Amsterdam. You were reported killed, but in reality you were employed by the Turkish government as a spy. You were responsible for the disaster at Semna Bay—don't try to draw that gun or your life will be shorter."

"Well," said the man, a little breathlessly "what do you want?"

"I want first of all the money you drew from the bank this afternoon. I've an idea that Miss Martin gave you a blank check, and I've a stronger idea that you filled that almost to the limit of

her balance, as she will discover tomorrow morning."

"A holdup, eh?" Konnor laughed harshly.

"That money and quick!" said Leon, between his teeth.

Konnor felt the point of the gun against his stomach, and obeyed. Leon took the thick pad of notes from the man and slipped it into his pocket.

"I suppose you realize, Mr. Leon Gonsalez, that you're going to get into very serious trouble?" began Konnor. "I thought you'd probably decipher the pass—"

"I deciphered the pass without any trouble at all, if you're referring to the gold tablet," said Leon. "It said that 'the Englishman Konnor is permitted to enter our lines at any moment of the day or night and is to be afforded every assistance,' and it was signed by the commander of the Third Army. Yes. I know all about that."

"When I get back to England —" began the man.

"You've no intention of going back to England. You're married. You were married in Dublin— and that was probably not your first bigamy. How much money is there here?"

"Thirty or forty thousand— you needn't think that Miss Martin will prosecute me."

"Nobody is going to prosecute you," said Leon, in a low voice.

He took one quick glance around: the decks were empty.

"You're a traitor to your country—if you have a country; a man who has sent thousands of the men who were his comrades to their death. That is all."

There was a flash of fire from his hand, a guttural "plop!" Konnor's knees went under him, but before he reached the ground Leon Gonsalez caught him under the arms, threw the pistol into the water, lifted the man without an effort and heaved him into the dark sea. . . .

When Ostend harbor came into sight, and the steward went to collect Major Rutland's baggage, he found it had gone, and with it the owner. Passengers are very often mean, and carry their own baggage onto the deck in order to save porterage. The steward shrugged his shoulders and thought no more of the matter.

As for Leon Gonsalez, he stayed in Brussels one day, posted without comment the £34,000 in notes to Miss Lois Martin, caught the train to Calais, and was back in London that night. Manfred glanced up as his friend strode into the dinning room.

"Had a good time, Leon?" he asked.

"Most interesting," said Leon.

The Boy Had a Gun

by **RICHARD L. SARGENT**

THE way Dan Miller figured it, he didn't have a thing to lose. The Slashers had him tagged for ratting out on them and they were going to get him after school anyway. If he waited until then, there'd be twelve of them, and their switchblades and bike chains would get him before he could do anything. Now though, he could pick his time and place. He could take dead aim and they'd never know what hit them. His fingers tightened around the stolen .38 revolver in the pocket of his plaid wool jacket.

Dan looked smaller than the other students milling around the Senior Class special area at Maderro Junior High School. He was slim, blond, and they called him "square" because he wouldn't join the gangs, or even fight back when they pushed him around. But the gun made a difference, he told himself, a lot of difference.

He sat down on an empty bench near the fence that enclosed the long rectangular area running along the back of the main building. He wiped his glasses and looked at Tony Lavenno, the tall, blackhaired leader of The Slashers.

Always before, it had made him nervous to be this close to Tony, or any of The Slashers. He'd never know when they'd take a notion to push him around. Today, he was not afraid. It was Tony who should be afraid. He half wished Tony would try to give him a bad time.

Tony's hands were jammed deep in the pockets of his blue jeans, giving his broad muscular shoulders a round look, like the back of a Buffalo.

Betty Thomas, the green-eyed blonde he was talking to ran her hand affectionately along the side of his duck-tail haircut.

She laughed when Tony playfully brushed her shoulder with a closed fist.

Dan stared at the fist, remembering it crashing into his jaw as two of The Slashers held his arms.

He wondered if a bullet was as painful as being hit in the jaw. Maybe if he aimed just above Tony's belt, right in the gut, he'd suffer a little before he died. All he had to do was bring the gun up, pull the trigger, and find out.

A smile walked slowly along his thin lips as he gripped the gun butt tighter and aimed at Tony. Of course, he'd never fired a gun, and might miss the first time, but there were six bullets, and one of them would land.

He might hit Betty though. He didn't want to do that. She was probably the cutest girl in the A-9 class. She'd never noticed him, and he'd never got up the courage to ask her for a date, but it gave him a thrill just to look at her. She'd notice him all right, if he killed Tony.

His fingers hugged the gun. It felt good to have six death warrants in his pocket. For the first time in his life, he wasn't afraid of anyone, he felt big. He felt as if he was ten feet tall, and five feet wide. If he stood up, he would tower over the school

The fact that this story seems an echo of today's — or tomorrow's — headlines, should not prejudice you. Richard Sargent, young Los Angeles writer, who has been widely published in the true-crime field, in men's magazines and elsewhere, tells a disturbing story—a story that will make you think.

buildings. Just let any of the gangs try to mess with him today, and he'd kill them dead as hell right on the spot.

No matter what happened afterward, he'd be leaving a monument. The tough guys would never know when another "punk" would have a gun in his pocket, ready to blast them. Maybe there'd never be another guy stomped because he'd violated the code and told the truth.

Last week, The Slashers had dragged him into the boy's head and two of them held his arms. The rest lined up and took turns hitting him in the mouth.

First he'd seen the face, twisted and contorted, hurtling toward him; then the fist hit him, and another face took its turn.

It was while they were working him over that he got the idea of getting a gun. He'd looked at the faces and thought, "if I had a gun, I could kill them."

The gun was heavy and cold in his slim hand. He relaxed his fingers and looked at his watch. In a few minutes, the lunch hour would be over.

He felt guilty about the gun. It was the first thing he'd ever stolen, and he wished he could take it back. The guy who ran the sporting goods store across the street from the school probably didn't earn a very good living anyway. Judging by the prices his Dad paid for watches, Dan guessed the new .38 had cost about forty bucks wholesale. But what the hell, he needed it and it was too late to take it back now. He had it and he was going to use it. The guy would get it back after the cops were through with it.

The bell rang for the fifth period class. Automatically, he picked up his books and started toward the main building's north entrance.

As he started through the doorway, Dutch Fraser was in front of him. Dan accidentally stepped on his heel.

Dutch whirled, his broad face tight with rage. He grabbed Dan's collar and twisted it, jerking him off balance.

"Watch it, you fink punk, or we won't even wait 'til after school."

Dan's hand curled around the butt of the gun. Dutch's stomach was less than four inches from the muzzle.

His foot radiated pain as Dutch's steel toed shoe came down on his instep and ground into the flesh.

A fiery kind of pleasure was in Dutch's eyes as he did it.

He hated Dutch, oh God, how he hated the big louse! and for once, he could do something about it. Tensing himself, his finger convulsively jerked the trigger. He waited for the explosion of the shot.

Dutch slammed him against

the stair railing and went on down the hall.

Dan just stood shaking, his eyes wide, fixed on the retreating black leather jacket with the red lightning slash painted across it.

He cursed himself for forgetting the safety catch. Flicking it off, he looked for Dutch, but he'd disappeared into a class room.

At the next class break, he'd get him. Maybe Tony too, if they got close enough to each other.

He hobbled toward his class. Each step hurt him. He could almost feel the jagged edges of the broken bones in his foot grinding together as he walked. He could go to the school nurse and get it fixed up, but he'd probably be sent home, and he didn't want that. He didn't have to figure out how to run from them today.

He sighed and sank into his seat. Opening his text book, he looked neither to the right, where Jimmy Grigsby sat, nor to the left where Joker Smith was carving an obscene picture into the desktop.

He tried to read, but the pain in his foot was too intense. He wanted to cry. Instead, he gritted his teeth, sucking his lips back against them. His fingers wound around the butt of the .38 and squeezed until he thought he might break the handle.

He could feel oily sweat breaking out on his forehead, and rolling down his cheeks. The printing in the text book became a gray blur, and his thoughts blurred too, drifting back to last Thursday when it had all started.

He'd stayed after school to help Miss Lewis, the typing teacher. He liked all his teachers, but she was something special. It was her first term at Maderro, or anywhere for that matter. She was only about 27 years old, tall, black haired, and had a beautiful figure. He'd been the first to raise his hand when she asked for someone to stay and help her.

She had watched silently as he cleaned the blackboards. From the first few minutes, he knew she was trying to find a way to ask him something.

After he finished, he stood in front of her desk expectantly and looked into her soft brown eyes. "Anything else I can do for you, Miss Lewis?" he asked.

She tapped her pencil back and forth through her fingers for a moment. "Won't you sit down, Dan?" she answered uncertainly.

He sat down at a front row desk.

'Dan, what's wrong with the students here . . . ?"

She could have asked the other teachers who'd been here longer, or anyone else in the class, one of the girls for instance, but she'd asked him, and it made him feel that she thought of him as her friend.

He'd started awkwardly. "They just don't want to learn

anything, but the law makes them go to school. . . ."

The words seemed to pour out. He told her about the gangs, and how the other kids were afraid of them. About how you lived by their rules, or got beat up as you left the grounds.

She listened intently for half an hour asking questions, half shocked, but always interested.

Then, as if she really wanted to be his friend, and not just pump him for information, she told him about herself. Her father had a good business, and Dan gathered that they had a lot of money. She had been to Vassar. They had a big house in Beverley Hills, with a swimming pool, and she even invited him to come and visit some week end. Just as he had lost his mother when he was little, so had she, and it made them seem just that much closer.

He'd left the room in kind of a daze. He wandered toward his locker, which was across the yard in the Gym Building, thinking of her. She was very beautiful when she smiled, and you could see laughter in her eyes as well as on her lips. He tried to recall the sweet smell of her perfume he had caught momentarily when he had opened the door for her. He wondered what it would be like to kiss her, to be in bed with her . . .

After he left his books in the locker, and picked up his jacket, he walked back toward the Main Building. He usually left by the side street exit of the Gym Building, but he thought maybe he could get another look at her before he left.

And that was how he happened to see Big Mike Ruiz and Cuneo Ortega with the typewriter. They were loading it into the back of Cuneo's car.

Cuneo was short and stocky. Just the way he carried his arms, wide at his sides where they could lash out without warning, made Dan afraid of him.

They saw him. Dan wanted to run, but he knew they'd catch him. him. He tried to keep his lips from quivering as Cuneo started toward him.

Cuneo came up close, stopped and gave him a cold stare.

"You better . . . you better take it back," Dan stammered.

Cuneo grinned. "We don't take nothing back, punk. You know what's good for you, you didn't see nothing. You rat on us, and we fix you good. You pick up?"

Dan shivered.

Cuneo slapped him hard, and instinctively he'd put his hands up to protect his glasses, waiting to be hit again.

Cuneo laughed. "Remember that, punk. You didn't see nothing."

The next day, the typewriter was missed, and everyone in the school was questioned.

When it came his turn, he told

the Boys' Vice Principal he didn't know anything about it; hadn't seen anyone with a typewriter, and had no idea of who might have taken it. They were all stock answers at Maderro, and the Vice Principal was as used to hearing them as Dan was to giving them.

Later though, Miss Lewis had asked him about it because she knew he'd left late that night. She told him she was afraid she would be in a lot of trouble if the typewriter wasn't found, because it had been stolen from her classroom.

He couldn't give her the stock answers, not even knowing what The Slashers would do to him if they found out he'd talked, he had to help her.

The cops found the typewriter in a pawn shop. Big Mike and Cuneo were in Juvenile Hall right now, waiting to be sent to reform school.

Whether the gang had a spy in the office, or whether Cuneo and Mike had been able to pass the word he'd seen them, he didn't know, but the gangs found out who talked.

When a teacher found him in the Boy's head lying in a pool of blood, Dan thought he was dying. Everything inside him felt broken, so he'd spilled out as many names as he could remember.

Later, he was sorry because they'd only taken a few stitches at Hollywood Receiving Hospital and sent him home.

Yesterday, every guy he had named was missing from classes, and The Slashers knew why.

This morning, he'd tried to talk his father into letting him stay home, but Dad didn't understand, or wouldn't believe the stuff he'd told him about the gangs. He'd begged to transfer out of Maderro.

His father sat at the small bench in the front of the jewelry store and continued to probe the inside of a watch. "You can nodt run away all your life. Sometime, you have to face things. You dond't talk to those boys. You stay away. Then they dond't bother you no more. Everything, it will be all ridt if you do this, yes?" and he'd smiled pleasantly, as if he'd solved it all.

"Dad, please don't make me go to school, not today . . ."

The old man had shoved his books into his hands and said, "You dond't talk back to me—go to school."

As soon as he got to the school grounds, he heard they were going to get him, and this time it would be worse, much worse. In every class he felt them watching him, heard them talking in whispers about when and how they'd get him.

He knew they'd kill him if he didn't do something, so at lunch time he'd slipped across the street and stolen the gun.

