THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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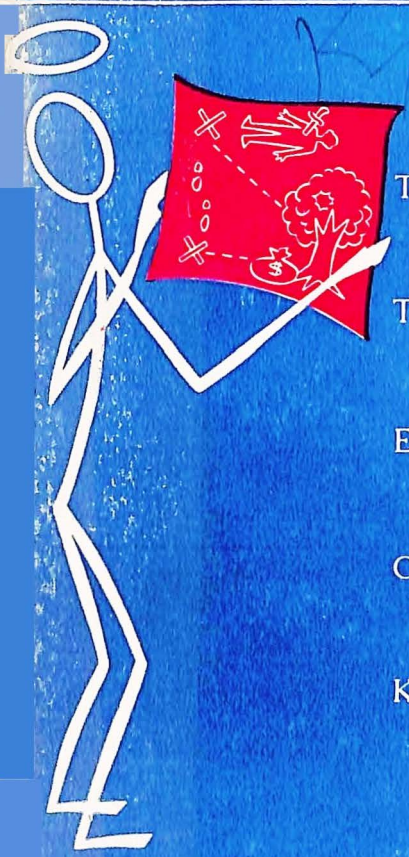
Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



The Deadly Mr. Lyon
by EDGAR WALLACE

The Night of Stranglers
by RAFAEL SABATINI

Easter Devil
by MIGNON C. EBERHART

Case of the White Elephant
by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

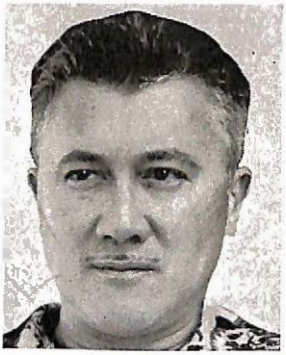
Killing in Chanco Lane
by WILL JENKINS

THE PERCENTAGE PLAYER

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



MEDITATING IN A VERY idle and aimless way the other day about matters concerning this magazine, and the Saint, my mind veered rather naturally to the subject of other old-time pirates, and then by an obvious association got snagged on the thought of another kind of magazine, those powder magazines which were such a spectacularly vulnerable feature of the ancient battle-wagons, that is if I should believe some of the movies I have seen. And I suddenly wondered for the first time why two such dissimilar things should share the same name, and which had the prior right to it. For the enlightenment of any of you who may now be similarly bothered, I am glad to relay the discovery that Mr. Webster's *New World Dictionary* traces the word back to the Arabic *makhzan*, a granary, from *khazana*, to store up, and proceeds to define it as follows:

> 1: a warehouse or military supply depot. 2: a space in which explosives are stored, as in a fort or warship. 3. a supply chamber, as the space in a rifle from which the cartridges are fed, the space in a camera from which the film is fed, etc. 4: Things kept in a magazine, as munitions or supplies. 5: a publication that appears at regular intervals and contains stories, articles, etc., and usually advertisements.

This of course makes us look like the most junior member of the club; but some fast serendipping into encyclopedias revealed that the earliest photographs, or daguerreotypes, did not appear until 1837, and George Eastman only introduced his idea of roll film in 1884, whereas Mr. Funk (or it may have been Mr. Wagnalls) told me that *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the first publication to use the name, made its début in London in 1731. So that Mr. Webster's order of definitions is certainly not chronological. Nevertheless, I'm afraid that even strict historical seniority could only move us up to third place.

With all due humility, therefore, I beg to announce that this publication, which appears at regular intervals, contains nothing explosive, but many good stories by most distinguished authors, whose names I should not have to repeat because they are on the front cover. But I would like to draw special attention to THE KILLING IN CHANCO LANE, a brand-new product of Will Jenkins, who has another name too which you might like to try guessing. And Rafael Sabatini's THE NIGHT OF THE STRANGLERS is a most unusual article.

There are also a few advertisements, to which I might as well add a plug for THE PERCENTAGE PLAYER, since I wrote it.

Leslie Charteris

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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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the percentage player

by . . . Leslie Charteris

THERE is a story, which may be apocryphal, about a certain bookmaker (of the horsey, not the literary, variety) who was making a long trip by car when towards nightfall he happened upon a hostelry which displayed an ordinary sign bearing a most unusual name, *The Even Steven.*

To a man in his business, this quaint appellation was of course doubly intriguing; and since it was in the middle of a particularly bleak and desolate stretch of country, and he had no idea how much farther he might have to drive to find a meal and a bed, he quickly decided to stop there for the night and satisfy his curiosity at the same time. The proprietor soon explained the peculiar designation of the place.

"It's very simple, really. You see, my name actually is Steven Even. So I just decided to turn it around and call this *The Even Steven.* I thought it might get a few folks puzzled enough to stop and ask questions, and sometimes it does. Like yourself."

"That's a pretty smart way to use the luck of a name," said the bookie appreciatively. "I bet it brings you a lot of business."

Like most heels, Mr. Way had his Achilles' . . .

Simon Templar was always at the disposal of a damsel in distress, but this was the first time he had tackled a dragon who could do algebra.

Mr. Even, a dour and dejected type of individual, seemed glad to have someone to talk to.

"It hasn't brought me so much luck," he said. "The folks who stop don't stay long. There's not much gaiety around here, as you could see. In fact, there's not another soul lives closer than thirty miles away, whichever way you go. Makes it pretty lonely for me, a widower. And worse still for my daughters. Three of the loveliest girls you ever set eyes on, should have their pick of boy friends. But the nearest lads would have to drive thirty miles to pick 'em up, thirty more to take 'em to a movie, thirty miles to bring 'em home, and thirty back themselves. That's more 'n they got time to do even for beauties like these. The girls are getting so frustrated they're about ready to do anything for a man."

The bookie made sympathetic noises, and listened to more in the same vein until hunger obliged him to change the subject to that of food. An excellent home-cooked dinner was served to him by a gorgeous blonde who introduced herself as Blanche Even; and when he was surfeited she still kept pressing him to ask for anything else he wanted.

"A toothpick, perhaps?" he suggested.

She brought it, and said: "Would you like me to sit and talk to you for a while?"

"Thank you," he said politely, "but I've had a long day and I feel like closing the book."

He went to his room, and had just started to undress when there was a knock at the door and an absolutely breath-taking brunette came in.

"I'm Carmen Even," she said. "I just wanted to see if you'd got everything you want."

"I think so, thank you," he said pleasantly. "I do a lot of traveling, so I pack very systematically."

When he had finally convinced her and got rid of her, he climbed in between the sheets and was preparing to read himself to sleep over the *Racing Form* when the door opened again to admit an utterly stupefying redhead in a negligée to end all negligées.

"I'm Ginger Even," she announced. "I wanted to be sure your bed was comfortable."

"It is," he assured her.

"I hope you're not just being tactful," she insisted. "May I try it myself?"

"If you must," said the bookie primly. "I will get out while you do it."

When she had gone, he settled down with a sigh of relief and was about to put out the light at last when the door burst open once more and the proprietor himself stomped in, glowing with indignation.

"What's the matter with you?" he roared. "I got to listen all

night to my daughters moaning an' wailing, the most lusciousest gals in this county, because they all try to show you hospitality an' you won't give one of 'em a tumble. Ain't us Evens good enough for you?"

"I'm sorry," said the transient. "But I told you when I registered, I'm a professional bookmaker who only lays Odds."

Mr. Theocritus Way, this chronicler must now hasten to establish, was not the bookie immortalized in the foregoing anecdote. He was, however, a man who had concentrated on the subject of Odds with an almost comparably classic single-mindedness.

Indeed, one of his oldest but perennially profitable discoveries in the field was directly tied to the same numerical quibble between Odds and Evens. At any bar where he might be chumming for potential suckers, when the inevitable dispute eventually arose as to who should buy another drink, he would promptly suggest that they match for it. The mark could hardly refuse this, and would take from his pocket the conventional single coin. Mr. Way would then say, with a skillfully intangible sneer: "The hell with that penny-matching stuff. That's how some guys got rich making double-headed coins. Let's play Monte Carlo Match."

He always had some high-sounding name, suggestive of authenticity and tradition, for the games that he invented.

"What's that?" the innocent would ask.

Mr. Way would haul out a handful of small change, which he jingled noisily in his closed fist to leave no doubt that it was a fair quantity.

"I got a mess of chickenfeed here," he would explain, with labored patience for such ignorance. "You grab a stack from your own pocket. We slap it all on the bar—two stacks. Suppose your stack turns out to be an odd number, and the total of our two stacks is also an odd number, you win. Suppose you got an odd number, and the total of us two is even, you lose. Or vice versa. That's one bet you can't fix, because neither of us knows how many coins the other's going to have."

The mark might win or lose the first time, on this fair fifty-fifty basis. Mr. Way rather liked him to win, because that made it somewhat easier to insist on another match for money instead of drinks. And one game easily led to another, and another, for increasing stakes. If the dupe insisted on them taking turns as matcher, Mr. Way would take his honest fifty-fifty chance. But after the first time, the victim never had a chance to match the total

of their combined hands in oddness or evenness.

Whenever the other was trying to "match," Mr. Way simply took care to have some odd number of coins in his own stack. Therefore if the mug also had an odd number, the total had to be even; if the mug had an even number, the joint total had to be odd. Stated this way, any intelligent reader will see that the stupe would have had the same fifty-fifty chance of finding somebody with a right foot growing naturally on his left leg. But it was a gimmick which had paid Mr. Way more cash dividends than Albert Einstein ever earned from the Theory of Relativity.

The fond parent who had him baptized Theocritus was only another of the human race's uncounted casualties to misguided optimism. Even in his tenderest years, his contemporaries declined to accord him even the semi-dignified contraction of "Theo." They abbreviated him swiftly and spontaneously to "Tick." The record does not show whether this was initially due to his instinct for stretching credit to the snapping point whenever he was supposed to do the paying, to his physically insignificant stature, or to his extraordinarily irritating personality; or to a combination of all three. But the monicker clung to him like flypaper into the middle-aged maturity where his path crossed the Saint's, which is the only encounter this short story is seriously concerned with.

However, in contradiction of some recent propaganda which purports to attribute all adult crime to the cancerous frustration of the growing boy, it must be instantly said that "Tick" Way consistently collected above-average grades, and revealed an especial talent for mathematics. But instead of being thus inspired to think of a career in science or engineering, his temperament had only been impressed by the magnificent possibilities of pigeon-plucking that were opened up by the magical craft of figures.

In his middle forties he was still a runt, barely topping five feet in his built-up shoes, but broad and thick-set and now somewhat paunchy, a strutting little rooster of a man with all the aggressiveness with which the small ones are prone to overcompensate for their unimpressive size, and a toughly amorphous face which looked as if he had antagonized more than one person whose resentment was too convulsive to be conveyed without physical amplification. But if he was doomed by his chromosomes to be forever unformidable in a fight, he had a grasp of the immutable laws of probability that might have frightened an insecurely wired electronic brain.

For "Tick" Way, the comparatively obvious percentages of dice

were teen-age stuff. He had nothing but contempt for the half-sharp crapshooters who knew that the true odds were three to one against a natural on the first roll, two to one against making a point of 10, and thirty-five to one against making it the hard way—only because they had read the figures in a book. He could work out all those simple chances in his own head, and even knew how to project them into the more elaborate calculation which ends up showing that the shooter has only a 49.3% chance of passing when he takes the dice.

The higher complexities of poker were not much harder for him. He did not have to memorize the odds of 23 to 1 against drawing two cards to make a flush, or 97 to 1 against drawing three that would turn a pair into a full house. He could even prove on paper the paradoxical theorem that when holding two pairs against an opponent who you are sure has threes, you have a better chance of taking the pot if you discard your smaller pair and buy three new cards than if you timidly trade your maverick for just one that you hope will fill the hand.

Mr. Way had long since relegated such overworked games to the category of minor pastimes or last resorts. For one thing, he had also learned a few things about the mechanical methods of loading, shaving, switching, marking, and otherwise hocussing cards and dice, to say nothing of the sleights of hand (for which he himself had no natural aptitude whatever) in their manipulation, which could nullify the most comprehensive theoretical calculations. For another, he had found that a discouraging percentage of even the most verdant greenhorns had been forewarned through the modern media of Sunday newspaper supplements, paperback fiction, B pictures and television, of the hazards of playing games with strangers. And thirdly, the relatively fractional edge that a brain with a built-in slide rule might give him in conventional gambling was too small and laborious in the payola to satisfy his driving ambitions. He would prefer to cash in any day on some proposition in which his advantage could be measured not in fractions but in fat round numbers.

Simon Templar first saw him in action at the bar of the Interplanetary Hotel in Miami Beach. Every season during this era of seemingly endless expansion saw the opening of some gleaming new caravanserai which aspired to be the "hotel of the year"—bigger, grander, gaudier, more modern, more luxurious, and more expensive than all the jam-packed hundreds of other palaces to which it added its opulence—which for a few dizzy months would skim the cream of th-

traffic before it yielded to the hotel of next year which was even then in the girder stage on the adjoining lot. The period of this story is fatally pinpointed by the mere mention of the Interplanetary Hotel, which obviously staked its début on the fact that solemn citizens who once automatically dismissed science fiction as a form of juvenile escapism were currently pontificating about rockets to the moon and pondering the legal tricks that might have to be invoked to grab off the largest hunk of the lunar market. The entrepreneurs of this palatial pub had already nailed their seats on the bandwagon by having the lobby laid out on the lines of some futuristic concept of a space-port, decorating the main dining-room with symbols aimed at striking a happy compromise between astronomy and astrology, branding their plushier accommodations with such labels as "The Martian Suite" or "The Venusian Suite," and barely stopping short of putting plexiglass bubble helmets on the bellboys. And for that season at least, they were assured of entertaining the loudest, lushest, most ostentatious fugitives from the northern snows who were likely to get washed up on that excessively upholstered strand. The ideal subjects, in fact, for Mr. Way's studiously honed technique.

This was one of those rare but reliable drizzling gray afternoons which the Chamber of Commerce sweeps furiously under the rug, but which stubbornly re-manufacture themselves a few times every winter—the kind of day which makes even the stiffest isolationists tend to unbend in the common misery of being done out of most of the highly advertised amenities while paying the same $50 daily rent on a minimum room. Mr. Way hit the bar (or the Spaceship Room, as the brochures called it) at a shrewdly calculated 4:25 p.m., when the patrons were mostly solitary and vaguely disgruntled males, and few enough to be individually aware of each other and surreptitiously absorbing every audible word even if they spoke none themselves. The first bartender recognized him as an obstreperous but lavish tipper, and greeted him with the perfect blend of obsequiousness and familiarity: "Hi, Tick. What's new today?"

"I dunno, Charlie. Gimme the usual—double."

"Yes, *sir*."

A quick and expert pouring and mixing.

"Y'know, Charlie, there are some guys in this world so stupid, I sometimes wonder how they ever learned to keep on breathing."

"I hear plenty of 'em gasping; but who did you have in mind?"

"Just a little while ago, I get in the damnedest argument with some thick-skulled bartender."

"You should stay out of those low-class bars, Tick."

"Yeah? Well, it all starts from talking about this place." Mr. Way's voice was deliberately pitched to carry to all corners of the room, and it had the timber of one who was not only unabashed by an audience but welcomed one. "Somehow this gets us on to astrology, see, which it seems this dope kind of goes for. So I'm only trying to show him how dumb he is. 'Look at it this way,' I tell him. 'There's only twelve signs to be born under, like there are twelve months in the year. But if you read those horoscopes, any day, they're the same for everybody born under the same sign. Now take any six guys sitting down to a poker game. You can bet two to one there'll be at least a couple of 'em born in the same month,' I says, 'but would you bet there'll always be a couple who'll have exactly the same luck and win or lose the same amount?' And you know what this jerk wants to argue about? Not about the intelligent reasoning I'm giving him. No. He wants to pick on my figures, and have it that it's only a fifty-fifty chance there'll be two guys born in the same month."

The bartender stayed where he was, polishing glasses. At that hour he had time to chat, before the feverish cocktail rush started, and Mr. Way's obliquely insulting gambit had inevitably given him a controversial attitude towards a conversational subject that was already more intrinsically stimulating than most of the topics that get bandied across a bar.

"That doesn't sound so unreasonable, Tick. Let's see, if—"

"You want to take his side, Charlie, I'll save you the brain fever. 'People are getting born every day, all over the world,' says this moron. 'So there must be about the same number born every month. Now suppose you divide the year in half, six months to a half. You take six guys. Either they get born in one half or the other. So it's fifty-fifty.' . . . Now I ask you, Charlie, what sort of logic is that?"

"It makes a certain amount of sense," said the bartender stubbornly. "After all—"

Mr. Way turned to the nearest listener, who had obviously been following the entire conversation, and offered him a smirking invitation to join the fun.

"Go on," he said. "Tell him that's why he'll be a bartender all his life."

"Okay, you tell me, Mr. Jacobs," said the bartender defensively. "You're a good bridge player—how would *you* figure the odds in a deal like that?"

"I don't think your colleague was so stupid," said the newly appointed umpire deliberately. "He's just a fraction off. As I heard it, the condition was that

two of these six men had to be born in the same month. Well, let's go with him up to a point, that five of them were born in five different months. You want to find the chances of the sixth man being born in one of those same five months. Well, anyone can see he's got five to choose from that'll do it; the other seven months of the year, he misses. So the exact odds are seven to five against him."

Mr. Way regarded him with a baleful sneer.

"There must be something about bars that gets into people," he announced disgustedly. "Now I'll tell you the right and scientific answer. Any man's got the same chance of being born in one month as any other, hasn't he? So let's take any month—January. Give the first man a shot at it. Either he's born in January or he isn't. It can only be yes or no. Heads or tails. *There*'s the fifty-fifty chance. Let's say he makes it. So give the second man a shot. Either he hits January or he misses. Heads or tails again. And the same for the third guy, and so on. So for these five guys in a row to all miss being born in January is like you tossing a coin and having it come down heads five times running. Sure, it can be done, but I'll bet two to one against it any time you want to play."

There was barely an instant's silence, sustained only by incredulous second-thinking, for nobody there was a mathematical prodigy; and then the first derisive retort became a fugue which became a chorus.

"You call *that* scientific?"

"Perhaps *I*'m stupid, but—"

"If *that*'s what you mean by logic—"

"All right," retorted Mr. Way, even more loudly and offensively. "Anyone who calls anyone else crazy should have the guts to back up his opinion. I'll back mine with good green money." He hauled out a roll of bills and slammed one on the counter. "I'll still lay ten bucks to five that out of any six men here, two were born in the same month."

The erstwhile referee sucked his cigar for a moment, and said slowly: "Well, if that's your attitude, and you want to pay ten to five *on* something that any fool can see should get you seven to five *against*, I guess I can bear to take it."

He was backed up by a respectable clamor of others who wanted a piece of this self-evident bonanza.

It was almost a classic example of the technique which had sustained Tick Way throughout his dubiously solvent life. First, the proposition to arouse the interest of a vast curious and inherently disputatious section of mankind, presented at a coldbloodedly chosen hour when they would be most susceptible. Second, the

channeling of their first thoughts into a fallacious pattern that they would soon adopt as their own, forgetting that he was the one who implanted it. Third, the presentation of a contrary theory so apparently absurd that the most mediocre intellect would reject it. And throughout and overall, a display of objectionable cockiness that was guaranteed to strangle the noblest impulse to show him his error kindly and disinterestedly.

For Mr. Way was not one of those ingratiating swindlers who work on the softer side of their prey. The most brilliantly original facet of his art was in his development of a natural gift for making himself detestable. In a few scintillating minutes, he could inspire the mildest citizen with seductive thoughts of mayhem. But since he was too ludicrously puny for the average man to punch in the nose, most of them sublimated this healthy impulse into a willingness, indeed an eagerness, to take it out of his noisily proffered bankroll.

The fact that Simon Templar was not among the first of those who volunteered to fade him may have been due not so much to the Saint's mastery of theoretical figures as to his appreciation of live ones, and particularly the specimen who chose that moment to make her entrance.

It should be superfluous, after that sentence, for this chronicler to expatiate at much length upon the proportions and attractions of Hilda Mason, which in cold truth were not intrinsically different from those of any other girl who gets herself into these stories. They were, however, striking enough for him to have judged her at once to be the most interesting girl on the Interplanetary Hotel beach on the first day he cased it, with an outstanding chance of defending that title against all comers from plenty of other beaches and for quite a few orbits. Let it be on the record that she had light brown hair and light brown eyes and was almost criminally young and glowing, and that the puffy balding-gray man with her who looked easily old enough to be her father proved on investigation to be her father—a phenomenon which in Miami Beach in the season was not merely epochal but had also made the Saint's casual campaign almost effortless.

"I'm not late, am I?" she said.

"Not one second," he smiled. "And I'd allowed for half an hour. Which gives us time for just one family-style drink together."

"I accept with pleasure," said her father, sinking into another chair. "But I assure you, that's as long as you'll be stuck with me. I only came this far to keep Hilda company in case you happened to be late. I brought her up according to the old-fashioned

doctrine that punctuality is the most inexpensive of grand gestures; but one can't count on everyone else having the same philosophy."

Simon ordered the drinks from a waiter who was already waiting, fortunately, for more customers were beginning to seep in. But the room was still populated sparsely enough for Mr. Way's discordantly jeering voice to snag the attention of the newcomers as it rose in raucous triumph a few minutes later.

"October! Here's another guy born in October! And he's only Number Five. Now who says I didn't prove my point?"

"What is this all about?" George Mason asked.

Simon gave him a factual synopsis, untrimmed with any personal comment, and Mason shook his head.

"The man must be out of his mind. Or else he's got money to burn and he'd rather burn it than admit he's wrong."

The group that was gravitating towards the noise focus of the bar evidently shared this opinion, and furthermore had no scruples about taking advantage of either contingency. Nor were they discouraged by the accident that had cost them a few dollars on the first sampling of nativities.

"Any fool can be lucky," growled the good bridge player who had been finessed into becoming spokesman for the opposition. "But that doesn't prove he's right. If you want to convince me the odds are what you say, you'd have to win two out of three times. With six total strangers."

"You think you aren't strangers?" squawked Mr. Way. "You think one of you is my stooge? I'd really hate to have such a dishonest mind as to even think that. Or to be such a bad loser as to say it. But don't make any cracks about backing down until we see who's doing it. You want to try this again twice more, or two hundred times, I'll give you the same odds."

"There aren't that many people here—"

"Then we go out and ask any six guys in the street. And you pick 'em. Or easier still, we send out to the office for something like *Who's Who*—they must have a copy in a joint like this. You name any six names, so long as they aren't *your* ancestors. Or shut your eyes and pick 'em with a pin. Just show me the color of your money first!"

The debate progressed without any diminution of temperature towards the next inevitable showdown.

"If I'd known bars were such fun," Hilda said, "I'd have lied about my age long before this."

"You probably did, anyhow," said her father tolerantly. "Only you were afraid to try it on the fancy places, which are much

less willing to be fooled than certain others, I'm told."

"I wonder who told you."

The Saint grinned.

"I must hear more about this, George," he murmured. "Some time when the child isn't fanning us with its big shell-pink ears. Right now, I honestly hate to drink and run, but we're stuck with the program I sold her. At this hour, it'll be mostly a crawl down to the very end of the Beach for Joe's immortal stone crabs. And from there, it's another long haul over to Coral Gables and this show she wanted to see. Until the millennium when it dawns on theatrical producers that an eight-fifteen curtain is the ideal time to ensure a hostile and dyspeptic reception from anyone who also likes a nice peaceful dinner—"

"Don't worry about me, my boy," said Mr. Mason expansively. "I shall stay here for a little while and improve my education."

"Just don't pay any padded tuition fees," said the Saint frivolously.