The pain in his foot let up,

and the book lying before him came back into focus.

He felt rather than saw Joker's lean wolfish face turn toward him.

Looking across at Joker, he saw the wide mirthless grin that meant trouble. Until then, he hadn't felt the fingers moving along his neck at the back of his collar.

Wetto Travares sat behind him, and Dan heard him whispering, "He one fine chick, Joker, nice boy, pretty boy . . ."

He didn't have to take that crap now. Turning, he levelled the gun under the desk at Wetto's middle and said, "Knock it off!" His voice was surprisingly loud and harsh.

Wetto's dark features were expressionless. He called him a dirty name. Only the brown eyes flamed with the same fire that had been in Dutch's eyes when his foot was being crushed.

"What's going on back there?" Mrs. Collins demanded, striding to the rear of the room.

Every eye in the class was on Wetto and himself as they looked up at the teacher's well lined face.

She stood above them, her knarled, blue veined hands resting on her bony hips. Her high pitched, aged voice again demanded, "What are you two causing all the commotion about?"

The stock answer snapped to the front of his mind "Nothing's wrong—we were just kidding," instead, he answered defiantly, "Wetto was bothering me."

A startled look flashed across Wetto's eyes.

"Mister Travares," she said wearily, "am I going to have trouble with you again today? Any more of this, and I'll send you to the Principal. Now you leave Miller alone."

Wetto looked innocent. "I wasn't doing nothing to him. He always try to get me in trouble. He don't like me. I never did a thing."

"Well, we'll have no more disturbance from either of you. There's a test on the board, and I want it completed by the end of the period, now you'd better get busy, both of you," she said and walked back to her desk.

A minute later as Dan worked on the test, Wetto leaned forward and said, "You sign your own death order, punk. We get you outside, we gonna fix you good."

Dan felt the razor sharp edge of a knife touch his back, coming between the backboards of the seat.

Across the aisle, he saw Joker had taken out his gleaming switch-blade and was making little slashing motions in the air at his side, down low, where Mrs. Collins couldn't see.

Before either of them could get up, he could kill them. Sure, why not? Right here in class. He'd get Wetto first, then Joker—just two

quick shots and they'd both be dead.

He tensed to whirl on Travares, and in the same motion back to get Joker. He was breathing hard, getting set, the safety catch was off, and his finger was tightening on the trigger.

He hesitated. Gym period was only an hour away—all of them would be there. If he watched carefully, waited for just the right time, he could get all of them—Tony, Dutch, Wetto and Joker.

That was the way to do it—why should he settle for two when he could get four? His foot hurt like hell, but he could hang on for another hour to get them all.

It wasn't that he couldn't kill. He'd proved that with Dutch. If he'd just had the safety catch off, Dutch would be dead now.

He winced as a stabbing pain shot upward from his foot. He wished they were all here in the room right now so he could do it. He would stand up suddenly and start shooting.

He pictured the scene, the four bodies sprawled half out of their seats, and himself standing with the smoking gun in his hand, all eyes on him.

No one in the school had ever paid much attention to him. They thought he was just a little "punk" who could be pushed around. He'd show them all right—show them all what he was made of. He was tougher than all of them put together, and the gun in his pocket would prove it.

The bell sounded ending the class.

Mechanically, he walked to the teacher's desk and dropped the test paper he had somehow managed to finish in her desk basket. Mrs. Collins smiled at him as if she were confident it would be another "A" for him.

As he crossed the wide asphalt yard to the Gym Building, his heart picked up speed with every step. Several of The Slashers were near the building and they were watching him.

The hand caressing the gun in his pocket was sweating and sticky. His finger moved over the warm metal, rechecking it again and again, making sure it was still cocked, and that the safety catch was off. He thought of the six bullets as poisonous snakes, coiled inside the gun, ready to strike whenever his finger commanded.

Ambling up to the brick building, he leaned against it and mentally rehearsed how he would do it. All four of them were fairly close together. It would have to be quick, but he could get them.

Wetto was only a few yards away, he would be first. Then Tony, who was a few feet beyond. Dutch would be running by then, but he could hit him. He'd let Joker have it last. It might take two shots to get Joker.

The hand holding the gun started to shake, now that the

time to do it had actually come. His mouth was dry. He waited for the shaking to stop. When it did, he aimed the gun at Wetto, sighting on the center of his red satin jacket.

He knew just the tiniest squeeze would send the bullet on its way.

Wetto turned around, and he stared hard at the wide, brown expressionless face.

He wanted Tony worse, maybe he should kill him first, just to make sure.

The gun in his pocket twisted slightly until it pointed at Tony's heart. Tony would jerk upward when the bullet hit, spewing blood, crying out . . .

Again the gun twisted, aiming now at Joker, who was laughing as he dribbled a basket ball just out of Dutch's reach.

Dan examined each feature of the boy's smooth, pale, pointed face, and imagined it contorted in death.

He really didn't have any more against Joker than a dozen of the others.

The gun pointed at Dutch. He had plenty against Dutch. He would be the easiest to kill.

A dozen times his finger came back against the trigger, but not far enough. "I can do it," he told himself. "Just squeeze the trigger, that's all I have to do."

He made one final effort. His finger came back against the trigger. He tried to keep it moving, but it wouldn't budge the final hair's width of distance that would unleash the hammer.

He couldn't, just couldn't force the gun to fire.

Weakly, he turned and went into the building. He wandered into the Gym Teacher's small white painted office. The teacher was out. He took the gun from his pocket and laid it on the desk. He looked at it until the bell rang, ending school for the day.

He went to his locker, tossed his books in, then stopped and stacked them neatly, carefully. There was a lot of home work he should do tonight. He ran a finger across the back of the bindings thoughtfully. He closed the locker, twisted the combination dial to lock it, and stood staring at the closed door for several seconds.

"A jungle's a great place to live, if you happen to be one of the animals," he thought bitterly, and turned toward the large double doors of the side street exit he almost always left by.

Outside, he could see them waiting for him. Joker was there, Wetto, Tony, Dutch, and about eight other Slashers. They were grinning as he walked slowly toward them.

Joker had his switch-blade in his hand, half hidden in his pocket.

Wetto held both hands behind him. Dan could see the bicycle

chain he held dangling between his legs.

Tony's hand was clinched in his jacket pocket, and the outline of a pair of brass knuckles was clear against the fabric.

Dutch wasn't bothering to conceal the short length of lead pipe he held in his right hand.

Dan's legs shook. He tried to keep walking.

He stopped just inside the door, he couldn't go out there; not just walk into a beating.

Fear wrapped itself around him like a heavy blanket. He turned and ran back towards the coach's office, hoping the gun was still there.

He heard them coming in after him. Their steel toed shoes clattered on the cement floor.

He reached the office out of breath and snatched up the gun, knowing he couldn't use it on them; knowing there was no way out—it would be over in seconds, the way they worked—and they'd be gone before any teacher could get to him no matter how loud he might yell for help.

The gun didn't help any more. He couldn't even point it at them. He looked around for some way out—but the office had only one door.

Overwhelming terror surged through him like an electric charge as they came through the doorway, running toward him.

Even in that momentary glimpse of them, he saw their eyes were bright. Their weapons were out in plain sight now as they closed in for the kill. He raised the .38 and fired before they were even aware he had it in his hand.

The shot echoed strangely through the old brick building, rattling the steel lockers, reverberating from the walls . . .

They stopped.

Half his head was blown away, and his spattered blood dripped down the white wall.

They looked at each other.

"My gawd," Tony whispered, "the little punk could of killed us."

A NEW PISTOL

JOHN DOS PASSOS was reported recently, both here and abroad, to have turned inventor. He and three friends had obtained a patent for a pistol that shoots soap bubbles.

The origin of the device was a conference at his home in Virginia about making a movie of his novel, *U. S. A.* At one point during the proceedings it was realized that his daughter, aged 8, needed improved facilities for blowing soap bubbles, and the conference thereupon apparently adjourned to the kitchen where a series of experiments were begun. In due course a working model of a gun with a hollow rubber butt, a barrel, and a blunderbuss muzzle, was evolved. A satisfactory stream of bubbles was produced, and a mid-Western manufacturer became interested.

Production arrangements, we understand, have yet to be finalized.

Sword for a Sinner

by
EDWARD D. HOCH

THE highly delicate mission that brought Simon Ark and me to the tiny village of Santa Marta is a story in itself, and since it was to play such an important part in what followed I must start with it. Perhaps by starting with Father Hadden's story I can at least delay for a time the setting down on paper of the horror that was to await us in the mountains. Perhaps I can wash it from my memory with a beautiful scene of Santa Marta as I first saw it, nestled on the valley floor in a sea of sunshine, a jewel unclaimed among the mountains.

Santa Marta is a village of some fifty or sixty people, located almost on the state line between Colorado and New Mexico. It

lies somewhat north of Questa, and east of Antonito—in the rugged foothills of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range. The journey from New York had taken us two full days by plane, train, and bus, but finally we arrived. It was early morning when the bus dropped us at our destination, with only a quizzical glance from the driver in farewell.

"So this is Santa Marta," I said, breathing in the warm, dry desert air. "Where is this priest we came to see?"

Simon Ark frowned into the sun. "I see a church down there, a relic of happier days here. I imagine once this was a booming oasis in the desert. Perhaps Father Hadden can be found in his church."

The church, in stone architecture distinctly Spanish, was the last building on the street, a final resting place before the long climb into the mountains. As we approached, a few of the village people were drifting out, bound for their day of work after morning mass. This far north I was surprised to see so many Mexicans, and I was equally surprised to see Father Hadden, a rosy-cheeked man who might have been more at home in a big, sparkling church in Chicago.

"Father Hadden? I'm Simon Ark . . ."

"I'm so glad you've come," he said, and I could see he meant it. He had the type of personality that made him immediately an old and trusted friend.

"This is a friend of mine," Simon explained, gesturing toward me. "A New York publisher who sometimes assists me in my wanderings. He wants to write my biography someday—but that day is surely far off."

A hint of uncertainty crossed the priest's face at these words. "I hope I can trust my story in your hands," he said quietly. "It would not be the type of story that should appear in print."

"You can trust me," I said. "If I ever write it at all, I'd change the names and the location."

"I admire your church," Simon said. "It is large and fine for such a small village."

"Thank you," Father Hadden said with a slight smile of gratitude. "I try to keep it well, even for such a small congregation as mine. The fine old church from a better day is one of the reasons why the bishop believes it necessary to keep a priest here in Santa Marta."

"Oh?" Simon said. "And what are the other reasons?"

Simon Ark, almost ageless fighter against evil, makes a first appearance in The Saint *with this unusual story of murder—premeditated murder—in the* morada *of Sangre de Cristo. Edward D. Hoch, who works in an advertising agency in upstate New York, has been published widely in this field.*

"One involves a place you might have passed on the way in—a den of sin or such called the *Oasis*. It's been open only a year, but it already attracts people from a hundred miles around. The other reason . . . has to do with something up in the hills which need not concern us now."

"Your letter said you'd heard of my work," Simon began, anxious to get to the matter at hand.

The priest leaned back in his chair, brushing a sun-tanned hand through thick black hair. "I have a brother at the monastery of St. John of the Cross, in West Virginia. He told me that some two years ago you rendered them a great service."

"Oh, yes," Simon nodded. "A case of diabolic possession. Both interesting and tragic, in a way."

Father Hadden nodded. "My brother spoke very highly of you, and when my own . . . problem came up I felt you were the man to help me. I went to my bishop and received his permission to consult you about it."

"I'm indeed gratified that your bishop ever heard of me."

"You're much too modest, Mr. Ark. How many men are there in the world today doing actual, physical battle with the devil himself? And I understand that you yourself were once a priest?"

It was a phase of Simon's past he never spoke of. Now he simply brushed it aside with an impatient gesture. "In Egypt, long ago, I practiced in the Coptic rite. But let us get to your problem, Father . . ."

"My problem is simpler stated than solved, I fear. It seems I find myself equipped with the power of communication with the dead. In short, Mr. Ark, I am a medium . . ."

His face never changed expression as he made the statement. He might have been giving us a baseball score, or asking for an extra-large Sunday collection. He was still the friendly, smiling priest, but I thought I detected a slight chill in the warm spring air.

"A medium?" Simon Ark repeated very slowly. "Of course, the term is only a bare hundred years old. It's odd to hear the word spoken by a priest—one who certainly holds nothing in common with the Fox sisters and other American spiritualists."

"I use only the popular term for a somewhat unpopular gift, Mr. Ark. I believe even Margaret Fox finally admitted the presence of fraud in her little act. Still, I understand there's a monument to her back in Rochester where much of it started."

Simon nodded. "But tell me of your strange power, whatever its name. This is most interesting."

The ringing of a telephone interrupted the conversation, and Father Hadden rose to answer it. "Hello? Father Hadden here . . ."

As he listened, his expression changed, ever so slightly. The smile faded and was replaced by a troubled, gray look. "I'll come at once, of course."