It was not until after he had ordered their stone crabs at Joe's, with a bottle of Willm Gewurtztraminer, and they were toying with cigarettes and Dry Sack while they waited, that he realized that he might have been a little too flippant.

"I only hope Papa doesn't get into anything silly," Hilda said.

"Is he likely to?" asked the Saint. "He seems a long way from being senile, to me."

"He does like a little gamble, though. And he can't forget that he was an insurance company statistician for thirty years. Of course that's only a glorified kind of bookkeeping, but he sometimes thinks it makes him an authority on anything to do with figures. He might have a hard time staying out of that argument in the bar."

"That shouldn't get him in any serious trouble. . . . Well, I admit I hadn't thought of it that way. It sounded like a typical bar-room argument, with nobody really knowing the score. They were all talking through their hats, I may tell you. Let's find out what the odds really are."

He turned a menu over, took out a ball-point pen, and began jotting.

"Do you really know how to work it out?" she asked.

"I don't let on to everyone, but I had one of those dreary old out-dated educations. Lots of gruesomely hard study, and no credits at all for football, fretwork, or folk dancing. But I think I can figure it the textbook way."

"You'll have to tell me. I even flunked Domestic Science."

"They must have tested you in the wrong domicile. But this is how you have to look at it. The first guy can be born in any

month, as somebody said. When were you born?"

"April."

"Okay. Then the second guy has eleven months to choose from, that'll lose for Loud Mouth back there."

"That sounds right."

"So the second guy was born in May. Now up comes the third guy. He has two months to dodge, out of twelve. On any of the other ten, he still wins from Loud Mouth."

"Even I can follow that. So it leaves the fourth man nine months, and the fifth man eight months, and the sixth man seven months. But—"

"Now according to the Law of Probabilities in my school book, and don't ask me who made it or why it works that way, to find the odds against all those things happening in succession, you don't add them up, you have to multiply them. Like this."

He had written:

$$\frac{11}{12} \times \frac{10}{12} \times \frac{9}{12} \times \frac{8}{12} \times \frac{7}{12}$$

"Don't forget that eight-fifteen curtain," Hilda said.

"It's not so hard as all that."

He made a few quick cross-cancellations to simplify the problem, did a little rapid arithmetic, and ended up with the fraction

$$\frac{385}{1728}$$

"That's fine," she said. "But how does it give you the odds?"

"It means that theoretically, out of any 1728 batches of six people, there should only be 385 batches in which two of 'em *weren't* born in the same month—meaning where Loud Mouth would lose his bet. 385 from 1728 leaves 1343. So the odds are 1343 to 385, which—"

The Saint made another swift calculation, and whistled.

"It comes out at almost three-and-a-half to one," he concluded. "And everybody thought Loud Mouth was nuts to be offering two to one—only a bit more than half the honest odds! A fellow could make a career out of being so crazy!"

Her face fell for a moment, in transparent anxiety, before she forced herself to suppress the thought.

"Well, after all, it's not so different from the kind of statistics that insurance companies worry about, is it? Papa probably knows the correct way to work it out, just like you did."

"I hope so," said the Saint; but for the rest of the evening only the superficial part of his attention was completely available to the conversation, the entertainment, or even the notable charms of his companion.

Now that he had belatedly been obliged to think seriously about it, his fateful instinct for chicanery and the fast double-shuffle could recognize the loud

and unlovable gamecock of the Interplanetary Hotel's Spaceship Room as a probable charter member of an ancient fraternity, with a new angle. But the most interesting novelty was not the switch from the stereotyped con man's beguiling suaveness to Mr. Way's crude art of alienation, but the upper-class mathematics on which the nasty little man had based his act. This was an artifice that Simon Templar had never met before, and he seriously wondered if it might not prove too tricky even for him.

He had even graver doubts when he saw the obnoxious operator again the next day. Wandering up to the Futuramic Terrace in search of a long cooling potion after a couple of hours of swimming and sunning himself on the beach, he spotted the little man sitting at one of the tables by the pool, unselfconsciously exposing as much of his bulbously misproportioned physique as could not be contained in a pair of garishly flowered Hawaiian shorts, and holding forth to a pimpled and sulky-mouthed young man and two tough-looking middleaged women with the unmistakable air of dames who had never yet lost an elbowing contest at a bargain counter.

The table, like all the others on the terrace, sported a cloth patterned in red, white, and blue stripes about three inches wide; and Mr. Way was flipping cigarettes a foot or two into the air so that they fell on it at various random angles.

"In Pakistan, where it's practically the national game, they call it Tiger Toss—from the board they play on, which has black and yellow stripes. And they use carved ivory sticks instead of cigarettes. But the measurements are relatively just the same: the sticks are exactly as long as the stripes are wide. Like on this cloth, the stripes happen to be just as wide as one of these cigarettes is long. See?"

He demonstrated.

"Then you toss a stick, or a cigarette, on to the board, or the cloth, and see how it lands. It has to spin in the air and turn over so there's no chance of controlling it. If it comes down completely inside a stripe, you win. If it falls across a dividing line, you lose. Like this . . . But wait till you hear the catch."

The Saint waited, at a diffident distance towards the background, but no farther off than other patrons or passers-by whose attention had been caught and held by Mr. Way's provocatively high-decibel style of conversation.

"The pitch they give the peasants is that this is the rajah's way of distributing charity so as to do the most good. You know—if you give a rupee to every starving slob, they'll all be just as hungry again tomorrow; but play-

ing Tiger Toss, the lucky ones could make a pot of money. And the guy who's running the game —who's got a concession from the rajah, of course—shows 'em how easy it is. 'Look,' he says, 'even if a stick falls at right angles to the pattern, there's still room for it inside a stripe. And the more it falls at an angle, the more room there is.' " Mr. Way illustrated the fact with a cigarette. " 'Until if it was parallel with the stripes, there'd be room for eight or nine of 'em to lie in there side by side without touching the dividing line,' says this official gypper. But they never got me to play. No, sir." Mr. Way's insufferably malevolent stare swung around him like a scythe. "Before I'd buy a tale about a philanthropic rajah, I'll believe in a big-hearted shylock."

Without giving anybody time to draw a deep breath, he picked up another cigarette and went on: "Right away, *I* can see how anybody with a grain of sense would look at it. Either the stick gotta fall at right angles to the stripes —like this—or it doesn't. It's as simple as that. One or the other. A fifty-fifty chance. And once it falls like this, square across the stripe, if it's only a hair off of dead center, see, it has to touch the line or cross over to the next stripe. Now, there's so little chance it'll fall dead center, one in a million maybe—you can forget it. So it still boils down to whether it falls square or not."

"Now wait a minute, smarty-pants," riposted one of the women, in an almost equally strident voice. "If that's what you call using a grain of sense, saying it's fifty-fifty if it falls this way or two hundred other ways—"

"At least, there are ninety degrees in a right angle," corrected the pouty young man. "So if you said eighty-nine other—"

"Are you ribbing me, trying to sound like those other benighted heathens?" snarled Mr. Way. "Or if that's what you call your intelligent opinion, would you back it up with any more than hot air?" Even from his attenuated costume he was able to produce a wad of currency which he slammed on the table with a vehemence that almost equaled a slap in the face. "You want to bet even money with me? I'll say the cigarette touches the line, you can do the tossing, and we'll see who comes out ahead. And I'll fade anyone else who wants to come in."

Simon adroitly evaded the contentious bantam's challenging eye, and drifted on to find himself a vacant table, where he asked a mildly befogged waiter for a Pimm's Cup, a pencil, and a piece of paper. When all these items were finally delivered, he sipped the cold ambrosial drink and went soberly to work with the other articles. By that time, a "Tiger Toss" school was in

full and audible session on the other side of the terrace, with Mr. Way the self-appointed banker daring all and sundry to prove themselves as ignorant as the credulous Pakistanis.

The techniques of bogus backgrounding, Macchiavellian misdirection, and a gadfly approach that could be relied on to make almost anyone but a lower-case saint too furious to think straight, were the same as the night before. But the specific probability problem, shorn of the artistic camouflage, Simon soon found, would be unscientifically called a snorter.

Since it is not the purpose of this story to double as a first primer of higher mathematics, which it may already have started to sound like, the reasoning by which the Saint solved this rather interesting equation must be omitted from the present text. To anyone who has not set at least one foot in the mystic realm of trigonometry it would be meaningless. Those who have studied such subjects, of course, may recognize it at once under the name of Buffon's Problem. The Saint took much longer to wring the correct answer out of his rusty recollections, and when he had done it he had even more respect for the perverse astuteness of Mr. Way.

It was quite comforting to persuade himself that such comparatively small-time improbity was not worthy of his serious attention, and that the types who paid Mr. Way for improving their education would not be mortally hurt by the fees; but this consolation was short-lived. Chronologically, it lasted about two minutes, until his reverie was cut short by Hilda Mason's voice beside him.

"Well, here's the man who knows his arithmetic."

Simon turned and jumped up, grinning.

"I was starting to worry about you, not seeing you on the beach all morning. I was afraid I'd shown you one night club too many."

"I did sleep a bit late. . . . And then, Papa and I had a lot to talk about when I got up."

George Mason was with her, in a gaily checkered terry-cloth robe that failed to obscure a certain haggardness in his amiably inflated presence.

"Like a dutiful daughter, she is understanding the fact that I made a fool of myself last night," he said, lowering himself into the next seat. "After you left me, I was inveigled into expressing my views on that birthday bet. Unfortunately, my reasoning seems to have been erroneous. Hilda has been telling me how you worked it out, which I now remember is the proper method —but I'm afraid this is a little late. Somehow I managed to lose almost two hundred dollars to Mr. Way on various names

chosen at random from *Who's Who* and other directories. And then, somehow, we began playing this game of Tiger Toss, which I see he is still at."

The girl glanced across the terrace, and down again to the scratch-pad on which Simon had been trying his creaky computations.

"Were you just working that one out?" she asked.

"Yes. And I have a headache which only another Pimm's will cure."

"Tell us the answer."

"I can do that, but don't ask me to explain it. It's a bit more complicated than the birthday deal. If you don't want to be bludgeoned with a lot of double-talk about sine curves and spandrels, you'll have to take my word for it that the theoretical odds are almost exactly seven to four against the stick, or the cigarette, falling cleanly inside a stripe."

There was the kind of silence which is tritely called pregnant.

"And I was playing him for even money," Mason said somberly. "It honestly looked like an even bet to me, because . . . Well, my stupid reasons aren't very important, are they? However, they cost me another hundred and fifty dollars. And by that time, I had imbibed a trifle more than I'm used to—enough, I fear, to make me somewhat reckless. When he offered to let me match him for double or quits, in some simple variation he calls Monte Carlo Match, I was optimistic enough to accept. As a result, I may not be much wiser, but I am some seven hundred dollars poorer."

"And so," Hilda said, "this is our last day here."

She was much too young to show the same gray deflation as her father, but young enough for an excessive brightness of eye to be betrayed by a slight unsteadiness of lip.

"Does it make all that difference?" Simon asked.

"It does to us. You see, we're not quite like the usual people who come to these places. With a job like his, and a family to bring up, Papa could never afford it. But he always promised me that when all the others were safely on their own—I'm the youngest—and the time came for him to retire, we'd have one tremendous splurge and see what it felt like to be millionaires for a couple of weeks. And I held him to it; although I've got a secretarial job now and I'll pay him back for my share eventually. I thought he should have it for once in his life, before he settles down to scraping along on his pension. But we don't really belong here, and since this has happened we've got to be sensible."

"Don't feel sorry for me," said the older man defiantly. "Things like this have happened to mil-

lionaires too. And I am still not so broke that I can't insist on you being my guest for lunch."

The Saint nodded slowly.

"No millionaire could do more, George."

"There's nothing else we *can* do, is there?" Hilda asked wistfully.