"What is it, Father, trouble?" Simon asked as he hung up the phone.

"I fear so. The very worst kind of trouble. A murder at the *morada* of Sangre de Cristo. In the mountains. I must go there at once."

"Could I be of service?" Simon asked. "I have had some slight experience in such matters. Perhaps on the way we could discuss your own problem further."

But the priest waved this aside. "You are welcome to come certainly, Mr. Ark, but this is far more important than any problem I might have. This is a tragedy that could be very bad for the Church."

"Then all the more reason for my assistance." Simon motioned to me and we followed the priest outside to his car, a station wagon brown with dust from the plains.

Father Hadden paused at the door and turned to me. "I must ask one promise from both of you. What you are to see up here is . . . well, it is a sight few men have witnessed. You must promise me never to speak of this to the outside world."

We gave him our promises, and I for one was wondering what strange world we were about to enter, what sights awaited us in these distant mountains. Before long we were bouncing over back roads, climbing ever north into the hills and valleys of the Rockies. It was beautiful country, but strange and silent too—almost menacing in the quiet calm of its mountains, in the yucca and cactus that were the only vegetation.

"These mountains," Simon began, breaking the silence which had hung over the car, "are called the Sangre de Cristo range? Blood of Christ?"

The priest nodded. "An ironically tragic name in view of the circumstances. Have you ever heard of the Brotherhood of Penitentes, Mr. Ark?"

Surprisingly Simon nodded his head. "Is that what this is?" he asked somberly.

"I'm afraid so. They have nearly a hundred and fifty chapter houses in the southwest. They're a group more powerful and more important than most people realize."

"Would someone mind telling me what this is all about?" I asked.

"You will know soon enough, my friend," Simon said, as a great stone villa came into view ahead. It stood on a flat bluff between two mountains, a relic of the Spanish conquerors forgotten by later men.

But the thing that riveted my eyes was on a hill just beyond the house. It was a great wooden

cross, much too large to be simply the marker for a grave. There seemed to be some sort of banner or scarf attached to it, drifting gently in the breeze. "What's that?" I asked.

Father Hadden didn't even lift his eyes to it. He must have seen it many times before. "The cross," he said simply. "You'll see more of them inside."

We parked in a worn brick driveway in front of the place, and I wondered about the absence of other cars. Certainly the people here must arrive somehow. Did they fly in on broomsticks or something?

There was a little cross over the door, too—a plain wooden one—and I suddenly supposed that this must be a monastery of some sort. I was about to put my thought into words when the great glass-and-metal door swung silently open in answer to our ring. The man who stood there wore a black hood over his head, a hood with only two eyeholes staring out at us. He was naked to waist, and there were a number of great bloody scratches across his chest. In that moment I thought I'd stepped into a madhouse, but there was worse to come.

The hooded doorkeeper led us in without a word, down a dim, dank hallway lit only by stained glass windows high on each side. Father Hadden hurried along with him and I could see they were speaking in low tones about the tragedy we had come to witness.

"What in hell is this anyway?" I whispered to Simon. But already we were starting down a flight of stone steps, and in a moment we found ourselves in a low, dark basement lit here and there by flickering candlelight. My first impression was that we were in a great storeroom full of life-size crucifixes. But then I realized with a chilling start that the figures on the crosses were *alive,* horribly fantastically alive!

There were perhaps twenty of the crosses in the room, reaching from floor almost to ceiling. And on each a nearly naked man was tied, his arms outstretched in the familiar attitude of Christ. Most of them wore only the black hoods and white loin cloths, though some had compromised by wearing bathing trunks. All had their arms and legs tied to the crosses with thick horsehair cords, and some showed the red marks of scourging on their bare chests and thighs. It was a scene from hell.

"What is this?" I gasped out. "A lodge initiation?"

"If it were only that simple," Simon mused. And then Father Hadden shone his light on the cross at the far end of the room—and we saw there the greatest horror of all.

The last cross in the line had a man tied to it like all the others—a man wearing a black hood—

but this one was different. From the left side of his body, slanting upward into his chest, protruded the slim steel shaft of a Spanish sword . . .

"What is it, Simon? What is this madness?" I asked him later as we sat with Father Hadden in one of the upstairs rooms.

And Simon Ark closed his eyes and stared off into an unseeing world of his own mind. "The Brotherhood of Penitentes," he began, very softly, "is an old, old society. Some trace its origin back to the Franciscan missionaries or even before. In a virgin country without priests or churches, perhaps it was only natural that some of the more passionate Spanish men should turn to self-torture as an act of devotion. A hundred years ago the practices of the Penitentes were so widespread and so brutal in the southwest that the Catholic Church was forced to ban such groups. But of course it didn't stop them. They continued their rites of self-scourging and crucifixion in secret, wearing hoods to conceal their identity from the public and sometimes from each other."

"But if the group is banned by the Church, why does Father Hadden here deal with them?"

The priest himself answered my question. "A few years ago it was decided that the practices of the Penitentes had softened considerably, consisting now only of processions and mild scourging during Holy Week. They have again been recognized by the Church—or at least most of the chapters have been. Unfortunately, this *morada* is one that was not received back into the fold. Its practices continue as staggeringly brutal as they were fifty or a hundred years ago. You saw the basement—some say there have been times when the crucifixions were performed with nails rather than merely ropes . . ."

"There have been deaths before?" Simon asked.

"There have been deaths," the priest agreed. "Hushed up, but I hear of them sometimes. Never anything like this, though. I ask myself how it is possible that one of these men, in the midst of a religious fervor so great that it drove him to emulate the sufferings of Christ, could possibly commit murder."

"Who was the man?" Simon asked. "I noticed your start of surprise downstairs when you removed the hood."

"That is the thing that makes this all the more frightening," Father Hadden answered. "The man is the owner of the *Oasis*."

"The bar you mentioned earlier?"

The priest nodded. "The *Oasis* is all things to all men—drink, sex, sin, gambling. And Glen Summer is, or was, its owner and manager. His was the greatest sin of all."

Simon frowned and was silent for a moment. Somewhere outside a cloud lifted from the sun and a single ray of light shot through one of the stained glass windows, bathing his face in a purple hue. "You believe a man like Summer would come to a place like this to atone for his sins in secret?"

"I believe it, Mr. Ark, because these others tell me it is true. But imagine what the police and the public will think! They will never believe it—they will never believe that good and evil can live side by side in the same man. They already circulate fantastic rumors about this place, and now they will claim Summer was kidnapped and murdered in some sort of religious ritual."

I could see that Simon agreed with him. "It would be a fairly logical assumption, Father. But we have no choice except to call the local police. The murderer might not be so difficult to discover, after all. It must be one of those men downstairs."

"But which of them, Mr. Ark? Which of them?"

Simon rose slowly from the chair and began to pace the floor, frowning. "If we sit in on the police questioning, we might learn something. How many are there downstairs?"

"Eighteen men, plus the one who let us in."

"Who was he?"

"Their leader, in a way. His name is Juan Cruz. He's Mexican, studied for the priesthood for a time, but was dropped because of practices like these. He drifted into the States about ten years ago and joined the Penitentes. I fear Cruz is the one who keeps this little group banded together. Without him they'd surely listen to me and funnel their passionate piety into more normal outlets."

"You think this Cruz may have killed Summer?"

"Normally I'd answer yes to that. He was the only one not tied to a cross when we arrived, and certainly such a deed wouldn't be beyond him if he thought it would bring some good. I have had many long talks with Juan Cruz and have yet to convince him that the end does not justify the means." The priest paused and then continued after a moment. "And yet . . . I do not think he would endanger his group of Penitentes here by committing a murder during one of their rites of penance. He would kill Summer under certain conditions, but he would pick another time and another place."

As if on cue the basement door opened and Juan Cruz appeared, fully dressed now and carrying the black hood he'd removed earlier. He was a bulky man, distinctly Spanish in appearance, with glistening black hair and tiny eyes to match. I disliked him immediately, but not for any action or word. Rather it was the

dislike one often feels for a person of obvious superiority.

"They are all untied and dressed now," he said quietly.

"Then we must call the police," Father Hadden said. "There is no other way, Juan."

"I suppose not," the bulky man answered.

Simon Ark stepped once more into the purple spot of light that filtered down from above. "Do you know of any of these men who might have had a special reason for killing Glen Summer?"

"Certainly not," Cruz answered. "He was a sinful man, but he was seeking the way back to God. I doubt if anyone else was even aware of his identity. That's the purpose of the hoods, you know."

"Who are the other eighteen?" Simon asked.

"For the most part they are simply poor Mexican laborers who have lived in sin for many years. A few are Americans, like Summer."

"With the hoods to conceal identity it would be possible for an outsider to gain admittance, would it not?"

"Possible but most difficult," Cruz replied. "I am careful."

"The body has not been disturbed?"

"No."

"Then I suggest we call the police immediately," Simon said. "Too much time has already elapsed since the killing. Father Hadden and I will remain here while they question you and the others."

Cruz nodded reluctantly and went off to the telephone. I noticed Simon motioning to me and I walked over to where he stood. "My friend, you can serve no purpose here, but you might serve a very useful one elsewhere. Perhaps you could take Father Hadden's station wagon and drive to this place called the *Oasis*. You could be there when the word came in about Glen Summer, and you could see what reaction there was. It might be most interesting."

It was agreeable with me, if only to get me away from the atmosphere of that place. Simon told Father Hadden of our plan and the priest nodded in agreement. "Take my car and see what you can learn," he said. "You might especially observe the reaction of Summer's wife, since I doubt very much if she knew he came to this place."

I left them there and headed the dusty station wagon back down the road to Santa Marta. About halfway into town I passed the sheriff's car, filled with grim-faced men, and a moment later the town's ambulance-hearse followed.

It took me a little time to locate the *Oasis,* a few miles outside of town. It sat back from the road a ways, a long low building with a parking lot and a few trees around it. Now, in the afternoon

sunlight, there were only two cars parked there, and the business seemed slow for a den of sin. I parked the station wagon and went inside.

The place was not unlike a thousand other bars back east. It was a neighborhood sort of joint, even out here in the middle of nowhere. Booths along one wall, the damp and glistening bar along the other. And curtains over an entrance to a back room. A bald bartender with a gray mustache was polishing glasses casually behind the bar, and the only customer appeared to be a good-looking blonde girl propped up on one of the bar stools. She was wearing a loose white blouse and blue shorts that were much too short. I guessed her age at twenty-five or younger, and the way she eyed me when I came in told me she wasn't presently attached.

"What'll you have?" the bartender asked without putting down the glass he was polishing.

"Beer," I mumbled. "Too hot for anything else." I picked out the stool just two away from the girl and lifted myself onto it. After a moment I asked, "Glen Summer around?"

The bartender placed a bottle of beer and a glass in front of me. He took his time about answering, as if trying to determine the reason for my question. Finally, he said, "Nope. Gone away today. Back tonight."

"How about Mrs. Summer?"

"She's in the back. Want I should get her?"

"No. Maybe I'll wait for Glen."

The girl in the blue shorts slid off her stool, her shapely thighs bulging a bit under the tight fabric. She picked up her glass, moved it over a bit, and sat down next to me. "Mind?" she asked in reply to my look.

"Why should I?"

"I need somebody to talk to. This town is dead dead dead."

"So I've been noticing."

"Nothing to do with your afternoons but drink them away. The *Oasis* is the only civilized place for fifty miles."

She'd had a few drinks but she was far from drunk. Just unhappy, I decided. "You live in Santa Marta?"

"Nobody lives in Santa Marta. They only exist. A month ago I was working up in Denver. I lost my job and decided to travel south, and this is as far as I got."

"What keeps you here if you don't like it?"

She waved an arm in a vague gesture. "Oh, things. You know."

I didn't know, and I could see I wasn't going to find out. "You know Glen Summer?"

"Sure do! He's a swell fellow."

"And his wife?"

"She's a bitch, but that's the way it usually turns out."

I took a swallow of beer. "I

came down through the mountains, past a big old house with a cross nearby on a hill. What is it, a convent or something?"

She peered at me from under half-closed lids. "A bunch of crazy religious nuts. They go up there and beat each other with whips and stuff. Supposed to be good for their souls." She gave a little chuckle. "If they did it in New York they'd be locked up in ten minutes."

"You from New York?"

"I'm from everywhere. You're just full of questions, aren't you?" She signalled the bartender to pour her another drink.

The only thing I'd decided about her was that she didn't know about Summer and the Penitentes, and that wasn't much. "What's your name?" I asked, figuring there was nothing suspicious in the direct approach.

"Vicky Nelson," she answered. "Twenty-four and unmarried."

I told her my name, said I was from New York, but skipped the rest of the vital statistics. Before we could get in any more conversation I noticed a distant funnel of dust through the window. It was a car, traveling fast in our direction. A good guess told me it was the sheriff and I was right.

He was short and fat—why are sheriffs always fat?—and he wore a holstered revolver low on his hip like some left-over cowboy. He'd come alone to break the news to Mrs. Summer, and I figured that made her a pretty important person in his opinion.

"Della around?" he asked the bartender.

"She's in back, working on the books, Sheriff."

"Get her for me. It's important."

The bartender muttered something under his breath and put down the damp cloth. As he went through the back curtains I caught a glimpse of multi-colored metal monsters lining the wall. The place was a little Las Vegas, complete with slot machines, and I was sure gambling wasn't legal in this state.

After a moment the curtains parted once more and a tall middle-aged woman appeared. She might have been pretty once, but that day was long past. I discovered later that she was only thirty-five, but just then I would have guessed her for over forty. "Hello, Sheriff. What's the trouble?" she asked.

"I've got some bad news, Della," he said, ignoring the audience of Vicky and me. "It's about Glen."

"God — what happened to him?"

"Somebody killed him, Della. Up at the *morada* . . ."

"Killed him!" she gasped, her voice cracking. "At the *morada?*" I don't know which surprised her more—the fact of her husband's death or its place of occurrence. "What was he doing there?"

"He was . . . with them, Della. He was taking part in their . . . rites, and somebody stabbed him with a sword."

"I don't believe it," she screamed out. "You're lying!"

The bartender came around the row of stools and took her arm. "Steady, Della. Let me take you in back."

The sheriff finally noticed us sitting there and nodded in agreement. "Let's all go in back," he decided. And the three of them disappeared through the curtains.

"Glen Summer—dead!" Vicky Nelson said when we were alone. "I just can't believe it."

"He was a good friend, eh?"

"He was a good guy. I'd only known him these few weeks but he was a good guy. Say, how come you were asking about that place where Glen got killed, mister?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Just coincidence. What have you heard about it?"

"Like I said, they're nuts. I sure didn't figure Glen Summer for one of them."

The sheriff came out of the back with Della Summer and they got in his car. Her eyes were red but she was holding up well. The bartender returned, too, stepping behind his polished counter and picking up the damp cloth as if nothing had happened.

"Summer's dead?" I asked him.

"Yeah." He picked up another glass.

"How'd it happen?"

"Don't know a thing, mister. You'll have to ask the sheriff about it."

"Thanks," I said, and slid off the stool. I could see I wasn't going to learn anything more here. "You want a ride anywhere?" I asked Vicky.

"Guess not, thanks. I need a few more of these." She held up her glass. "See you around."

"Yeah." I went out and climbed back into Father Hadden's station wagon. I didn't want to go back to the villa in the mountains so I drove to the church where we'd first met the strange priest. It was only then, sitting there in the street before the great stone towers that I remembered the thing that had brought Simon and me to this place.

Father Hadden believed that he was a medium. That was an interesting thing to think about, at least. I didn't remember ever hearing before about a priest who could communicate with the dead, though it did seem logical that if such things were at all possible a priest would be the person to do it.

I lit a cigarette and tried to conjure up a phantom in the smoke. If Father Hadden could talk to the dead, why couldn't he talk to the departed Glen Summer and find out who shoved the sword into him? I filed away that

thought for further conversation with Simon.

Ten minutes later, halfway through my third cigarette, the familiar sheriff's car turned into the street before the church. I saw Simon and Father Hadden climb out, followed by the stout shape of the sheriff himself. While I was still debating whether to reveal myself, the sheriff strode quickly to my door and yanked it open. "O.K., mister, climb out. I want to talk to you."

"What?" I mumbled something, startled by this sudden turn of events. "What did I do?"

The big sheriff rumbled on. "Never mind the wise talk. Come on inside while I get to the bottom of this."

I slid out of the driver's seat and followed him into Father Hadden's rectory, because at this point there was nothing else to do. Simon and the priest were already there, sitting at a big oak table in silence.

"I got your buddy here," the sheriff said triumphantly. "Nobody puts anything over on Ben Partell. You two were up there without any car, and then I see this joker at the *Oasis* drivin' the church's car. I just put two and three together, and I come up with all of you at the *morada* and this bird leavin' for some reason. Why?"

Father Hadden cleared his throat. "Really, Sheriff Partell, there's no excuse for this type of questioning . . ."

"And you be quiet, too," the sheriff stormed. "I ain't runnin' for another three years. I don't have to worry about the Catholic vote this season."

It was amazing to me how the calm, semi-dignified man who'd brought Della Summer the news of her husband's death could have given way in a brief half-hour to this growling, bullying person who now faced us.

"You think *we* killed the man?" Simon asked mildly.

"No, I don't think you killed the man, but I'm sure as hell goin' to find out, if I have to run in that whole collection of creeps. They were all hangin' there on their damned crosses, all in the same room, and not a damned one of them saw a thing! You think I believe that?"

"The room was quite dark," Simon said. "And the dead man was at the far end of it. Since I understand the Penitentes were in the habit of entering the room one at a time at irregular intervals, any one of them could have plunged the sword into Summer and left him hanging there in the dimness."

"But Juan Cruz tied each of them to the cross. If he didn't do it himself, he sure as hell must know who did." The sheriff lowered his bulk into one of the chairs and took out a fat cigar. Now that he'd shown us he was

the boss, he seemed content to pursue the investigation on a somewhat more subdued level. "Cruz was constantly in and out of that cellar room. You mean to tell me that one of those eighteen guys, stripped down to shorts or a loin-cloth, could have taken the sword off the wall upstairs, carried it down to the cellar in plain sight, and stabbed Summer without anyone seeing him?"

"It is possible," Simon said.

"Nuts! I'm taking that guy Cruz down to my office, and if he won't talk I'll beat the truth out of him. I'll lock up that whole place if I have to. I'm no hick-town sheriff, you know!"

Father Hadden rose and rested a gentle hand on the sheriff's shoulder. "I have faith that the sinner will see his way to confess before very long," he said. "Whatever the world may think of groups like the Penitentes, there is no doubt they are deeply religious men. The very fact of murder in such a place is unthinkable—the continued concealment of the crime by the killer is fantastic. He will come forward to confess, never fear."

But Sheriff Partell was far from satisfied. "Well, you start praying for his soul, Father. I'm going out and drag that Cruz in for questioning." And with that he rose from the chair and went outside to his car.

For a moment we sat simply in silence, as people do when some sort of vague disaster has passed them by. Finally, I broke the silence. "He may be a slob, but he's no dope."

But Simon Ark only sat in continued silence, as if deep in thought. "Tell me, my friend," he asked at last, "what adventures befell you at the *Oasis?*"

"Well . . ." I told him everything that had happened, as close as I could remember it. Neither he nor Father Hadden interrupted, but when I finished I could see they weren't impressed.

"Della Summer must still be up there," Father Hadden observed. "The sheriff brought her to officially identify the body and then he took us back here."

Simon stirred in his seat. "My friend, would you like to do a bit more traveling this day?"

"I suppose so, but let me tell you my idea first."

"And what is that?"

I turned to the priest. "Father, you told us before that you had been in communication with the dead."

"That is correct . . ."

"Then why can't you talk to the spirit of Glen Summer—talk to him and find out who killed him?"

The priest's face paled at my suggestion. "I fear you do not understand my problem, not at all."

Apparently I'd said the wrong thing, for Simon interrupted quickly. "My friend, would you take the car again and journey to

the villa in the mountains? Perhaps you can somehow get a chance to speak to Juan Cruz before Partell takes him over."

"And what should I say to him if I do? Should I ask him if he killed Summer?"

Simon ignored the sarcasm in my remark. "No, my friend. You should ask him if any member of the Penitentes was absent this morning . . ."

"Absent?"

"Perhaps there was an extra man in the room. It hardly seems likely that the murderer would allow himself to be tied to a cross in the same room as his victim. But if there was a missing Brother —perhaps that is your answer."

It sounded reasonable, if a bit far-fetched, and I agreed to go.

The unearthly quiet of the villa on my previous visit had not prepared me for the bedlam which had broken out in the few hours since I'd left. Now there were cars parked everywhere, in a crazy unpatterned manner that reminded me of harbored boats after a hurricane. The sheriff's car was back, as I'd expected, and now it had been joined by a state police car and a number of unidentified vehicles. At least two of them had press cards in the windows.

A deputy sheriff met me at the door and asked what I wanted. I thought fast and flashed my membership card in the Overseas Press Club. Apparently that was good enough for him, because he stepped aside without a word. Inside the place was alive with reporters and photographers, popping their flash bulbs at every possible corner. A cluster of them had gathered in the big main room, where the stout Partell was standing on a chair examining a rack of antique Spanish swords. Beyond, in a sort of sitting room, I could see Della Summer, deep in an old straight-backed chair, staring out the window in a state bordering shock. Juan Cruz was with her, speaking softly, but she seemed not to hear his words. I walked in and stood quietly behind them, listening.

"Mrs. Summer, I know it is a difficult thing to grasp," he was saying, "but your husband came to me a month ago. He was shocked by the sin and vice the *Oasis* had caused in its brief existence. He wanted to repent. He wanted to join the Brothers of the Blood of Christ and suffer for the sins of his life. Just a few days ago he told me he planned to sell the *Oasis* and give the money to the Church. He was a man repentant, Mrs. Summer, and you can be thankful he died that way."

I cleared my throat and he turned toward me. "Ah, you are the friend of Father Hadden and that man Ark. What can I do for you?"

"Could I talk to you alone?" I said. Della Summer turned tired

eyes in my direction but seemed not to really see me at all.

"I'm afraid the good sheriff will never let me completely out of his sight, but perhaps over in the corner . . ." He motioned me to the far end of the room, under a great red-draped painting of some Franciscan missionary whose name I didn't know.

"Simon Ark wanted me to ask you a question," I began.

"Yes?"

"Were there any members of your Penitentes who were not present this morning?"

A cloud of something—fear?—passed over his eyes before he answered. "There was one," he said slowly. "The man who first introduced Summer to me. Yates Ambrose, the bartender at the *Oasis* . . ."

"You think this bartender, Ambrose, might have sneaked in here while the others were tied to those crosses? The man was his boss—he might have had a reason for killing him."

The Mexican never had a chance to answer, because I saw Sheriff Partell bearing down on us with fire in his eye. "Joe, show this bird to the door, and make sure he doesn't get back in." His orders were crisp and to the point, and the deputy he'd spoken to acted at once.

Before I had a chance to say anything else to Cruz I found myself being propelled toward the door and out down the steps to the car. "Sheriff means what he says," the guy told me. "Stay away or we lock you up."

I turned quickly at the bottom of the steps and only succeeded in sliding into the dust. I got up slowly, brushing myself off and feeling like a fool. Whatever Simon and Father Hadden wanted me to find out, I surely hadn't done it. Unless there was something about that bartender . . .

I passed a careful eye over the scattered parking of cars and remembered the complete absence of them when we'd driven up this morning. But there were nineteen men—twenty, counting Summer—in that place and they must have come somehow. They sure didn't walk.

I started the station wagon and drove slowly around to the rear of the big mansion. As I'd suspected, there was another parking lot there, with some ten or twelve cars nestled under the roof's tiled overhang. Well, all of the Penitentes weren't poor Mexicans.

On second thought I took back that last part. Some of them might live at the villa—it was certainly large enough. But there was something in the sand that caught my eye and I swung the car to a quick stop. It was an odd type of tire track, a double tread mark made by a tire only recently put on the market. The rows of double treads ran *over* the other tracks, showing that it had been the last car in. And there was an-

other set of them on the left, coming out of the driveway. I left my car where it was and walked the fifty feet to the line of vehicles. None of them had the double-tread tires. Somebody had come and gone after they arrived. I took a quick look for footprints, but that was hopeless. With a bit of hope I headed back to the car . . .

The *Oasis* was picking up business as the afternoon dragged along, filling its parking lot with a variety of new and old cars. The one I was seeking was at the end of the line, one of the two that had been there earlier in the day. I jotted down the license number and went inside.

The place was more like a morgue than a palace of pleasure, and I guessed that the word had gotten around. The same bartender, who must have been Yates Ambrose, was serving an occasional drink to the somber crew. But what really stopped me was the girl, Vicky Nelson. She was still there, in the same tight shorts, sitting on the same stool smokingher cigarette.

Beyond the curtained partition waited a solid row of one-armed slot machines. There were a couple of green felt poker tables, too, and a cloth-covered bulge that might have been a roulette wheel. But these were quiet today, out of respect for a dead sinner. There were only the slots to greedily accept our quarters.

Vicky and I played a while and then I asked her, "Ever hear any talk about Yates Ambrose and Mrs. Summer?"

"You kidding? Not a chance! He couldn't have gotten her with a fish net. Besides, he's one of those religious nuts."

"A Penitente?"

"Could be, for all I know."

"How come he works in a place like this?"

"Who knows? Trying to convert Summer, I suppose."

"Yeah."

"You're full of questions, aren't you?"

I handed her a couple of quarters. "Play for me. I'll be right back."