"Not legally," Simon said. "You haven't been swindled—technically. Nobody sold you the MacArthur Causeway, or a submerged piece of real estate. A difference of opinion is what makes bets; and how would you convince a cop who has to do his own arithmetic on his fingers that Loud Mouth is taking an unfair advantage? All you can do is remember that you were taken by one of the most original artists I've come across for a long time, if that makes you feel any better. And don't look at me with those big fawn's eyes, Hilda, because I'm on vacation too."

But although she instantly stopped looking at him like that, he knew that his protestation was as hollow as it had always been, since the very first time he had tried to stick to it.

He also wished he could stop being stuck with such preposterous projects. For the one thing that he had been most solidly convinced of by his strenuous figuring was that in any straight mathematical tussle with the talented Mr. Way he would have about the same prospects as a rheumatic water-buffalo in a greyhound race.

He thought that if there were laws against wicked old men taking advantage of trusting young girls, there should also be laws against young girls *and* old men trusting merely middle-aged bandits to rescue them from grades of wickedness that a college professor might have been puzzled to cope with.

In spite of which, and with no obtrusive sign of having racked his brain and paced his room for two hours in search of an answer, he was in the Spaceship Room again before four-thirty, ensconced at a strategic corner table that was still within easy speaking distance of the bar. From there he espied Mr. Way's blustery approach from the lobby; and by the time the percentage player strutted in, he was intensely absorbed in an eye-catching experiment.

On the table-top, he had laid out three ordinary poker chips. These he was shuffling around into various small patterns, sometimes turning one over and rearranging them, occasionally closing his eyes and fumbling for one at random, and turning it over and staring at it and finally shuffling the pattern again. All of this was done with a scowl of agonized concentration, and an air of frustrated bafflement, which were an almost deafening invitation to any other solitary

customer in need of a conversational gambit.

Tick Way, with a hypertrophied affinity for brain-teasers to augment his common human curiosity, resisted the bait perhaps 39.65% less seconds than an average target might have held out. Thus he was comfortably ahead of anyone else to turn from his bar stool, after he had been served, and baldly accept the hook.

"What in hell," he demanded, with his distinctive kind of bumptious bonhomie, "are you playing at, buddy?"

"I'm glad you asked me that . . . chum," said the Saint, without even regurgitating. "You might be able to help me work this out. I've heard you talking about this sort of thing a couple of times, and it sounded to me as if you knew more about figures than most people."

"I probably do," admitted Mr. Way, with the most affability he was capable of. "What's bothering you?"

"It's this silly game," said the Saint. "A chap showed it to me in the club car, on the train coming down here. He told me it was something the rich mandarins used to play in China, for concubines—Dong Hai, or something like that, he called it. You're supposed to have three plaques like this, all exactly the same. One of them has some Chinese character painted on both sides. The second has the identical character on one side only. And the third is blank on both sides. Instead of Chinese characters, we just made an X with a pencil, the way I've marked these."

The connoisseur of hazards was already moving over to the table.

"Okay, what's the game?"

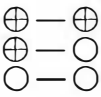
"Well, you drop the three chips into a bag, or a box—or a hat." Simon did that. "You shake 'em up under the table, where nobody can see what happens to them. Then if it's your turn, you pick out any one of 'em, without looking. Go on, you try it. You take it out and slam it on the table, so that anyone can see what's on the top side—whether it's marked or not—but nobody knows what's on the under side. Then you try to guess what's underneath, an X or nothing."

Mr. Way thoughtfully turned over the chip he had put down. Simon spilled out the other two beside it. The little man picked them up and examined them. A newcomer would have wondered why anyone ever called him Loud Mouth.

"Here's how this chap explained it to me," said the Saint, reaching for his pen and a handy piece of ashtray advertising. "And it might help you to visualize it quicker. Let's pretend we can see both sides of these chips

at once. I'll draw both sides of each chip and tie them together. Here's the one with a cross on both sides, for a start . . ."

He drew it, followed by two similarly attentuated dumbbells.



". . . and the one with a cross on one side only, and the double-blank. Now, as this chap says first, anyone can see there are three crosses and three blanks, altogether, so if you just shut your eyes and guessed what side was down—or up, for that matter—you'd have an even chance."

"Yeah, if you're guessing—"

"But suppose you're looking. Suppose the chip on the table shows a cross. Then you know it can only be one of these first two, don't you? In other words, the under side is either a cross—or a blank. An even chance . . . On the other hand, if the side that's up is blank, you know the chip must be one of these second two. So the bottom either has a cross—or it doesn't. Again, it's fifty-fifty. Or it *seems* to be."

"What d'ya mean, it *seems*?"

"Well, that's what was bothering me. Because when I was doing the guessing, I was right about half the time. But this other chap guessed right much more often than not. I lost quite a packet playing with him. So I've started wondering if I was unlucky, or whether there's some trick to it that I haven't seen. I'm sure that the crosses were all exactly alike, and there was nothing on the chips that you could find by feeling them—I thought of that. And the way we played, he couldn't have done any sleight of hand. But if it's legitimate, why go through such a complicated business to set up an even chance?"

Mr. Way fiddled with the chips and frowned over the diagram for a full minute, which is quite a long pause in a conversation. And if his had been an electronic brain instead of the old-fashioned variety, one would have sworn that one could feel the churning incandescence of his tubes.

It had been manifest from the start, to his practically single-minded instincts, that some deceit was involved. But the same ingenuous presentation which had caught his interest had also effectively nipped off any branch lines of thought which might have led towards mechanical props or common legerdemain. He knew that he was confronting some subtle trick of skillful misdirection from the same family as those which had long provided him with a fairly painless livelihood, but a trick which he had somehow failed to master before. It had given him a twinge of professional jealousy to discover that some cheesy plagiarist must be

exploiting a colorable imitation of his own method in positively overlapping territory; but this pang had been rapidly alleviated by more constructive thoughts of the profits he might derive from swiping this Dong Hai routine for his own repertoire. All he needed was to twig the trick, and he even had a self-confessed pushover already set up and waiting for the shove.

It may be cited as some kind of testimonial to his misguided genius that he found the solution in those sixty seconds of seething cogitation—a par for the problem which only the most razor-witted reader is likely to have equaled, although in this case no abstruse mathematics whatever were involved. Perhaps it was only the gigantic blatancy of the logical pitfall that made it so hard for a devious mind to see.

But when it did dawn on him like a blast of lightning, it was purely to the credit of Mr. Way's personal discipline that he did not emit a screech of triumph like the orgasm of a banshee, or even exhibit the faintest furtive smugness. He merely wagged his head, with a disillusioned and contemptuous weariness.

"There's nothing wrong with the game, bud," he said. "The only thing wrong is that some bum sports always think they've been robbed if they don't win."

"But why go to all that trouble to invent a game like that when you might as well flip a coin?"

"Don't ask me, my friend. Maybe these mandarins were too rich to carry small change. Maybe the concubines would've been offended about being flipped for. Maybe they got bored with flipping coins and had to think up something different. How do any betting games get started?"

"But an even chance—"

"What's more complicated than a roulette table? And yet half the people you see in a casino are playing the even chances—red and black, odds and evens, high and low. It just seems more glamorous, or something, to do it that way. I could get bored with tossing heads and tails myself. I'm a sucker for a new game. Why don't we try this one? This time, you might be lucky. That'd prove it was on the level."

"I could use a bit of luck," Simon grumbled, declining the gibe. "How much d'you want to play for? Would five bucks be too high for you?"

"I thought you told me you'd lost a *packet*," sneered Mr. Way. "How long did it take you, at those prices? Or how much do you call a packet? Most times, I'd say that any bet less than a ten-spot wasn't worth the effort; but if you're strapped—"

"Okay," said the Saint. "Make it ten dollars."

He scraped the chips into his

hat and shook it under the table.

"Who goes first?"

"After you," said Mr. Way.

Simon brought out a chip and slapped it down. When he took his hand off it, it revealed a penciled X.

"Blank," said the Saint, and turned it over.

The other side was blank. Mr. Way pulled out his roll, peeled off a bill, and handed it over. Simon threw the chip back in his hat and passed it to Mr. Way under the table. Mr. Way took out a chip, laid it down, and exposed a cross.

"Another cross," he said, turning it over.

He was wrong. The other side was blank again.

On the next draw, Simon showed a blank, called for a cross, but turned up another blank. Mr. Way also picked a blank, called it blanks back-to-back, and lost—when the chip was turned over, it showed an X on the other side.

Mr. Way paid off with equanimity. He was betting on a cast-iron percentage, and he could afford to wait for the dividends.

Several plays and some three hundred dollars later he was still waiting. He had won a few times, but not nearly so often as his opponent. That was when, convinced that the laws of probability could not be defied indefinitely, he made the utterly amateurish mistake of suggesting that they should double the stakes to speed up the action.

The Saint let himself be cajoled and insulted into that with the most irritating reluctance, and had soon taken another five hundred and forty dollars of Mr. Way's cash. They doubled the stakes again, and Simon won another forty dollars on his correct guess and another forty on the little man's incorrect one.

"This can get damn monotonous, after all," Mr. Way conceded. "Let's try some other game."

"But I'm just getting lucky at this one," Simon protested. "Don't be discouraged because I'm having a winning streak. Let me have my fun. It probably won't last long."

Mr. Way thumbed through the very thin sheaf of currency that was still left to him.

"You'll have to take my check, then. I don't have any more folding stuff on me—"

"I'm terribly sorry, dear boy," said the Saint earnestly. "But that's against the vow I made to my dear old grandmother on her death-bed. I can see her now, with the setting sun lighting up her nose, and her poor tired trembling fingers hardly able to hold on to the gin bottle. 'Promise me,' she burped, 'that whatever the bet is, you'll never take any chiseling bastard's IOU. Always make 'em lay it on the line, son,' she said, and—"

"I'm just wondering," snarled

Mr. Way, "if I should have another look at those chips."

"Help yourself," said the Saint aggrievedly. "But don't forget, you were the one who said that some bum sports always think they've been robbed if they don't win."

What Tick Way had to contribute to the remainder of the debate is perhaps largely unsuited to verbatim quotation.

"But how did you *do* it?" pleaded Hilda Mason.

"I simply conned him into playing strictly by the odds," said the Saint. "With a mentality like his, he was wide open."

"I am probably nearing my dotage," George Mason said, "but I still don't see the catch."

Simon reproduced the diagram he had drawn for Mr. Way.

"It's built right into the rules. As you see, there are two chips which you might call 'doubles'—that is, if there's an X on one side there's an X on the other, or if it's blank on one side it's blank on the other. There's only one chip that has two different sides. Now, the three chips are thrown into a hat and one is drawn at random. Therefore the odds are two to one that it'll be a 'double.' So if you see a cross, you call a cross; and if you see a blank you call a blank; and two out of three times you'll win. What you have to think of isn't the chance of what *could* be on the other side, but the odds on *which chip has been drawn.* Your pal Tick was sharp enough to spot that."

"Then why did he lose?"

"Because I cheated," said the Saint proudly. "I changed the odds. Since he relies on his gift for figures instead of manual dexterity, I thought he might have a blind spot for physical hanky-panky—which I'm rather good at. I made him a bit blinder with his own technique of misdirection, rubbing it in about how there couldn't be any funny juggling. But I was palming an extra chip with a cross on one side and blank on the other. I rung that in, so that there were two of that kind, and took out one of the doubles. Sometimes I changed them back, so he would not notice that there was one double that never showed up. But most of the time, the odds were the exact opposite of what he was counting on." Simon began to peel layers off a thick bundle of green paper. "Now, it was about seven hundred dollars you lost, wasn't it?"

"But we can't take that," Hilda objected, half laughing and half crying.

"Why not? It's your money, isn't it? And I made a small profit for myself. Besides, I only did it because I couldn't let you pack up and go home before we got to know each other a lot better," said the Saint.

killing in chanco lane

by . . . Will F. Jenkins

The problem was simple. Bob Hansford might have thrashed Vines — if he'd found him — he wouldn't have killed him.