Out in front the murmurers were still in force, holding their private wake for the late owner of the *Oasis*. I leaned on the end of the bar until I attracted Ambrose's attention and I motioned him toward me.

"Got a minute, Yates?"

"Who told you my name?" He was still clutching the bar rag.

"I'm a friend of Juan Cruz."

"Who?"

"Cut the act. I know you're one of them. Why weren't you up there today?"

"You must be crazy."

"Or maybe you were up there, huh?"

"Look, mister, I don't know anything about it. I belonged to

the thing for a while, went up there a few times. I even told the boss about it and introduced him to Cruz. But I quit a couple of weeks back."

"That nut!"

"Was this crucifixion bit a usual thing?"

Ambrose nodded. "Every week or so. He had twenty wooden crosses in the basement room, and he'd tie us to them with horsehair cords. Sometimes he'd let himself be tied there too."

"Did each of you have your own cross?"

Ambrose shook his head. "It wasn't quite that organized. But Cruz never let us forget we were sinners."

"And you weren't out there this morning?"

"No sir! I didn't go near the place."

I was pretty sure he was lying, but I'd never get anywhere with him. I thanked him and went back to Vicky Nelson.

"Hi, girl. How's things been in my absence?"

She gave me a big smile. "I beat the thing out of five dollars with one of your quarters. Put it nearly all back in, though."

There was a stir of activity in the front and we poked our heads through the curtain. Della Summer had returned and she was telling Ambrose to close the place up. "We'll be open again after the funeral," she told the crowd. "Go home now, and mourn my husband's murder."

They murmured and moved, slowly filing toward the door. Mrs. Summer had regained much of her composure now, but I could see she was still a shaken woman. "We have to leave," I told Vicky. "Come on."

"Leave? Where will I go?"

"You must have a home somewhere. Where've you been staying?"

She thought about that, the drink gradually beginning to cloud her vision. "A motel someplace. I don't remember quite where. Can't I come along with you?"

"Girl, there's fifteen years and a wife between us."

But by this time Della Summer had appeared. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before today?" she asked me, frowning in concentration.

"I don't think so."

"Well, we're closing anyway, till after my husband's funeral. You'll have to leave."

I shrugged and helped Vicky gather up her quarters. As soon as we were out the door Della Summer and Yates Ambrose began closing the place up, getting ready for the period of mourning. I wondered if anyone else worked at the place and I asked Vicky.

"At night a few dealers and stick men come in," she said. "Glen Summer hired them in Vegas."

"And Sheriff Partell winks at all this?"

"He sure does, near as I can see. Maybe Summer was paying him off."

One of the remaining cars in the lot apparently belonged to Vicky, but in her condition I could hardly let her drive it. She was beginning to sober up a bit, and I figured I could drive her around in the afternoon air for a while. "Climb in," I said, holding open the station wagon door. "You can stay with me a little while and then I'll bring you back here to your car."

"You're nice," she said, climbing in.

I headed back toward Father Hadden's church, because I was anxious to report my progress—or lack of it—to Simon. It wasn't until I pulled up in front of the place again that I remembered Vicky's costume. I couldn't very well produce her in Father Hadden's rectory in those shorts.

"Stay in the car," I told her. "I'll be back."

"You're going into *church*?"

"There are worse places, believe me. I'll be back."

Inside, Simon Ark and Father Hadden were still sitting at the table, just as I'd left them. Empty coffee cups told me the hours had been talkative and thirsty.

"I'm back. You two got everything solved?"

Simon peered at me through the lengthening afternoon shadows that were quietly stealing into the room. "We have had an interesting talk. Did you learn anything?"

I started at the beginning and told them everything that had happened, especially about the tire tracks that appeared to be from Yates Ambrose's car. "Simon, I think he went out there this morning, took off his clothes and put on his black hood and killed Summer with the sword. It's the only solution as I see it."

Simon smiled a bit, as he often did when I was becoming positive about some theory of mine. "It is hardly the *only* solution, my friend. But perhaps we may learn something tonight. Perhaps your idea of Father Hadden communicating with the dead was not so bad after all."

I shot a glance at the priest, but his face did not change expression. "You mean . . . ?"

Simon nodded slightly. "Father Hadden has explained his problem—the problem that originally brought us to Santa Marta. It does indeed appear that he is able to form some sort of communication with the dead of this parish. In fact, the good Father believes he can reach anyone whose confession he ever heard during life."

"Fantastic! Do you believe this, Simon?"

"There may be some truth to it. At times God moves in strange ways."

I turned to the priest. "You'll actually do it? Hold a seance or whatever they call them? Tonight?"

Father Hadden nodded reluctantly. "Mr. Ark is most persuasive. I will do as he wishes."

"Who's going to be here for this, Simon? Just the three of us?"

"On the contrary, my friend. I hope to have a great many people present—as many as possible. We will start by inviting the good Sheriff Partell."

That even brought a laugh from me. "You'll never get him down here. And if you did, he'd never sit still for anything as crazy as this."

"Perhaps he would," Simon mused. "Perhaps he would. In any event, I will go out now like the servant in the Gospels and assemble some guests for our gathering. I shall return by nightfall."

"Oh—say, there's this girl in Father's car, the one I told you about . . ."

Simon nodded. "She may want to join us too."

I couldn't quite picture Vicky Nelson sitting at any table that didn't have drinks on it, but I supposed there was always a first time. "You'd better get her some clothes first," I warned him. "She hasn't got many on now."

And when Simon had left I sat for a time in silence with Father Hadden, as the sun finally began to vanish behind the meagre line of shrubs and cactus in the distance. "Mr. Ark is truly a strange man," he said at last.

"You're right there, Father," I agreed. "I've known him for twenty years, off and on, and still I don't *really* know him."

"Do you believe what he says about his past? About back there —in Egypt?"

I spread my palms flat on the table. "Frankly, he's never told me too much about it. Just that he's lived a long, long time. Occasionally, when the dark winds of night are passing over the moon, I even find myself thinking that perhaps he actually is over fifteen hundred years old . . ."

The priest nodded. "One could believe it, very easily. He spoke of other things this afternoon, of a strange Coptic priest in the first century after Christ, who wrote a gospel glorifying the Lord. The words were devout but hardly divinely inspired. The Fathers of the Church denounced it as a fraud, and the Coptic priest lost everything. He was in a unique if impossible situation—his writings had been holy praises to God, worthy of a place in Heaven, but the deceit he'd used in circulating them as a fifth gospel made such a reward impossible. It was a situation even baffling for the Almighty, and this man could be sent neither to Heaven nor Hell. He was doomed to walk the earth

forever, until such time as God would decide his fate."

It was the first time I'd ever heard the story, and I wondered if this really was the strange secret of Simon Ark. "Did he tell you the name of this work?"

"It has come down to us, in a greatly altered form, as *The Shepherd of Hermas*. There is such a book. I am familiar with it."

"And why would he tell you these things?" I asked.

"Perhaps," said the priest slowly, "perhaps even a man as powerful as Simon Ark needs help sometimes. Perhaps he did not come solely to help *me*."

"But why does he seek Satan, Father?" I asked. "Will the finding of the devil somehow break the spell of this curse that haunts him?"

But the priest only shook his head. "That I do not know. I do not even know if these words he spoke were true words. He was perhaps only telling me that the ways of God are often strange and unbelievable. He was only telling me that the fantastic, the supernatural, is possible on this earth—if it is God's will."

"And?"

"And he told me to accept this strange power of mine—accept it and turn it to God's uses. He told me that tonight I must attempt to contact the spirit of Glen Summer . . ."

"But aren't such things as seances against religion?"

"He says that some good can come even out of the bad. Though the end may never justify the means, surely at times circumstances must dictate the wiseness of fools and the foolishness of wise men."

"And so Simon thinks the killer will give himself away at the seance?"

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? I assure you I have never done anything like this before. My . . . spirits have always come in private before."

"Well, I've seen a few of these things in the movies. Everyone sits in a circle and holds hands, or something like that."

Father Hadden nodded. "I suppose we must duplicate the expected conditions."

"Could I have a cup of that coffee while we're waiting?" I asked him. "I suddenly remembered I've had mighty little to eat today."

"Surely. I think I even have enough food for us."

And that's what happened. I ate there with the priest while Simon Ark roamed the streets of Santa Marta, seeking out those we needed for the final act of the little drama.

And presently, as the night shadows slipped slowly across the plain, Simon returned with Sheriff Partell in tow. "I must be crazy to even come here," he was protesting. "Am I supposed to believe this big-deal priest is goin'

to conjure up a murderer for me? I've already got the killer locked up, and it's that guy Juan Cruz, believe me!"

But Simon took the renewed attack with a slight smile. "I have not yet been able to convince the good sheriff that we will need the presence of Mr. Cruz as well."

"The hell you will!"

"Consider, Sheriff Partell, if you do not arrive at a quick and satisfactory solution to this case, the state police will move in very soon. There are already some of them around. They will move in, and ask questions, and soon they will begin to wonder about your connection with the *Oasis* . . ."

"Damn it, I have no connection with the *Oasis!*"

"When a wide-open place like that operates in a town as small as this, the sheriff *must* have a connection with it."

"I looked the other way, that's all I did! Are you going to crucify—" He stopped as soon as the word was out of his mouth. "Are you going to hang me just because I let people do what they wanted to do? It's a free country!"

I could see that Simon had him on the defensive, and he pressed his advantage. "Freedom to violate the law is not found in any constitution," he pointed out. "It would be to your advantage to cooperate with us."

"I'm here, ain't I?" the sheriff growled. "How the hell much else cooperation do you want?"

"We want Juan Cruz," Simon answered simply.

"Nuts! He stays in his cell."

"You haven't actually charged him with anything yet, you know. You can only hold him a few more hours."

Partell sighed and flung up his hands, a beaten man. "O.K., O.K.—you can have him. Where is this crazy thing goin' to take place. Here?"

Simon glanced at Father Hadden, saw the troubled frown of uncertainty on his face, and answered for him. "No, I think not. I think we should return to the villa in the mountains—to the scene of the crime, as they say . . ."

And so we went back, up the hill now darkened by desert night, up and over dusty mountain roads leading nowhere, till finally the moonlight caught the image of the great wooden cross on the rise near the *morada.* Other cars were arriving, too, and I could see that Simon had done his work well in gathering these people together.

The great house itself was dark now, guarded only by a single deputy sheriff who snapped a quick and sloppy half-salute at Partell. The eighteen, whoever they were, had long since headed for their homes, their moment of dim suffering gone now. And if I wondered why Simon had not

summoned them back, I was soon to learn the reason.

The great central room of the place seemed crowded with familiar faces, but a quick count showed only eight of us—Simon and myself, Father Hadden and Sheriff Partell, Juan Cruz, a bare-legged and puzzled Vicky Nelson, and — surprisingly — Delia Summer and Yates Ambrose. Simon's travels had apparently carried him to the *Oasis.*

"If you'll all be seated around this table," Simon began, "I hope we can get this over with quite quickly."

"Do you really think you can contact my husband?" Mrs. Summer wanted to know.

"We are certainly going to try, madame. But first let me say a few words of introduction." As he spoke, we were seating ourselves around the big table. I took a chair to the left of Simon, right next to Vicky Nelson, who was still looking mildly bewildered at this whole business.

"You all know," Simon began, "what has been happening here, in this place. A practice of medieval times, that of extreme physical penances for sins, has been revived. It has been revived and carried to extremes by a group of devout but misguided men. Perhaps Juan Cruz here was the most misguided of them all, since he was their leader."

The eyes of us all went to Cruz, who sat opposite Simon, between the sheriff and Yates Ambrose. "Today," Simon continued, "one of this group died, killed with a Spanish sword as he hung on a cross in the dim basement below us. As you know, he was Glen Summer, owner of the *Oasis.*"

Beside me, Vicky moved restlessly in her chair. Beyond the leaded glass windows I could hear a wind rising in the mountains. Perhaps there was a storm on the way. "As a few of you also know, Father Hadden here has been deeply troubled of late by a strange power that has thrust itself unwanted upon him. It is the power to communicate, under certain circumstances, with the spirits of those who have departed the earth. I'll turn you over to Father Hadden now."

The priest, looking uncomfortable, cleared his throat and began. "It is a generally accepted belief that the soul of a dead person does not leave the body for some hours after death. I believe that this fact is the basis of my strange power. I believe that by coming to the place of death within twelve to fifteen hours I can sometimes make contact with the soul of the departed. This is what I will try now. Please join hands to complete the circle."

We did so, and the lights of the room dimmed, apparently on a signal to one of the waiting deputies outside. Soon the place was almost black, with only a distant glow through the win-

dows to show us the faint outlines of each other's faces.

"Now," Father Hadden's voice droned on, "silence, please . . . concentrate and hold hands tightly . . . do not break the circle . . . do not break the circle . . . I am calling upon the departed spirit of Glen Summer . . . Glen Summer . . . can you hear me? . . . are you still among us, Glen Summer? . . ."