THE Commonwealth's Attorney of Prince Charles County, in Virginia, ran his hand through prematurely thinning hair and went to the telephone. He dialed. He spoke with some urgency. Then he hung up and looked unhappily at the girl in his office.

"Hold it, Diane!" he said pleadingly. "I've just asked your father to come over here. You know I've nothing against Bob Hansford personally! But this character Vines did get out of hand, yesterday, and you scratched his face practically to ribbons —and it was an excellent idea!— and Bob had reason to dislike the guy! I wouldn't think much of him if he didn't!"

Diane said desperately:

"But he didn't kill him! He didn't! He'd have thrashed him thoroughly if he'd been able to find him. But he didn't kill him!"

The Commonwealth's Attorney again ran his hand through the place where thick hair should have been, and wasn't.

"He's been charged with it," he said helplessly, "and I'm the Commonwealth's Attorney, and I have to deal with it from that

It's said that Will F. Jenkins, writing both as Will F. Jenkins and as Murray Leinster, has been published more widely, here and abroad, than any other writer. It's possible. You've seen stories by Will Jenkins in the Post *and every major magazine, and read Leinster here recently.*

angle. Believe me, nobody'll be happier than I will be, if the case blows up in my face! Personally, I'm on your side. But I have a duty—."

Diane sobbed. She was a very pretty girl, even tear-streaked as at the moment. For some twenty minutes she'd argued fiercely that what the law required was wholly unjust, and what the statutes called for was unthinkably unfair, and the Commonwealth's Attorney had been made thoroughly uncomfortable. He knew her and her father and Bob Hansford, who was engaged to marry her. Everybody knew everybody else in Prince Charles County. But sometimes it made things awkward.

There came footsteps on the cement walk outside, and he sighed in relief. The bank was just around the corner from the courthouse green, which was an area of close-cropped grass cluttered up with a Confederate monument, a World War One cannon, the courthouse building, the treasurer's office, and the county jail. Diane's father had only to step out of the bank into the street and walk a hundred paces to get here.

He opened the screen door and came in, iron-gray where the Commonwealth's Attorney was bald, but with the firm step of a man who hasn't yet noticed that he's over forty. Diane looked at him miserably:

"I've—I've been trying to make Mr. Carter see—."

"You shouldn't," said her father. "Carter has a job to do. Sometimes it isn't pleasant, but he has to do it." He nodded to the Commonwealth's Attorney. "I was coming here anyhow, Carter. Something I need to tell you about this Bob Hansford case. His mother called me. I said I'd talk to you."

"Bob didn't do it!" said Diane fiercely. "He wouldn't do it! You know he wouldn't!"

"I know he didn't," said her father. "Now, you go home. Stop on the way and tell Bob's mother there's nothing to worry about and Bob will be cleared and free in a couple of hours."

"You mean it?" Diane searched his face. Her own lighted up. "You do! I'll tell her! And—M-mother's worried, too! I'll tell her what you said!"

She put her arm about her father and squeezed, and smiled shakily at the Commonwealth's Attorney. She fled. Only instants later there was the sound of a car starting. It went away at a rate of speed that should have interested the enforcers of law and order.

The Commonwealth's Attorney said uncomfortably:

"That's a pretty big promise you made, sir. Confidentially, it doesn't look so good for Bob."

Diane's father sat down very solidly. He looked grim.

"How bad is it?" he asked.

"Yesterday," said the Commonwealth's Attorney worriedly, "Diane was at the regatta, watching the races from the shore. Bob was sailing his Star Class, so they weren't together. And this character Vines was watching the races, too. Diane knew him. He's been around some weeks, looking for a house to buy to settle down here. Rather flashy character, always showing off a roll of bills. But he offered to drive Diane home. You know all this. He carried his liquor well. She didn't know he was half-drunk. On the way home she found it out. She had to claw his face pretty thoroughly to get out of the car. Nobody who lived here. . . ."

Diane's father nodded. He was president of the bank and a vestryman of Petsworth Parish and a prominent citizen of Prince Charles County. He looked savage. Being Thomas Lane, he would not have expected such a thing to happen to his daughter.

"So," he said, "Vines was found dead this morning. On the Chanco Road. Thirty feet from his parked car, in the brushwood. Possessions intact, but murdered. A man named Backus said he drove by there yesterday afternoon and saw Bob Hansford in the brush just about where Vines' body was later found. He said Bob looked scared and dodged out of sight. Bob's engaged to Diane. He would actively resent —like myself—the way Vines acted. He says he was still in his boat, alone, when Backus says he saw him there. So he's under arrest. I believe Taylor's arranging for bail for him. I'll agree that he would have hunted up Vines to beat the devil out of him. But you seem to assume that in the process he went crazy and killed him."

The Commonwealth's Attorney said unhappily:

"There's no reason to think he planned to do murder. But he could have lost his head."

"He didn't," said Lane. He mopped his forehead.

"I know how you feel," agreed the Commonwealth's Attorney. "But you can't be sure."

"I can," said Lane.

"Nobody could be sure," argued the Commonwealth's Attorney. "How could anybody be sure unless he was there?"

"I was there," said Lane. He put away his handkerchief.

The Commonwealth's Attorney started.

"You mean you were a witness?" he demanded.

"No," said Lane. "I was a principal. I killed Vines. I—disliked the man a great deal, Carter."

The more youthful Commonwealth's Attorney gaped at him. One does not readily accept the idea that a leading citizen of the county, of one of the county's

oldest families, president of the bank, a vestryman of Petsworth Parish, married to the chairman of the local chapter of the D.A.R. and the U.D.C. . . . One does not easily take in the idea that he is making a confession of murder.

"He insulted my daughter," said Lane, very steadily. "He meant to offer more than insult, —outrage. There are some things you don't go to law about. The law wouldn't do much more than fine him, and Diane would have to testify. You lawyers can make giving testimony a pretty horrible business."

"Hold it!" said the Commonwealth's Attorney, shakily. "You don't mean to tell me—"

"I do," said Lane. I had the right and the duty to beat him to a pulp. I meant to. But he didn't take kindly to the idea. He snatched up a club. So—I did the same. And as it turned out, I killed him. If he'd taken his beating like a man, he'd be alive now. He didn't. I can't say I'm as sorry as I should be."

The Commonwealth's Attorney sat down abruptly. He stared at the iron-gray man in the other office chair. He opened his mouth, and closed it, and opened it again. Then he said blankly:

"But look! This man Backus says Bob was there, not you! He says Bob ducked out of sight like he didn't want to be seen! He says he mentioned it in the store at Naxera when he got there! And he did! We heard about it first from somebody who'd heard him say it! He didn't know Vines was dead until we told him why we were asking questions, this forenoon!"

"Send for him," said Lane. "I doubt he'll say that in front of me."

The Commonwealth's Attorney gulped. Then he looked out of the office window. He went to the door. Lane, in his chair, mopped his forehead again. A car went past, outside. There were the shrilling cries of insects, singing in the sun. A fly buzzed somewhere.

The Commonwealth's Attorney went out, and across the street and the Courthouse green. He was gone a long time, while Lane sat motionless in the chair. When he came back, he was pale, as if he'd begun to realize what he'd heard.

"The Sheriff's trying to find Backus by telephone," he said shakily. " 'Said he'll be in some store or other, strutting and talking loud because he's star witness in a murder case. Sheriff'll ask him to come here. Won't tell him why.' "

Lane nodded. He had not stirred at all.

"I saw Taylor," said the Commonwealth's Attorney. "He's—. You know he represents Bob! I asked him to come here. You need him."

Lane nodded again. He did not move.

"Why'd you wait until today to report it?" asked the Commonwealth's Attorney unhappily. "I'd have thought—."

"It's a shock," said Lane tonelessly, "to find out that you're a murderer. And there's another matter. I—did not sleep much last night."

He looked at nothing. The Commonwealth's Attorney paced back and forth, frowning uncomfortably.

Footsteps. The Sheriff pushed open the screen door and came in. He nodded to both men, but spoke to the Commonwealth's Attorney.

"Backus's up at Wood's Store, spouting what he saw. Feeling mighty important. He's comin' right away. Right proud to be asked to come tell some more."

The Commonwealth's Attorney harassedly ran his hand over his bald spot. He looked out the window. He said numbly:

"Here comes Taylor."

In a moment the lawyer came in through the screened doorway, seeming to be stooped that he might not strike his head. He was broad and cadaverous and puzzled.

"What's the matter?" he demanded of Lane. "Carter says you need me. I was just fixing things up for Bob, getting ready to post bail, and so on. Have him loose in half an hour. What's up?"

"I didn't take time to tell him," said the Commonwealth's Attorney.

In a level, uninflected voice, the president of the bank and vestryman and prominent citizen of the county repeated the statements he'd made before. Taylor stared. Then he bristled:

"And that so-and-so Backus blamed it on Bob! I'll have him—"

"He's on the way here now," said Lane. "He'll change his story when he sees me."

"He'd damwell better!" growled Taylor. "Hm. Carter, let's get this thing straightened out. Come inside, here."

He went into the inner office, used by the Commonwealth's Attorney for confidential discussions. The Commonwealth's Attorney followed him. He closed the door. In the outer room, where Lane and the sheriff waited, there was silence again. A vast, cylindrical oil-truck rumbled by outside. An out-of-state car rolled past with flaring tail-fins, seeming to be of many colors. Somewhere voices spoke indistinguishably.

The Sheriff, sitting in a straight-backed chair against the wall, said slowly:

"This is a mighty bad business, Mistuh Lane. I'm real sorry it's happened."

Lane did not answer. The Sheriff added meditatively:

"Could've been that Bob

Hansford saw the car an' knew it, and hunted and found Vines already dead. He'd figure people would blame him, knowing he had reason—."

"No," said Lane.

"That coulda been why he tried to duck outa sight—."

"No," said Lane. He spoke with seeming difficulty. "You'll find out. I haven't told everything yet. There's—something else."

The Sheriff blinked. There was a very long silence. In the inner office, the Commonwealth's Attorney and Taylor discussed the technicalities of removing a charge of murder—not yet having reached the stage of an indictment—from Bob Hansford, on the so-far unsupported statements of Lane.

A considerable time later, there was the sound of a car in much need of a valve-and-bearing job. It came to a stop outside the Commonwealth's Attorney's office. A figure got out and swaggered to the screen door and pushed it aside. Backus came in, in jeans and checked shirt and a two-day beard. He glowed with self-satisfaction.

"Hi, Sheriff!"

"Howdo," said the Sheriff, formally.

The door of the inner office opened. Taylor and the Commonwealth's Attorney looked out, and then came out. Backus said happily, like a dog frisking because somebody has noticed him:

"Hiya, Mistuh Carter! The Sheriff said you needed some more evidence from me. What more d'you need to put in the case?"

"Will you," said the Commonwealth's Attorney distastefully, "will you tell us again just what you saw on Chanco Lane?"

"Hell, Mistuh Carter! You got it all wrote down and swore to!"

"Nothing to add, then?"

"Not a thing, suh. It happened just like I told it."

Lane said without intonation:

"Pretty unlucky business for you all around, though."

"Unlucky? . . . Oh. Yes, suh. Mistuh Vines was a right nice gentleman, suh. He was goin' to buy my place on the water an' tear down my house an' build himself a prettier one. But he cain't buy it now because he's dead. Yes, suh. That's unlucky for me."

"Maybe he'd changed his mind, anyhow," said Lane heavily. "After my daughter had to scratch him to get out of his car, he knew Bob Hansford and I would be hunting for him. I'd guess he'd decided not to buy a place here after all."

Backus shrugged his shoulders. He looked uncomfortable.

"I heard about that fuss, suh. Last night. But it wasn't none of my business. I never heard of him changin' his mind."

"I was sure he'd told you,"

observed Lane, "when you saw him yesterday afternoon."

Backus jumped. Then he said truculently:

"No, suh! I never did, suh!"

"You were arguing with him when I came along," said Lane steadily. "I figured you'd seen his car passing and flagged it down. You were arguing with him, and saw me hail him. You saw him try to get away from me. You tried to interfere and I pushed you aside. You saw him pick up a club to defend himself against me, and you saw me pick up another club and kill him!"

Backus stared. His mouth opened and closed. He changed color, and changed back again. He said with a trace of shrillness:

"No, suh! I never—you never —'tweren't so!"

He looked appealingly, scared, at the Commonwealth's Attorney. There was silence. The Commonwealth's Attorney had his head cocked on one side. His eyes were puzzled but intent. Taylor fidgeted with the indignation of a lawyer convinced that somebody has lied about a client he has, and may be prepared to lie about a client he is going to get. The Sheriff watched, his forehead wrinkled.

"I've confessed the killing," said Lane, harshly. "And you were there. You tried to stop me. You couldn't. And after the killing I gave you your choice, to take that money and swear to keep your mouth shut, or get killed with Vines. Remember?" He turned to the others. "Vines was going to buy his house, for cash. He stopped in the bank yesterday morning and got four thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills. To pay for the house. He went to the regatta first. From there he started to drive Diane home. You know what happened!"

A truck in one of its lower gear-settings grumbled and roared past the office, outside.

"I could wish," added Lane grimly, "that he'd left the county immediately, or that he'd taken the thrashing that was due him. But he didn't, so he's dead. Did you find four thousand dollars on his body?"

The Sheriff jumped.

"No!" He stared at Backus. "There was twenty dollars and some cents. That was all! And everybody's been talkin' about him showin' off money, askin' fillin'-stations to change hundred-dollar bills when he bought gas! But he only had twenty dollars! We didn't think—."

Silence. Only Backus' harsh breathing sounded above the minute noises of Prince Charles Courthouse between the passings of not-too-frequent vehicles.

The quiet became burdensome. The Commonwealth's Attorney looked very, very thoughtfully at

Backus. Backus' breathing grew more rapid. He licked his lips. He panted.

"This looks pretty bad, Backus," said the Commonwealth's Attorney. "Mr. Lane claims you witnessed the killing—not by Bob Hansford, but by him—and took money to keep your mouth shut about it. What do you say?"

"It ain't so!" cried Backus passionately. "It ain't so! He never—. No! No! No!"

Lane said steadily to the Commonwealth's Attorney:

"There's evidence that he knew about the killing. Remember, before anybody but Backus and I knew that Vines was dead, Backus was talking in Naxera's store about seeing Bob Hansford and that Bob tried to duck out of sight. It was a lie. Why should he lie about that particular place, at that particular time, unless he knew that Vines' body would presently be discovered there?"

"It—ain't so!" panted Backus. "It's a lie! It—ain't so!"

"You did see Bob Hansford in Chanco Lane?" demanded the Commonwealth's Attorney.

"Yes, suh! I saw him! He was theah!" Backus trembled. His words were gasps. "I drove right by! Mistuh Lane wasn't theah!"

"If you've got the money, like Mr. Lane says," said the Commonwealth's Attorney, "he's telling the truth. And there'll be a search-warrant issued to let the Sheriff look for it. I can't do anything less than that! If he finds it—."

"I ain't—." But Backus' throat closed convulsively. He could not speak.

"I can't think of any reason Mr. Lane would have," added the Commonwealth's Attorney uncomfortably, "to say anything about you that wasn't true. If his story's true and you back it up, you'll put a noose around his neck. And you'll be accessory to the fact, but you acted under threat of death. He said so! You might get off clear. He's the one who'll lose if you back his story!"

"It—ain't so!" panted Backus in agony. "He never— I didn't see him theah, if he was. I saw Mistuh Bob Hansford! I—I—."

Lane said in a level, almost indifferent voice:

"He's afraid this is a trap, Carter."

"'Tis!" raged Backus in sudden hysteria. "You' playin' a dirty trick on me! You' lyin' right an' left! You wasn't theah! You never—. You' a rich man an' you tryin' to get me in trouble!"

The Commonwealth's Attorney frowned harassedly.

"This don't make sense!" he protested. "What'd he gain by that?"

"He'd — " panted Backus, "he'd git me to say I was theah an' then—" He gasped for breath. "Then he'd prove he wasn't! He c'd do that!—He wants to git me in trouble!—But

he cain't! — He wasn't never theah!—" He panted. "You know he wasn't theah, suh, if you think! He—he says he clubbed Mistuh Vines to death! You know that ain't so! You—you know Mistuh Vines was all muddy an' scratched, but—he was choked to death! You know that, Mistuh Carter! He's lyin',—tryin' to git me in trouble!"

Lane drew a deep breath. The Sheriff sat up straight. The Commonwealth's Attorney looked absolutely incredulous.

"He was—choked to death?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes, suh! You know it, suh!" raged Backus. "He's tryin' to git me in trouble—."

"Lane," said the Commonwealth's Attorney shakily. "You didn't know that!"

"No," said Lane steadily. "I didn't."

The Sheriff stood up, deceptively at ease.

"Y'know?" he said mildly, "I didn't know it either!"

Taylor made an inarticulate sound. He shook his head. The Commonwealth's Attorney ran his hand uneasily through the place where his hair was thinnest. He said uncomfortably:

"Backus, I didn't know it. There hasn't been an autopsy yet. And Vines wasn't very—tidy when he was found. If he was choked to death, you're the only person in the world who knew it. And if you're—sure the autopsy is going to say he was choked, why—you're going to need a lawyer, fast! But I think he'll advise you to confess that you murdered Vines for the four thousand dollars you knew he had on him, and that he wasn't going to pay you for your house."

Backus' eyes went wide and staring. He cried out, in a terrible voice. He leaped. The Sheriff swung a straight-backed chair before him, at his legs. He crashed to the floor and the Sheriff dived on top of him. Taylor plunged into the fray. Even the Commonwealth's Attorney grabbed and sat on the thrashing feet of the man who struggled so insanely, mouthing and gibbering fury and fear.

Lane stood ready to help, but he looked white and sick, and he wasn't needed. When Backus subsided, sobbing, Lane mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Bob'll be here in a minute or two," said the Commonwealth's Attorney fretfully. "Taylor's attending to it. But—."

"I promised Diane," said Lane heavily, "that he'd be cleared and free in a couple of hours. She's on the way here now."

The Commonwealth's Attorney spread out his hands.

"He's cleared, all right," he said uneasily. "Backus started confessing his head off, once he hit a cell. Told where he'd hid-

den the money. Vines waved it at him, nastily, sneering that he'd never get it. He was still half-drunk, with scratches on his face and reason to expect trouble from you and Bob. He cursed all of you, and Backus for good measure. And Backus hit him. The rest followed."

Lane made a grimace.

"How'd you figure it out?" demanded the Commonwealth's Attorney. "I suppose it would have come out at Bob's trial, but —Diane wouldn't have had a particularly good time on the witness-stand."

"I had that in mind," said Lane. "Also—I knew Bob. I knew that if he said he didn't kill Vines, he didn't. I started thinking with that as a fact, as proof that Backus was lying."

"But how'd you know—. Look here! Did you have an alibi in case of need? After confessing—."

Lane grimaced again.

"I spent yesterday afternoon," he said wrily, "at a meeting of the vestrymen of Petsworth Parish. I had dinner with the minister and his family. Didn't get home until eleven. I—didn't even know of Diane's—experience until some hours after Vines was dead."

The Commonwealth's Attorney grunted.

"The way to break down a liar's story," said Lane, shrugging his shoulders, "is to ask for lies he hasn't prepared beforehand. I'm sure Backus could have handled an accusation of murder. He was guilty, and he could imagine and prepare for that. But I put him in a fix where he had to prove me innocent! And when I did that he got confused. He knew I was innocent, and he tried to prove it by telling the truth."

There was the shrill scream of car-brakes. There was a cry in a girl's voice, a cry at once of greeting and of joy. Lane and the Commonwealth's Attorney, together, looked toward the courthouse green. Bob Hansford, freed, was just coming out of the jail door. Diane had braked her car to a reckless stop. She was out of it and running across the green toward him, her arms outstretched, crying with happiness.

They clung to each other.

Lane stirred.

"Well," he said heavily, "that's that. I'll get back to my work in the bank."

the deadly mr. lyon

by . . . Edgar Wallace

Take one of Scotland Yard's most unusual officers. Add an informer and a "complete criminal." You have trouble.

THERE is water in the great Sahara Desert, and there is honor among thieves. Peter Dunn had never struck one of these remarkable oases, but he had been told about them by men to whom they were rare phenomena, not likely to be forgotten.

There are certainly clean thieves and thieves that are not so clean, and into this latter category comes Roony Riall. When Sergeant Peter Dunn thought of Roony, he thought of snakes.

Roony was suave, sleek, had glossy, pomaded hair and whitish, manicured hands. He had forged a little, taken minor parts in great crimes, always keeping on the safety line. As a craftsman he was versatile.

Peter loathed sly men who can never look at you straightly. Therefore he loathed Roony, who smiled too readily and was glib-tongued. Nevertheless, being a police officer, Sergeant Dunn was compelled to have dealings with him.

Peter drew the line at visits to his house, and when Roony called one night after dinner to impart certain information, Peter told

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Author of more than 150 novels (about J. G. Reeder, the Ringer, and others) of which as many as five million copies were sold in a year, fourteen plays, dramatic criticism, film scenarios and a daily racing article, Edgar Wallace, who died in 1932, was a man of enormous and unflagging energy.

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him just what was on his mind.

"We are always glad to meet a squealer at Scotland Yard," he said, "but I don't want you here, Riall. I like to keep this place clean, and you are my idea of dirt. As a police officer I appreciate your information, but as an individual I tell you you have had a narrow escape from being kicked into Berkeley Square. Is that clear?"

Roony showed his white teeth in a smile. You might have thought he was being complimented.

"Perfectly," he said. "I am afraid you are prejudiced, Sir Peter. I try in my own humble way—"

"Don't say 'humble,' " snarled Peter. "It makes me sick!"

He jotted down the particulars the man brought to him, but still Roony lingered.

"Have you ever thought what a marvelous cop Dappy Lyon would be?" Roony ended the question with a wide grin. "I suppose that ten thousand pounds reward still holds good?" he asked.

He referred to the reward which the Trust and Security Company had offered.

"You had better write and ask," said Peter shortly, and then: "Have you worked with him?"

"Never had the luck," Roony said.

"He is rather particular, isn't he?" said Peter offensively. And deliberately.

Roony smiled at the insult and chuckled to himself all the way through the hall, and was still chuckling when his unwilling host slammed the door behind him.

Peter had been engaged in relief duty when the Trust and Security Company's premises in Pall Mall were scientifically burgled. One of four men could have performed the operation, always excluding the possibility that it was the work of the Continental crowd. Scotland Yard settled down to locate the four suspects, and of these Dappy Lyon was the most important.

Exactly why he was called Dappy nobody knew. Possibly it was the work of a descriptive reporter who had a trick of covering men and things with picturesque labels. Likely enough it was a fight promoter who called him "Dapper Dick Lyon" in the period when Dappy was a featherweight, fighting for microscopic purses.

Dapper he invariably was; invariably well dressed, a generous little man who gave no trouble to the police, would go a long distance out of his way to help a fallen friend (he once paid for the defense of a man who had done him as bad a turn as any man could). He had so many admirable qualities that it was remarkable that he should have

followed the career he had chosen.

If any man deserved to be called the master criminal—a title which invariably raises loud guffaws at Scotland Yard—it was Dappy. This foxy-faced little man, with a bulging forehead and not unpleasant Cockney accent, was near to being The Complete and Perfect Criminal.

He had never been convicted, though he had been several times in the hands of the police. The historical details to be found in the Record Department at the Yard contained certain interesting information. He had served in the war, had risen to the rank of corporal in the Corps of Royal Engineers, mining section. After his discharge he had worked for three years in the factory of a locksmith and safe-maker — Grindles, who supplied the strong-room doors for most of the banks. He was an exemplary workman, skillful, painstaking, ingenious. He never lost time; was popular both with workmen and employers. During the period he was so employed Grindles were making the doors for the Midland and Southern Deposit vault. It is an undoubted fact that Dappy assisted in their erection. After they had been fixed he left the plant.