He kept it up like that, talking to himself in the darkness, for perhaps ten minutes—until my palm began to sweat in Vicky's grip. Then, without warning, there came a moaning sound from very close. It might have been at the center of the great round table. The moaning increased in volume until it formed words, and Vicky's fingernails dug into my hand.

"I have come," the voice boomed.

"That's not my husband," Della Summer gasped. "That's not his voice!"

But whoever it was, the voice continued. *"Hello, Della . . . hello, Juan . . ."*

I heard Cruz utter a startled gasp, and then Father Hadden's voice cut in. "Who killed you, Glen? Who?"

"I . . . I don't know . . . Felt the sword go in . . ."

"It's some sort of trickery," Yates Ambrose muttered across the table. "That's not Glen."

But Father Hadden pressed on. "Can you tell us anything at all, Glen?"

"No . . . except . . . except . . ."

"What? Except what?"

"Except how did the killer know which one of them was me?"

As soon as the words had been uttered I realized the truth of them, the single fantastic truth that none of us had noticed or questioned. With nineteen near-naked men hanging on crosses in a dim cellar, their heads completely hooded, how could anyone know which one of them was Glen Summer?

And as soon as the thought entered my head I knew the answer. Only one man could have known which of those hanging figures was Summer. One man, the man who tied him to the cross—Juan Cruz.

"No!" Cruz shouted in the same instant, and leaped free of the human ring. Before I knew what was happening the lights were flooding down on us, and Juan Cruz's terrified figure was leaping over a low sofa by the leaded windows.

"I knew it was him all the time," Partell snorted, reaching for his gun. But, somehow, Simon was there beside him, clutching the gun hand.

And in a moment it was all over, with three deputies bearing down on top of Cruz's struggling body. Partell shook free from

Simon's grip and finally got the revolver out. "Why didn't you let me shoot him?" he muttered. "It would have saved the expense of a trial."

"Because," Simon said quietly, "he isn't guilty."

"*What?* Who the hell could have done it if he didn't?"

And Simon Ark turned towards the others. "Suppose you answer that, Mrs. Summer. Suppose you tell him how you killed your husband . . ."

We just stood there, waiting for the screams of denial that never came. I think in that first moment even I must have thought that at last Simon had made a mistake, that certainly Della Summer could not possibly have plunged that sword into her husband's chest. But no denial came.

"Are you crazy, Ark?" Sheriff Partell snorted, breaking the shocked silence.

"Not at all."

"But that voice . . ."

Simon smiled. "Forgive me, it was my voice, slightly disguised and removed from its usual position. Father Hadden and I really had little hope that the spirit of Glen Summer would really present itself before so many people. We hoped to scare a confession out of Mrs. Summer, but unfortunately we only succeeded in scaring the innocent Senor Cruz."

"And why couldn't Cruz be the killer?" Partell wanted to know.

"The reason for that goes deeply into the character of the man and the whole practice of the Penitentes. It has already been pointed out that neither Cruz nor any of the others would be a party to a simple murder in such a place as this, while in the grip of a religious fervor. Such good and evil just could not exist side by side in the same man. Besides, none of the eighteen would know which cross was occupied by Summer this day. Only Cruz would know that, and he was the most fervent of all—the one person least likely to murder within the walls of his sacred palace. There remained one possibility, however. Suppose — suppose Cruz committed the murder in a fit of religious zeal, somehow believing Summer to be evil? Suppose he had some insane quirk that dictated the very ritual murder we all feared so much."

Sheriff Partell nodded. "I still think that's what happened."

But Simon Ark had not finished speaking. "Consider the man, though. Consider Juan Cruz, deciding he must murder the hanging figure on the cross. Either insane or in an uncontrollable fit of religious passion, he seizes a weapon from the wall there and heads for the basement." He paused only a moment. "And *what weapon* does he seize?"

The sheriff gestured toward

the wall. "All there are're swords and spears. He didn't have much choice."

"But he did! He had the ultimate choice. He had the choice between stabbing Glen Summer in the left side with a sword—and stabbing him in the right side with a spear. Call it fantastic if you will, but if Juan Cruz had killed that man on the cross as part of some religious ritual, he would have used a spear, not a sword—a spear like the Roman soldiers used on Christ as He hung dying on Calvary . . ."

We were silent then, all of us, because, somehow, we knew he was right. But then Sheriff Partell spoke again. "O.K., but why does that make it his wife?"

"We have already shown that the killer had to be able to recognize Glen Summer hanging nearly naked in a dimly lit basement, with his entire head covered. Who could have recognized him, from his body alone? Ambrose the bartender? Possible but doubtful. Only one person could enter that basement with the certainty of recognizing the naked chest and legs of Glen Summer. Only one person—the wife who shared his bed."

And now Vicky Nelson spoke up beside me. "I don't know too much about this whole crazy thing, but from what I have heard I'd like you to explain how Mrs. Summer or any other woman could walk past eighteen men without being noticed. After all, they were all supposed to be naked to the waist, weren't they?"

Simon cleared his throat. "What nearly everyone tends to forget in dealing with real-life crime is that it is not at all like crime in books. In a mystery novel a killer must have a foolproof, or seeming foolproof, method of murder before he strikes. But in real life a murderer might be impelled to strike with only a fifty-fifty chance of escape, if the motive was great enough. Della Summer's motive was great enough, and her chances of escape were better than fifty-fifty."

"But how?"

"She knew about the basement room; she knew about the rite that would be going on this morning. She knew it all because her husband had told her. She entered the villa, took down the sword—perhaps she knew about that, too, or perhaps she had brought some other weapon which she discarded in favor of the sword—and then made her way down the steps to the basement. And then she walked past those hanging men, studying them in the dimness until she recognized her husband."

"And they never saw her?"

"They never saw her, my friend, because—simply—their eyes were closed. You must remember that these men were religious mystics, in the grip of a

highly emotional experience. Each man, as he hung there with the ropes cutting into his wrists, was in a sense another Christ. Each man, deep in his own prayerful thoughts, would naturally have closed his eyes—especially since there was nothing to see in the dim basement. Della Summer guessed this, and she was right. Moving silently on the stone floor she had perfect safety—until the very moment she plunged the sword into her husband's chest. And even then the odds were with her. Already in pain from the ropes, there was a good chance he would not cry out in the split second before death. He didn't, and she won her only gamble."

Through it all, Della Summer had been silent. Now she spoke. "Why did I kill him?" she asked, not making it a denial but rather only a question. A question to which she already knew the answer.

"Because, dear lady, your husband told you he planned to sell the *Oasis* and donate the money to the Church. You couldn't stand the thought of a future of poverty chained to a religious fanatic. So you had to kill him before he carried out his plan. You had to kill him so you would inherit control of the *Oasis*. And you risked killing him here because this was the last place on earth a woman would be suspected."

I could tell by the faces around us that he'd convinced us all, but I still had a final question. "Simon, what about Ambrose's tire tracks outside?"

"Simple, my friend. She borrowed his car. I considered the possibility that Ambrose was guilty, but quickly rejected it. He had no obvious motive, and as I've explained, it was doubtful if he could have been certain of recognizing Summer's masked body. In any event, there was a final clue pointing to Mrs. Summer. You said that when she arrived here with the sheriff she broke away and ran sobbing to the basement. How did she know the way to the basement, or that her husband had died there? She knew because she'd been here before today—to search him out and kill him."

"While she was prowling around she might have run into Cruz," I objected.

"She knew he'd be at prayer. It was no more of a chance than any of the rest of it. When her husband told her of this place, he no doubt went into great detail."

Sheriff Partell's expression was somber. "Della," he said quietly, "I'm afraid I'll have to . . ."

"I know," she said. "It was the chance I took."

"You're confessing?"

But there was still a spark of fire in her eyes. "Not on your life! I'll fight it out with a jury."

Vicky Nelson turned to me

with a low snort. "Didn't I tell you she was a real bitch? Let's get out of here. . . ."

Simon and I dropped Vicky back at her car, and that was the last I saw of her—though the memory of those legs stayed with me for many days. We spent the night with Father Hadden, and I know that he and Simon talked far into it, of the strange happenings and the strange things that did not happen. And when we left the next morning the priest was busy telephoning—talking to the eighteen men who were all that remained of the case's loose ends.

A month or so later I received a letter at my New York office. It was sent to Simon Ark, in my care, and it was from Father Hadden. It had been a busy month for him, but it was a happy letter. He had succeeded in organizing the Penitentes into a group to help him with parish activities, and he had great hopes that their overwhelming piety was being channeled into more normal activities. Juan Cruz, unfortunately, had suffered a mild nervous breakdown—but Father Hadden even held out hope for him. And surprisingly enough he added a P.S. to the effect that Vicky Nelson and Yates Ambrose were planning to be married.

"He doesn't say a word about the spirits," I pointed out to Simon.

"It is a happy letter, my friend. Full of the joy of young love and older faith. There will be no more spirits for Father Hadden."

And one day—it must have been a year later—the priest himself visited us, happy in the midst of a job well done. "I'm here only for a few days," he said. "I couldn't pass through without seeing my old friends."

"How are Vicky and Yates?" I asked.

"Happy," he said, and that after all was a complete answer.

And Simon smiled down on the man of God. "No more spirits?"

But the priest hesitated before answering. "Only one, Mr. Ark. Only one."

"One?"

He nodded. "Della Summer died in the gas chamber last month." And that was all he would say. . . .

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO GET YOUR COPY OF THE saint EACH MONTH?

THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE gives you the most thrilling collection of mystery-detective fiction ever made available in a SINGLE MAGAZINE.

In each issue of THE SAINT, you meet internationally famous writers whose published novels would cost you from $2.75 to $3.95 each.

You can look forward to a COMPLETE MYSTERY each month by LESLIE CHARTERIS—creator of THE SAINT, one of the most popular characters in fiction today—PLUS exciting stories by outstanding authors, such as, John Dickson Carr, E. P. Oppenheim, Baynard Kendrick, Sax Rohmer, Van Wyck Mason, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, Octavus Roy Cohen and many others.

We should like very much to add your name to the list of the many thousands of mystery-loving subscribers from New York to Sydney, who in recent years have become THE SAINT'S avowed partisans.

If you are having trouble finding THE SAINT on your newsstand, and you want to be sure of getting us regularly... just clip the coupon below and mail it to us—with your check or money order—and THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE will arrive on time each month.

GREAT AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS, INC.

41 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

Kindly enter my subscription for THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

One year (12 issues) at $4.00 Two years (24 issues) at $7.00

Additional postage: Canada 50¢, Foreign $1.00.

Please remit by check or money order.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, ZONE, STATE _____

PLEASE PRINT SM 910

Into the Dark

by
WYNNE WHITEFORD

THE phone rang while they were playing the Waltz from Eugen Onegin, and he let it go on ringing for several seconds before he irritably turned down the radio and went across to answer it. But when he heard her voice he was apologetic.

"I've got some bad news for you, Alan," she said. "The concert's off."

"Off? Why?"

"Postponed. Just said in the paper he was indisposed." A pause, then—"I thought I might come over. I've a couple of new records you might like to hear."

"Good. I'll meet you at the street-car. Say in half an hour?"

"Right."

He crossed the room again and turned up the radio, but the music was just finishing. The time signal, and then the news. He listened absently, plugging in the electric radiator, as the night was already growing cold. Nothing of much interest in the overseas cables, but the local news still featured the jail-break of the previous day.

"Two of the escapees have now been captured, but the ringleader,

Wynne Whiteford, Australian writer now living in England, claims the only excitement in his life has been in road-testing fast cars. Whiteford, who has a commercial law and practical engineering background, is a former editor of the Australian Motor Manual and writes frequently on auto subjects.

Brown, is still at large. Police have issued a warning that this man may be dangerous. He is described as aged 25, 5 feet 11 inches, powerfully built, dark complexion. He is believed to be armed. I will repeat the description . . ."

Alan snapped off the switch, his vague irritation increasing as he caught a broken fingernail on the knob. He found a nail-file after a hunt through a crowded dresser, and walked out onto the front porch. He stood filing his nail, with the salt breeze blowing in his face.

The chill in the air was growing keener, and he could smell the trees, the heavy scent of the jasmine. The sounds along the beach road were fading, now as the traffic thinned out, and beyond he could hear the rumble of the sea. Away to the right a street-car clanked over the points —she would be on the next one, a quarter of an hour later.

He went back indoors, switched off the radiator, took his glasses from their usual place at the foot of one of the heavy brass candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and slipped on his coat as he passed through the hall. He locked the front door, walked quickly down the path to the gate, and set off towards the car-stop.

His steps rang hollowly on the narrow concrete sidewalk, echoing from the houses on the far side of the street as though someone were walking parallel to him. Where the lots were vacant the effect ceased, then an occasional house would throw back the echo again. He passed the high brick wall at the corner of the street, and turned into the shopping center.

The drug store was still open, with the music of a juke box jangling above the voices of the girls and youths who used the place as a club. He crossed the road and waited near the shelter-shed.