Within two months of his retirement the Midland and Southern vault was opened and emptied. The exact amount that was lost nobody knows; it was considerably over a hundred thousand pounds.

Dappy was pulled in when it was discovered that he had been working at Grindles. He had (it was believed) been concerned in a previous bank robbery. He was questioned closely and released for lack of evidence. "Released for lack of evidence" became a formula in his dossier.

It was undoubtedly Dappy who organized the mail-train robbery between Southampton and London, when fifty thousand pounds' worth of bar gold was taken from the bullion van and dropped onto the permanent way through a hole cut in the floor, after the train had been slowed by a manipulation of the signals on the loneliest stretch of the line. It had not only been slowed, but stopped, and the thief had time to drop down between the lines and make his escape before the manipulated signal fell and allowed the train to proceed on its way.

He chose his men well, probably imported a few of them, paid them munificently, and made no error until he fell in love. Then his mistake almost proved his undoing. This happened about three weeks after Peter's interview with Mr. Roony Riall.

Dappy hadn't much use for women, never used them in any of his *coups*. He would as readily

have fallen for the fat woman in a circus as for Canadian Lil, but, unhappily for him, he did not know Canadian Lil even by name. Her reputation was local to the town of Buffalo, though she had operated as far west as Cincinnati and Chicago. Roony Riall had met her in Detroit during a fleeting visit he paid there. She came to England in response to his urgent cablegram, sweetened by a bank draft that paid expenses, and he met her at Southampton, where the boat docked.

"There's fifty thousand dollars in this," he told her, "and we cut two ways."

Decoy was no new rôle to Lil. It was the main staple of her business. She was very lovely, golden-haired, fair-skinned, modest of manner. She had planned to go to London, and had already booked her room at a fashionable hotel.

"You can get that idea out of your nut," said Roony. "You'll stay at—" He gave her the name of a less pretentious hotel in a Midland city which Dappy frequented for reasons best known to himself.

So it happened that one day, traveling to London, Dappy found himself in a first-class compartment with the lovely Miss Mortimer from Philadelphia. She was doing Europe in a quiet, inexpensive way. Her father had a small store, and she intended staying at a small hotel off the Strand. She told him all this and a great deal more.

Dappy was a kindly soul. It was a pleasure for him to help any woman. He was human, and the pleasure was intensified by the fact that she was sweet and very lovely.

Within a month they were engaged to be married. A honeymoon trip to Como was planned, and a villa was secretly rented by Dappy, who was anxious to impress her with his wealth.

In justice to Lil it must be said that she had no idea that Dappy was a very rich man. She regarded disloyalty to money as one of the cardinal sins of her profession. To her, Dappy was a crook living on the edge of comfort—that and no more.

As for Dappy, he was almost a reformed character; Miss Mortimer was the center of a new universe. Even when they met Roony by accident in the Strand, he was not suspicious of her real character. Later . . .

"It is a curious thing," said Roony. "I recognized that little lady the moment I saw her. Her father has a store—"

Dappy knew Roony slightly. Roony's reputation was not good, but, being in love, Dappy warmed towards a man who was so full of praise for his fiancée. Out of friendliness grew confidence. Roony was given a job and the offer of a generous reward.

On a certain night the wheel

of Roony's car came off in the Acton Road. The accident occurred where two policemen met at the end of their beats.

This was the occasion of the classic robbery of the Acton Branch of the Leamington and London Bank. On that night the vaults of the bank held a large sum of money, due to liquidate the pay rolls of several big factories in the neighborhood. At four o'clock in the morning a policeman tried the door of the bank, found it open, went in, and discovered the night watchman tied hand and foot in a soundproof telephone booth.

He might have discovered this at an earlier hour, but the motorcar accident so carefully arranged had detained him.

The watchman could give very little information as to how he came to be in this position. He was uninjured (this was characteristic of Dappy's method), except that his arm bore the marks of several punctures where the hypodermic needle had been used on him. He only remembered a cloth being drawn over his head and his being pulled to the ground. Beyond that his memory was vague.

Dappy was in London, entrenched behind his inevitable alibi, and considerably strengthened by a new police regulation, introduced through some Parliamentary busybodies, which prevented certain questions being asked of a suspect. There was no evidence on which he could be detained, but at night he was never left unshadowed.

Roony came to Scotland Yard after a long telephone parley; in effect, he arrived under the white flag of the informer, and, although his information was sketchy and there were gaps in the story he had to tell, the chief believed him.

One evening Peter followed Dappy into a Soho restaurant and sat at his table. The little man looked up and stared at him.

"Got a gun, Dappy?"

"I never as much as owned one," he said. "Why?"

"You're coming for a little walk with me," said Peter; "and I'd like to carry your baggage."

Dappy's face twitched.

"You've made a mistake, haven't you?"

Peter shook his head.

"It's a cop," he said. "I think we've got you right this time. If you are wise, you will stand your trial for the Trust and Security Company affair as well."

A police car was awaiting them when they went out, and ten minutes later Dappy sat with four detectives.

He had been betrayed, he knew that. Somebody had squealed on him, and the situation was a desperate one. He never suspected Roony till the motorcar accident

was mentioned, and then he did not suspect—he knew.

"Roony Riall, eh? Well, you've got to prove it, gentlemen, and I don't think you can. The only thing I'd like to ask you"—he addressed Peter—"is that my young lady should know nothing about this."

Peter smiled and shook his head.

"What your young lady doesn't know about this isn't worth knowing," he said. "She is a friend of Riall's—a little more than a friend, I should imagine." They told him the truth brutally, thinking it would break him. He heard for the first time the true history of Canadian Lil. Peter saw his face go white.

Nobody knew better than the men who questioned him that, even with the evidence of the squealer, Dappy could not be convicted unless he convicted himself, but he was steadfast in his refusal to hand himself over to his enemies.

"It is pretty certain that the stuff is buried somewhere," said the chief. "Dappy is a born mole —he got a Distinguished Conduct Medal in the War for his mining work; he knows more about blasting than most miners, and you'll probably find that somewhere in England is a real Ali Baba's cave."

But if there was, Dappy was blandly ignorant of its existence. More likely, if a search had been made of the coastwise barges that went down London river by night and put into Ostend with loads of English brick, the police might have touched lucky; but nobody knew till years after that Dappy had three barges and a wharf of his own, and then the information came a little too late to be of much use.

Nevertheless, it was true, as the chief said, that he was a great digger and was an expert in the use of high explosives.

They searched his lodging without result. Every railway parcels office came under examination. Peter, who was in control of one of these search parties, never expected to find the evidence he sought. No man organized the disposal of his stuff so efficiently as Dappy.

Peter sent for Roony Riall, who came to his office. Roony was less confident.

"I tell you I was in it, Sergeant. I wouldn't own that unless it was true, would I? He worked four-handed, had two men down from Birmingham, and there was a seafaring fellow who drove the big car. I only saw him and Dappy. No, I don't know the names of the others. After the bust he went straight to his hotel. You found his car? Well, maybe the stuff is under the seat."

He looked a little anxious, Peter thought, and then his uneasiness was expressed in words.

"Does he know I've squealed?"

Peter nodded, and to his surprise Roony was not distressed.

"Does he know about Lil?"

There was something in his voice which arrested Peter's attention.

"Why?" he asked.

"She'd get it out of him in a couple of days," said Roony eagerly. "He's mad about her!"

It was then that Peter realized that he and his fellow questioners had probably committed a bad blunder when they had played Lil.

"She's in this squeak with me," Roony went on eagerly. "We split the reward."

"It looks as though there will be a whole lot to split," said Peter sardonically.

There was nothing to do but release Dappy Lyon. He could have been charged on suspicion and a remand granted, but if, at the end of the remand period, the police could offer no further evidence, there would be a discharge, and the failure of Scotland Yard would be emphasized.

Dappy was released from detention. It was remarkable that he did not employ a lawyer, and contributed nothing but his inhibitions to his salvation.

On the night he was freed Peter saw him in the West End, and, to his amazement, Lil was with him. She walked a little way from them when Peter stopped him.

"I am not believing that story about Miss Mortimer," said Dappy. "She has been bringing food to me ever since I have been inside — she's a woman in a thousand."

Peter sighed wearily.

"It must be easy to be a master criminal, with brains like yours!" he said.

Dappy spent a week in or about London, and the girl seemed to be with him every minute. They used to go for long motor-car drives together into the country—and a flying squad car, in some disguise or other, was never far behind.

One morning Dappy surprised them. He came out driving a newer and a faster car, outdistanced his shadows, heading northward. He was seen passing through Woodford. An hour later the officers were holding a consultation in the town of Epping when he appeared. Where he had been in the meantime nobody knew.

They searched his car but found nothing. That same week he left England for the Continent, and Miss Mortimer went with him.

As a matter of precaution Roony Riall had been kept under observation until Dappy disappeared. For there were odd stories told about this mild little man—Dappy was a killer, some

people insisted, though Scotland Yard could never connect him with anything as romantic as murder.

Peter, being what he was, had no use for men who saw in crime of any sort the least hint of romance. He was trained in the traditions of the Yard, and the Yard, in the eyes of its staff, is not a place where unusual things happen.

If you asked the oldest inhabitant what were the most remarkable happenings within his memory, he would (after long thought) cite the inspector who cut his finger with a piece of glass and fainted, or the day the Commissioner's dog bit the clerk in the Records Department, or possibly the occasion when half the staff went sick through eating bad fish.

But of murderers who had sat in poky little rooms and told the stories of their villainies, of confessions signed with trembling hands, of great robbers who had detailed their *coups* to the chief, he would remember nothing.

Peter went to Berlin to supply certain information about the brothers Poliski, and his visit had nothing whatever to do with Dappy and his misdeeds. In the red building on Alexanderplatz he exchanged reminiscences with men of his own profession, and told them how badly the central heating was run in London, while they in turn remarked upon the amazing stinginess of the government in the matter of stationery.

Peter was in Berlin for seven days, spending most of his time in the Criminal Museum. One day he was walking up Unter den Linden, ruminating upon the system of traffic control, when, coming towards him, he saw Dappy Lyon. Dappy wore an elegant fur coat, though the weather was warm, lemon-colored gloves, and patent shoes, and swung a gold-headed cane. He paused to look into a jeweler's window, and when Peter passed him he was humming "Ich liebe dich" sentimentally.

"Hello, Dap!"

Dappy looked round—he was only mildly interested in the presence of the detective.

"Doing Germany?"

"I am just having a look round." Dappy waved his hand airily to embrace all Germany. "I have never been in this country before."

"Museums and what-nots," suggested Peter politely. "You should have a look at Police Headquarters—very interesting. There are a number of scientific burglars' tools which may be new to you."

Dappy smiled indulgently.

"No more of that for me, Mr. —Sir Peter—"

"Call me Sergeant," suggested Peter. "Let us be democratic in this republican land."

"I have given up what I would describe as my career of crime," said Dappy. "I am getting married soon to one of the best girls in the world, and I'm going in for a motorcar agency. In fact, I am here in Berlin seeing my representative, a fellow named Harry Brown."

"A good old German name that. One of the Browns of Brandenburg? Or is he a Von Brown of Silesia?"

Dappy was amused.

"He's got an office on Leipzigerstrasse — telephones, clurks, everything." And then, as he saw the lift of the detective's eyebrows, he went on quickly: "He's not in Berlin just now—doing a bit of traveling—or I'd interduce you."

"The loss is mine. Where are you staying?"

Dappy named a hotel in Kurfürstendamm, where hotels are both good and expensive. He was quite at his ease, by no means perturbed at the outrageous appearance of one who, he had every right to expect, was hundreds of miles away. It struck Peter that he was neither uncomfortable nor alarmed. He was an innocent man, conscious of his temporary virtues.

Peter went back to the Adlon in a speculative mood.