He could hear the street-car coming a long way off, its motors whining in the cold air. All the sounds seemed abnormally crisp and clear as it approached—the rattle of the wheels over the points, the hiss of air-brakes, the thud of feet descending the footboard.

She crossed over to him, high heels clicking on the asphalt with her quick, firm step. She had her long plastic raincoat on, and it rustled with the movement of her legs.

"Been waiting long?" she asked.

"Just arrived."

She took his arm, lengthening her stride to match his. She was small and slim, her head barely level with his shoulder.

"Cloudy tonight?" he asked.

"Just a few stars peeping." He caught the sudden wave of perfume as she turned her head towards him. "Can you remember what they're like?"

He laughed. "Not very well, really. Remember, I was only five—"

"I know," she said. The sharp flick, flick of her heels rang against the brick fence across the street, stopping abruptly further on as they passed the vacant lot where the wind rustled the long grass.

"It's not all dark, you know," he said. "You build yourself a mental picture of the things about you all the time. A sort of horizon. Walls and buildings that you pass. Over-simplified."

"It's probably a much nicer world than the one I see."

He held the front gate open for her, and she led the way up the path, standing aside while he turned the key in the lock. Inside, something at once struck him as strange. A cold current of air from the bedroom. He heard the blind flap gently. Queer, that—he hadn't left the window open.

Her steps went ahead of him into the lounge. The click of the light-switch. The rustle of the raincoat as she slipped it off.

Was that the sound of a stealthy footstep in the kitchen? Apparently she had heard nothing, so it looked as though he were getting jumpy. That news item must have stuck in his mind.

"I think I'll get a glass of water," she said suddenly. Her steps crossed to the kitchen. The click of a switch again. And then she screamed.

"Shut up, damn you!" It was a man's voice, somehow young and old at the same time. "Back over there. I'm not fooling."

A quick, heavy step followed hers into the room. "Over here, you."

"He can't see you," said the girl. "Careful, Alan. He's got a gun."

He forced himself to keep calm. The other man was almost at breaking point. As he passed him he could smell the fear.

"Pull those blinds down—quick." He heard her steps obediently cross the room, heard each of the blinds pulled down. "Right down!" said the stranger harshly.

"Listen," said Alan. "If you want food, or a bit of money, take it and go."

"Think I'm a kid? How far d'you think I'd get, once you'd put them on my track? Sorry, feller. It's just not as easy as that."

"We'd give you time to get clear," said the girl.

"Don't talk a lot of rot. Come over here."

Alan put his hands in his pockets. The only thing that might have served him as a weapon was a steel nail-file about four inches long. But it was hopeless. Even if he could judge the other man's position well enough to strike at him, he wouldn't have known if he was looking straight at him at the instant he tried to attack.

He tried to stop the fear

mounting in him. Once he was afraid, he would lose all chance. The stranger's teeth chattered with a sudden shiver.

"Cold, aren't you?" asked Alan in an even voice.

"What's it to you?"

Alan began to cross the room.

"Stay where you are."

"No need to get upset. I'm cold myself. Just going to turn the radiator on."

A pause, then a short, unpleasant laugh. "Suit yourself."

He bent down and ran his fingers across the floor until they met the flex of the radiator, slipping it through his hand until he held the plug. He crouched over the power-point, his back hiding his hands as he balanced the nail-file across the two prongs of the plug, and then he carefully pressed it into the socket.

As soon as he heard the sharp sput of the short-circuit, he sprang sideways and up. Across the room, he heard the stranger's harsh explosion of fury.

The shot crashed like a thunderclap in the confined space, and Alan heard the crack of the bullet into the plaster of the wall near the power-point, the pattering of plaster-fragments on the carpet. But he was already at the mantelpiece, then away again, one of the heavy brass candlesticks in his hand.

He heard the sound of a blow, a gasp from the girl, and the man's taut snarl. "Stay there. I'll get this swine, first. Then the two of us are going to talk."

Alan slipped his dark glasses off and threw them across the room. The stranger heard the soft pat on the carpet. "Come away from the door!"

He blundered into a chair in the darkness. Alan stood slowly erect, the candlestick swung back. He had to come round the table. When he first stepped off the carpet onto the linoleum, his head would be directly above his foot —Alan knew enough about balance to realize that.

He heard deep, unsteady breathing. Five feet eleven inches. Have to swing higher than his shoulder. Feet sliding on carpet. *On linoleum. Now!*

He put all his strength into the swing. The impact through the brass numbed his fingers. A weight slumped against his legs, and he shortened his grip on the candlestick and struck downward, once, twice.

He heard her voice across the room, laughter climbing into hysteria. He suddenly realized that she couldn't see what was happening. When he found the revolver, he crossed the room.

"It's all right," he said. "Hold this. As soon as I've finished on the phone I'll have to get you to change a fuse. That's the worst of not being able to see what you're touching—I'm afraid of electrical things."

NOBODY WANTS TO KILL

by
WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

I AM very ordinary. I am of medium height, medium income, average intelligence — strictly middle class. In fact, I'm a little less than ordinary because I lack physical courage.

Still, I murdered a man! My neighbors all know it. The whole country knows it. And when my eighteen-month-old son grows up, he will hear about it. And that hurts more than all the rest. But I couldn't help it. I had to—

I was sitting in my living room. I was reading about the Finns' gallant stand against the Russians and feeling the admiration that weak men feel for the brave. I admired them particularly for the beautiful way they were handling their rifles. I could appreciate that, because in this one way I am a little above the ordinary. I am president of the local rifle club, and last year I won the Southern States Championship.

I was sitting there alone because Alice had gone out to her bridge club and I had to stay home with Buster. There were just the two of us in the house.

William Campbell Gault, as he wrote years afterwards, had been writing (and selling) sports stories and syndicate stuff in the late 1930's, but his agent had been after him to try the detective field. So he did. When Clues published it in 1940, they called it "one of the best short stories" they'd read in ages.

Originally published as MARKSMAN, September, 1940, *Clues*

Buster was in the back bedroom, asleep in his crib. I was in the living room reading about the Finns and I began to feel nervous.

I began to feel nervous because I am afraid of the dark, and if you think that's funny in a grown man, let me correct you. It's sad and damnable and maddening; but it's not funny—not at all.

I put the paper down. It was a gloomy night outside, and the light from the street lamp was haloed in a late spring fog. It was a hell of a night for a man afraid of the dark to be home alone.

I decided to put Buster into the big bed and climb in with him. I am just ordinary enough to enjoy that. I turned out the lights in the living room and was halfway to the bedroom when the phone rang.

I had a premonition as I picked up the receiver. Or perhaps I was just scared. Perhaps, if it had been Alice, I would have had the same chilled feeling. But it wasn't Alice. It was a man's voice, low, muffled.

He said, "It's important that I see you tonight, Mr. Johnson. Where can you meet me?"

I hesitated. "Who is this?"

"It's about the Reform League," he said. "I can't give you my name over the phone."

I knew him for a phoney then. Because if he could say "Reform League" over a phone, he could give his name. There was nothing secret about that. All of us were listed on the league stationery.

My heart began to hammer and I fought to keep my voice calm. I said, "You can see me at my store in the morning."

"No!" the voice said. "I'll be be over in about ten minutes."

I started to object but the line was dead.

I was scared. I went into the baby's room and closed the window. I latched it. I looked into his closet. Then I watched him for a second, and I was close to tears. He was lying flat on his back, his hands above his head. He was smiling faintly. I turned off the light and looked out the window into the back yard.

But all I could see was mist and shadow.

From the shelf in my closet, I took out the Camp Perry model Colt that Alice had given me for Christmas. It had a long barrel, but the pockets in my corduroy house jacket were ample. I turned on the porch light and sat down to wait.

This Reform League was the latest attempt to clean up our town. And it wasn't having any more success than its predecessors, because whoever controlled the graft in this rotten little metropolis was in absolute control.

The police dragged in hood-

lum after hoodlum and turned on the heat. They even pulled in one poor snowbird and kept him off the stuff for a week. He was about ready for the asylum then, but it did no good. Nobody would break.

All the law could do was sentence them; squealing would mean certain suicide.

I had been made an honorary member when I won the Southern States and had promptly forgotten all about it. But evidently somebody else hadn't.

I shivered a little and looked out the window. I hoped against hope that Alice wouldn't come home early. Then, as I fingered the Colt in my pocket, the doorbell rang.

I could feel the hair on my neck bristle, and my hand on the doorknob shook. The man standing on the porch was about my height, but broad.

I said, "Come in."

He didn't say a word as he walked into the living room. He was foreign-looking, with a bluish cast to his beard stubble, and dark, murky eyes. He sat down on the room's biggest chair and tensed on its edge.

He didn't give me a chance to open my mouth. He said, "You're a good shot with a rifle? An expert?"

I nodded.

"We've got a job for you—to kill a man!"

I was plenty scared. But I took out the Colt. I said, "What's to prevent me from doing that right now?"

I was the only frightened person in that room. He said, "Put it away. You could kill me all right. But your wife—and the kid—" He shrugged. "The boss never makes a mistake. You'd better just sit and listen."

I thought of Alice and Buster. I sat down shakily.

He said, "Bruce Barnum is going to give a surprise talk at the band concert in the city park. He's got some names to name and dirt to spill. You will be in the loft of that garage across the street. You will kill him from the window with a rifle. The boss thinks it should put an end to all this reform stuff. The boss is getting annoyed with all these reform movements that keep popping up."

Bruce Barnum was head of the league. He was fearless and a bachelor. That's why they'd picked him for the job. And he was my friend. I told Bluebeard that.

He shrugged again. "Even if I felt sorry for you, it wouldn't make any difference. I work under orders."

I said slowly, "There's quite a bit of money represented on the league board. It would be worth all we could raise to learn the name of the boss."

He smiled faintly. "I'm one of the few guys who know that.

And there isn't enough money in the world to buy my life." He paused. "We've tried to get Barnum a couple of times. But he's pretty well guarded. That's why we have to do it from a distance. And you just happen to be the unlucky guy."

"And if I refuse?"

For the third time he shrugged. "Maybe you, maybe your wife or the kid—"

I almost went for the Colt again. But it would do no good. As he said, he was only working under orders.

As he rose to go, he said casually, "Don't look so sick. Murder's a little tough the first time. But you get used to it." His eyes fell on the paper. "They're sure getting used to it in Russia."

The whole thing was like something out of a gangster movie, one of those wild B pictures. But this was no movie This was happening to me, George Johnson, citizen. I tried to get a grip on myself, reason sanely. But my mind was numb.

At the door, Bluebeard said, "We'll get in touch with you again, probably tomorrow."

I only nodded.

I went back to the living room and sat down again. I was still sitting there, staring dumbly at nothing, when Alice and Fred Lock came in.

Alice said, "Why George Fraidy-cat Johnson! Don't tell me you saw another ghost?"

I tried to smile. Fred Lock was looking at me curiously.

Alice sensed, then, that this was something more than my usual home-alone nervousness. "What happened?" she asked.

I hesitated. It was Fred who had nominated me for the league. If I told anyone, I could tell him. But I shook my head. "Nothing happened," I said. "I don't feel so well."

Fred left then, and Alice said, "You're not jealous, are you, George? I mean . . . I know he's been around a lot lately, but—"

That was almost funny. Alice and Fred had been practically engaged all through college. Then Fred went to law school and I stepped in. Fred just couldn't keep away from her, now, and I wouldn't have liked that if I hadn't trusted Alice a hundred per cent.

"I'm not jealous," I told her. "I'm a little fagged out. There's been a lot of trouble at the store lately, spring inventory and all." I knew then that I'd never be able to tell her.

I remembered Bluebeard's comment, and I tried to tell myself that mass murder was going on in Europe; that I had to do this for my family. But I couldn't. I'd never even been able to go hunting, and, now, I was expected to kill a man.

I wasn't worth anything at the store next morning. I thought of

taking the family out of town. But I would probably be trailed, and I didn't have the money to re-establish myself in another town.

There was a luncheon meeting of the league at noon. I had to stay active to keep from going crazy, so I attended.

When Bruce Barnum got up to speak, I kept my eyes averted. I kept seeing a bullet hole in his high forehead, blood in the grayish-black of his hair. Nausea stirred in me. Fred Lock was sitting next to me, and he whispered, "What's the matter, George? You still sick?"

I nodded.

Barnum was saying, "I want you all to understand that the police are one hundred per cent behind us. There have been rumors—and one of the papers has hinted—that a corrupt police department is partly responsible for this town's criminal record. I have investigated this thoroughly for the past month and have proved to myself that the rumor has no basis in fact. I wish you would give this information all the publicity within your power. I know an—"

I couldn't listen any more. I mumbled something to Fred about explaining to the others; then I slipped out the door.

But, outside, there was no place to go. I could have gone back to the store; but it's a sporting-goods store, and I feature a complete line of rifles. I didn't want to look at any rifles this afternoon. I got into my car and headed for the country.

It was beautiful. The mist of the evening before had brought out all the sleepy beauty of our southern spring. The sun was hot, but the sun could never get too hot for me. I love it too well. Which is just another way of saying I hate the dark.

I think, if Bluebeard had approached me in the daytime, I would have shot him.

My mind went back to the luncheon. I remembered Barnum's words regarding the police department. Perhaps—just perhaps—the police had uncovered something new. I turned the car back toward town.

My association with the league gave me a few privileges and I had known the chief of police since boyhood. He shook his head at my question.

"Nothing new, George. It's the same old story, and it will continue to be the same story until we get the headman." He shook his bushy head hopelessly. "Terror rules this gang. If we could get the boss, the organization would dissolve. I know that as well as I know my name. I'm willing to admit that we've hit a new low in the viciousness of our third degrees; but not a man will break. They're scum, every last one of them, but their

fear of the boss is greater than their fear of us."

I knew that too well. Because here I was, three feet from the law, and I was no criminal. Still I couldn't say what I wanted to say. I couldn't tell an old friend about Bluebeard, I couldn't go to the law which I was pledged to uphold. It was like living under a dictator—a criminal dictator! It wasn't American.

Oh, I cursed myself silently. And I was thoroughly ashamed of my yellow streak. But I didn't say anything. That, really, is what is important. I left, and again I had no place to go.

Then I remembered I had to go one place. Fred Lock had borrowed my Varminter a few weeks ago for a local meet. It was the gun I intended to use. I drove over to the boulevard.

There was a black sedan in the drive. If it was Fred's, it was a new one. But it wasn't Fred's. A little man in a loud suit was sitting in Fred's study when the butler ushered me in.

Fred was saying, "And you can tell your boss that I have no price. You can tell him that it's only a matter of weeks, now, before we bust his rotten ring wide open. Now, get out of here!"

The little fellow growled something, shot me a scornful glance and walked out.

Fred was smiling grimly. "One of the big boy's stooges trying to buy me off. I'd have thrown him in jail if I thought it would do any good."

I said something about his courage, and he shook his head. "It's not courage. I have all the money I need and enough love for my home town to fight for it."

I asked for my gun, and he lifted it from the rack in one corner of the room.

"It's a beauty, George. If you ever want to sell it—"

After I used it, I would be glad to give it away. But I didn't tell Fred that.

It was late enough now to go home. And I dreaded it because the more I saw of Alice and Buster now, the more I would miss them later. For I knew, despite my weakness, that I could never again face them unless I confessed. And that would mean a life sentence, at least.

Buster was in one of his playful moods. For a half-hour I tried to share that mood; tried to hide the sickness and the fear within me. But it was hopeless. I went down into the basement to load some cartridges. As I passed through the kitchen, Alice looked at me curiously. But she said nothing.

I have all the paraphernalia for making my own cartridges, including a mold of my own design. It would be possible for me to make a bullet which would

hit Bruce Barnum between the eyes and still not kill him.

For a moment I toyed with the idea. It would be possible, but the results would not be a certainty. And if Bluebeard's boss should suspect—I shivered.

I heard Buster's feet on the floor above; heard Alice moving about the kitchen. I was a weak man, but I could commit murder for them.

I compromised then. Two of the cartridges carried the regular load; the third I loaded lightly.

I put the gun in a machine rest and fired it with the light load. Then I examined the pine board I had used as a target. If I were to use a load that light, I would have to compensate for the comparatively short distance from the garage loft to the bandstand. And Bruce Barnum would be blind for life, even if I didn't kill him!

I made another of the light cartridges before Alice called me to dinner. I would take it along, tomorrow night, and perhaps I would have the nerve to use it.

Bluebeard called at ten o'clock. "Tomorrow night's the band concert," he said. "I'll pick you up in front of your store at eight."

I mumbled something and hung up.

Back in the living room, Alice put down her paper. She said, "I want to know what's wrong, George." Her blue eyes were filled with worry. "Don't tell me it's business. And it's not your health. It's something a lot more important than either—and I want to help."

I was silent for seconds. Finally, I said, "You'll know by Saturday. It's about the league and I'm pledged to secrecy. But I promise you'll have all the details by Saturday. Everything will be clear by then."

Quietly, she asked, "Is it dangerous, George?"

I nodded. "It's dangerous, honey. But I have to go through with it." I looked at her squarely. "Remember, honey, that whatever I do, I do for you and Buster. I'm not the cinema type, but you can believe that no one could love you more than I do."

She smiled then, and there was more than love in that smile. There was admiration, and that was something I didn't deserve. I kissed her humbly.

That night was sleepless of course. And I will never remember the next day. I was going through the mechanics of my regular routine. But behind the front, I was a jumbled mass of nerves, and I knew that without some form of opiate, I would be a poor marksman that night. All the long day I fought myself, and by six o'clock I had regained some semblance of normalcy.

I had brought my rifle down in the morning; so I didn't need to go home for dinner. I decided

to eat at a restaurant, and then come back to the store to meet Bluebeard.

I called Alice.

"This business," she asked hesitantly, "Is it coming off tonight?"

"It is," I said.

The line was quiet a moment. Then, "You took your rifle this morning, George — that new one."

"I did," I said.

Her voice was almost a whisper, now. "I'll wait up for you, George. And—I'll pray."

I was physically sick for the next fifteen minutes. I decided not to eat. I locked the store and turned out the lights. And for the next two hours, I walked the streets.

I don't know what streets. I walked and cursed. I cursed myself and the criminal boss. I even cursed Barnum for starting the league. But, mostly, I cursed myself.

I was in front of the store at eight o'clock. And a big black sedan was waiting. The front door was open. Bluebeard was behind the wheel. I got my gun and came out again.

Without a word I climbed in. Bluebeard just nodded; then he swung the big car away from the curb and up toward the city park.

The park was nearly filled when we pulled into the alley alongside the garage. The huge bandstand was brilliantly lighted; the shell behind it looking like an inverted sea shell, magnified thousands of times.

Bluebeard said, "You've got a good white background there, and the lights in the garage will do."

I said nothing.

Only one man was in the lower part of the garage. He watched us as we silently climbed the stairs to the loft. He may have been an accomplice or he may have been another me. I didn't know, and I didn't care.

The loft smelled of oil and rubber and dust. At one end, the window was open toward the park. The light was all right, and it was an easy shot. And my nervousness was gone. I was an inanimate piece of flesh at the moment. A murderer!

There were three men on the bandstand, three men in evening clothes. Their black suits stood out against the shell of the rostrum. The middle man was Barnum. The man on the left, the man who was rising to speak, was Fred Lock. He said over the public address system, "We have a surprise for you tonight—"

I didn't listen; Bluebeard was talking. "We thought you might try to pull a double cross; so I brought along a cartridge that we know will do the trick. I'll have those you have in your pocket."

I handed him the three I had brought along. He took a stand against the opposite wall. The

muzzle of his automatic was on me and it didn't waver a bit.

I broke open the breech. From force of habit, I weighed the cartridge in my hand; glanced at it. For a second my heart stopped beating.

That mark on the rim! Was it— It was, beyond a doubt. And the bullet had been cast in my own mold. The taper was unmistakable, and so was that mark that had been made when my tool slipped—the J-shaped mark that wouldn't be duplicated in a million shells.

It was one of the cartridges I had given Fred Lock!

All the incidents of the past turbulent days came to my mind. The car in Fred's drive, the same that had carried me tonight. I had caught him unawares, and he had covered his windy speech to the little fellow. And tonight's talk was to be a secret among the members of the league. Yet, Bluebeard had known the night he first came to call. And I remembered that Fred had been a poor credit risk two years ago; while today he was wealthy. And he had always coveted Alice. He would want me out of the way!

I snapped the gun shut and laid it on the sill. I wasn't afraid. I wasn't nervous. I was something far worse than that. I was filled with hate!

I knelt behind the rifle, my hands steady. I caught Fred's forehead in the scope. I pulled the trigger gently.

It was an easy shot.

It wasn't courage that filled me when I turned to Bluebeard. I was beyond courage. I wasn't even fully conscious.

"I missed Barnum," I said.

His face was stoical as he crossed the room toward me. He had the automatic jammed in my ribs as he looked out the window. The people were streaming onto the stand, but he saw what he wanted to see.

Then he turned to me, and I still felt no fear.

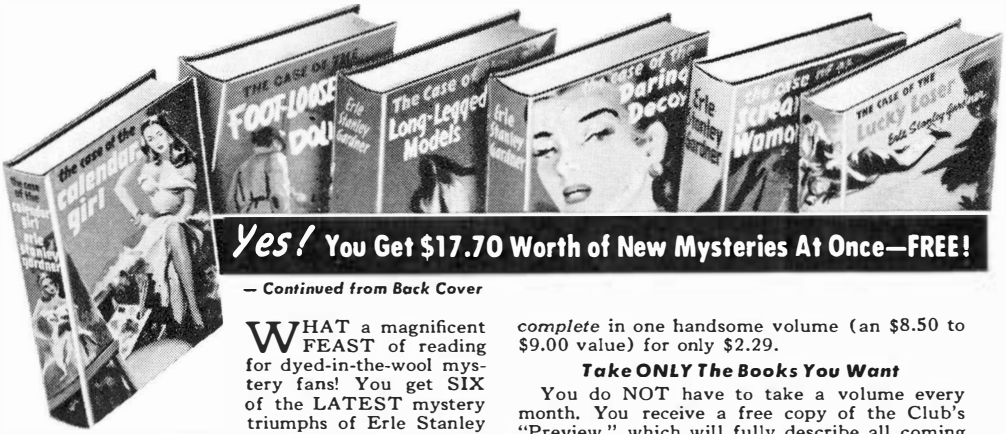
"Maybe," he said softly, "you didn't miss. You'd better git; nobody's coming this way, yet."

I said, "You mean you're not going to—"

"Nobody wants to kill," he said. "Not even me, unless there's money in it. And who'd pay me, now?" He threw the automatic behind a pile of tires and clomped down the stairs, out of my sight and out of my life—

I was cleared of course. Especially after a police search of Lock's papers. And our town is clean. But I killed a man! And it doesn't help to know I had to. My guns are sold, my beautiful guns. And fishing isn't in it with target shooting.

But I suppose I'll learn to like it after a while.



Yes! You Get $17.70 Worth of New Mysteries At Once—FREE!

— *Continued from Back Cover*

WHAT a magnificent FEAST of reading for dyed-in-the-wool mystery fans! You get SIX of the LATEST mystery triumphs of Erle Stanley Gardner, the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"! Each is a *full-size, full-length* book, absolutely complete. A $17.70 value – but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in The Detective Book Club – the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the New Mysteries for LESS than 80¢ Each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (an $8.50 to $9.00 value) for only $2.29.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after you receive it. You need NOT take any specific number of books – only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save as much as $6 to $7 off the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean – delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once – FREE – the six complete Perry Mason mystery thrillers described on other side, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L.I., New York

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE **SEND NO MONEY – JUST MAIL THIS CARD**

65

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB RF
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Perry Mason mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $2.29 plus a few cents mailing charge as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr. / Mrs. / Miss .....
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address .....

City ..... Zone No. (if any) .... State .....

FREE ALL 6 OF THESE TOP Perry Mason MYSTERIES

TO NEW MEMBERS

by The World's No. 1 Mystery Writer

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

6 Full-Size Hard-Bound Books • A $17.70 Value

Yes! You get ALL SIX of these suspense-packed Perry Mason mysteries — a $17.70 value — FREE on this amazing offer. Read simple details on other side; then rush postcard for six FREE books.

All Six of these Exciting New Perry Mason Mysteries FREE!

1 The Case of the CALENDAR GIRL

Perry's cooked his own goose this time! He's just proven to the D.A. that Dawn Manning is a murderess—and now she wants HIM to be HER lawyer!

2 The Case of the FOOT-LOOSE DOLL

The maddest murder mix-up of Perry Mason's career — in which Perry finds himself defending a girl who may be guilty of — HER OWN MURDER!

3 The Case of the LONG-LEGGED MODELS

PERRY'S client admits she has the motive for murder and a gun *with one shell missing.* She also knows *something* that could save her neck — but she WON'T admit WHAT!

4 The Case of the DARING DECOY

Perry Mason's client says he's being FRAMED on a murder charge. He insists a girl named Rosalind can clear him. But Perry finds her MURDERED.

5 The Case of the SCREAMING WOMAN

The D. A. produces a tape recording of the murdered man's last words — naming Kirby as the killer! How can Mason prove he ISN'T GUILTY?

6 The Case of the LUCKY LOSER

Everybody is convinced Perry's client is GUILTY — even the client! All Perry has to prove he's innocent is — a CORPSE that has been dead for 2 YEARS!

SEE OTHER SIDE

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
First-Class Permit No. 47—Sec. 34.9—P. L. & R.—Roslyn, N.Y.

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, L. I.
New York