"The office" did not allow Adlon accommodation, but Peter never stinted himself in the matter of comfort. His first act was to put through a call to Dappy's hotel. He found, as he had expected, that the little man had spoken the truth. He was staying at the hotel and occupied a suite which could not have cost him less than a fiver a day. And Miss Mortimer was living at the same hotel.

Peter saw them driving in the Tiergarten in the cool of the evening, and he himself did not escape observation.

"That's Dunn, isn't it?" asked the girl.

Dappy nodded. He was toying with her hand absently.

"The man who said I was—a bad woman? Where did he get that nerve?"

"Just trying to rattle me, my love," said Dappy. "He isn't a bad fellow—"

She was not disposed to discuss so uninteresting a matter as Peter Dunn, and came back to the subject that his appearance had interrupted.

"I never did believe you were a burglar, Dicky," she said. "And even if you were, why shouldn't you be? Pa always says that property isn't distributed like it should be. I wouldn't mind if you were a crook—really! But I know, of course, that you are not. How could you have got rid of all that jake—money, I mean—Pa always calls it jake—without the police knowing? You would have to be a mighty clever burglar to do that!"

The bait of crude flattery had been cast in front of him before. This time he bit.

"Oh, wouldn't I? You don't know me! Listen, kid." He turned to her with sudden energy. "I don't know what this fellow Dunn is doing in Berlin. Maybe he has got something on me." He paused and frowned. "If I thought so I'd tell you something." He patted her hand. "I don't want my little girl to be left without money. I've got twelve thousand pounds—that's sixty thousand dollars—cached near London, and in case anything happens to me I am going to tell you just where it is. Sixty thousand dollars of real money!"

She was breathing quickly. He was easier than she thought.

"You'd find it, because I have got the whole thing laid out."

He lowered his voice, although there was nobody to hear him except the taxicab driver, who certainly spoke German and probably spoke Russian. "Remember how you and me went sweethearting to that wood—Epping Forest?"

She nodded.

"Remember my carving the letters of our names on that big tree?"

She nodded again. She could find the place blindfold. It was a little off and close to a side road, and the tree stood in the center of a grassy clearing; the names had been cut largely, if awkwardly, and between them an odd-looking triangle which was designed for a heart.

"It is at the foot of that tree. You couldn't miss it." And then, unexpectedly: "Are you fond of Roony?"

She was fonder than she would admit, for Mr. Rooney Riall had been very attentive since she came to England. They, too, had planned a little trip together.

"Where did you get that idea?" she said scornfully. "I have got one boy in this whole wide world, and that's my Dicky."

Dappy sighed — she hoped happily.

He had some work to do and left her in the sitting room, telling her he would be out for at least two hours.

He was hardly out of the hotel before "Miss Mortimer" went to the telephone and put through a London call. It was half-past ten in the evening, which is half-past nine in London, and the line was clear; she was through to Roony in ten minutes.

"Got it?" said his anxious voice. "My God, you never have! Did he tell you about the Trust and Security—"

"Trust nothing!" she answered brusquely. "Get a paper and put this down. Sixty thousand for the lifting! You know the main road to Epping through that wood?"

Her instructions were very explicit and not to be mistaken.

Roony Riall wrote feverishly and read back to her the instructions she had given.

At that moment Dappy was in Peter Dunn's sitting room at the Adlon. There was a whiskey-and-soda on the table before him, and he was being confidential.

"I am leaving her, Sergeant; in fact, my baggage is at the station. I don't think that Miss Mortimer and me will get on together. No, I'm playing fair—I never left a woman flat in my life. I have paid the hotel bill and stuck five thousand marks under her pillow. A bachelor I live and die, Sergeant. Women can be useful, but not in my line of business."

"When are you going?" asked Peter.

"To tell you the truth—tonight," replied Dappy. He smiled faintly. "Clever fellow, Roony Riall, cleverer than me!"

At eleven o'clock that night an Essex policeman saw a car turn from the main Epping road and stop a little distance down a side road. He watched the car for some time, but it was too dark to see the man who alighted and, with the aid of a hand lamp, made a search for a certain tree. Later the policeman saw the flash of the lamp and was walking towards it when he saw a flash of white flame and felt the shock of a terrific explosion that almost blew him off his feet. When he recovered balance and wits, he ran in the direction of the sound.

There was a big hole at the foot of the tree. The force of the explosion had stripped away the bark, and with it certain initials carved sentimentally. Three policemen searched all night to find fragments of an unknown man who had exploded the mine which an ex-Corporal of Engineers had so skillfully buried.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND CRIMINOLOGY

Some day a paper will undoubtedly be written on the very real influence of Sherlock Holmes on police procedure and criminology. Hans Gross's CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION, often referred to as "the basis of every present-day police system," was not published until 1891, when two Holmes novels had already appeared. Holmes anticipated Gross in several instances, including the use of plaster of paris to preserve footprints. More recently, Dr. Edmond Locard, French criminologist, has been quoted as saying that, "I hold that a police expert, or an examining magistrate, would not find it a waste of his time to read Doyle's novels. If, in the police laboratory at Lyons, we are interested in any unusual way in this problem of dust, it is because of having absorbed ideas found in Gross and Conan Doyle." Brigadier General Washington Platt, USAR Ret., in his STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE PRODUCTION (Praeger, 1957) refers frequently to Holmes and to his contributions to the subject.

the night of stranglers

by . . . Rafael Sabatini

Andreas shouted that he was being murdered. There was no answer — answer enough. The silken noose was tightened. . . .

CHARLES, Duke of Durazzo, was one of your super chess-players, handling kings and queens, knights and prelates to flesh and blood in the game that he played with Destiny upon the dark board of Neapolitan politics. And he had no illusions on the score of the forfeit that would be claimed by his grim opponent in the event of his own defeat. He knew that his head was the stake he set upon the board, and he knew, too, that defeat must inevitably follow upon a single false move. Yet he played boldly and craftily, as you shall judge.

He made his first move in March of 1343, some three months after the death of Robert of Anjou, King of Jerusalem and Sicily, as ran the title of the ruler of Naples. He found his opportunity amid the appalling anarchy into which the kingdom was then plunged as a result of a wrong and an ill-judged attempt to right it.

Good King Robert the Wise had wrested the crown of Naples

Rafael Sabatini (1875-1950) was born in Jesi, a small city in the Italian marches known for its medieval walls, ancient cathedrals and crumbling palaces. Educated in Switzerland and Portugal—tall, with flashing eyes and "the features of one of his own Cesares," Sabatini was the author of BARDELYS THE MAGNIFICENT *(1906),* THE LIFE OF CESARE BORGIA *(1912),* CAPTAIN BLOOD *(1922),* THE NUPTIALS OF CORBAL *(1927),* SCARAMOUCHE *(1938), etc.*

From: THE HISTORICAL NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENT, 1923, Houghton Mifflin Company.
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from his elder brother, the King of Hungary, and had ruled as a usurper. Perhaps to quiet his conscience, perhaps to ensure against future strife between his own and his brother's descendants, he had attempted to right the wrong by a marriage between his brother's grandson Andreas and his own granddaughter Giovanna, a marriage which had taken place ten years before, when Andreas was but seven years of age and Giovanna five.

The aim had been thus to weld into one the two branches of the House of Anjou. Instead, the rivalry was to be rendered more acute than ever, and King Robert's fear of some such result contributed to it not a little. On his deathbed he summoned the Princes of the Blood—the members of the Houses of Durazzo and Taranto—and the chief nobles of the kingdom, demanding of them an oath of allegiance to Giovanna, and himself appointing a Council of Regency to govern the kingdom during her minority.

The consequence was that, against all that had been intended when the marriage was contracted, Giovanna was now proclaimed queen in her own right, and the government taken over in her name by the appointed council. Instantly the Court of Naples was divided into two camps, the party of the Queen, including the Neapolitan nobility, and the party of Andreas of Hungary, consisting of the Hungarian nobles forming his train and a few malcontent Neapolitan barons, and guided by the sinister figure of Andreas' preceptor, Friar Robert.

This arrogant friar, of whom Petrarch has left us a vivid portrait, a red-faced, red-bearded man, with a fringe of red hair about his tonsure, short and squat of figure, dirty in his dress and habits, yet imbued with the pride of Lucifer despite his rags, thrust himself violently into the Council of Regency, demanding a voice in the name of his pupil Andreas. And the Council feared him, not only on the score of his overbearing personality, but also because he was supported by the populace, which had accepted his general filthiness as the outward sign of holiness. His irruption occasioned so much trouble and confusion that in the end the Pope intervened, in his quality as Lord Paramount—Naples being a fief of Holy Church—and appointed a legate to rule the kingdom during Giovanna's minority.

The Hungarians, with Andreas' brother, King Ludwig of Hungary, at their head, now appealed to the Papal Court of Avignon for a Bull commanding the joint coronation of Andreas and Giovanna, which would be tantamount to placing the government in the hands of Andreas. The Neapolitans, headed by the

Princes of the Blood—who, standing next in succession, had also their own interests to consider—clamored that Giovanna alone should be crowned.

In this pass were the affairs of the kingdom when Charles of Durazzo, who had stood watchful and aloof, carefully weighing the chances, resolved at last to play that dangerous game of his. He began by the secret abduction of Maria of Anjou, his own cousin and Giovanna's sister, a child of fourteen. He kept her concealed for a month in his palace, while he obtained from the Pope, through the good offices of his uncle the Cardinal of Périgord, a dispensation to overcome the barrier of consanguinity. That dispensation obtained, Charles married the girl publicly under the eyes of all Naples, and by the marriage—to which the bride seemed nowise unwilling—became, by virtue of his wife, next heir to the crown of Naples.

That was his opening move. His next was to write to his obliging uncle the Cardinal of Périgord, whose influence at Avignon was very considerable, urging him to prevail upon Pope Clement VI not to sign the Bull in favor of Andreas and the joint coronation.

Now, the high-handed action of Charles in marrying Maria of Anjou had very naturally disposed Giovanna against him; further, it had disposed against him those Princes of the Blood who were next in the succession, and upon whom he had stolen a march by this strengthening of his own claims. It is inevitable to assume that he had counted precisely upon this to afford him the pretext that he sought—he, a Neapolitan prince—to ally himself with the Hungarian intruder.

Under any other circumstances his advances must have been viewed with suspicion by Andreas, and still more by the crafty Friar Robert. But, under the circumstances which his guile had created, he was received with open arms by the Hungarian party, and his defection from the Court of Giovanna was counted a victory by the supporters of Andreas. He protested his goodwill towards Andreas, and proclaimed his hatred of Giovanna's partisans, who poisoned her mind against her husband. He hunted and drank with Andreas—whose life seems to have been largely made up of hunting and drinking—and pandered generally to the rather gross tastes of this foreigner, whom in his heart he despised for a barbarian.

From being a boon companion, Charles very soon became a counsellor to the young prince, and the poisonous advice that he gave seemed shrewd and good, even to Friar Robert.

"Meet hostility with hostility, ride ruthlessly upon your own way, showing yourself confident

of the decision in your favor that the Pope must ultimately give. For bear ever in your mind that you are King of Naples, not by virtue of your marriage with Giovanna, but in your own right, Giovanna being but the offspring of the usurping branch."

The pale bovine eyes of Andreas would kindle into something like intelligence, and a flush would warm his stolid countenance. He was a fair-haired young giant, white-skinned and well-featured, but dull-looking, with cold, hard eyes suggesting the barbarian that he was considered by the cultured Neapolitans, and that he certainly looked by contrast with them. Friar Robert supporting the Duke of Durazzo's advice, Andreas did not hesitate to act upon it; of his own authority he delivered prisoners from gaol, showered honors upon his Hungarian followers and upon such Neapolitan barons as Count Altamura, who was ill-viewed at Court, and generally set the Queen at defiance. The inevitable result, upon which again the subtle Charles had counted, was to exasperate a group of her most prominent nobles into plotting the ruin of Andreas.

It was a good beginning, and unfortunately Giovanna's own behavior afforded Charles the means of further speeding up his game.

The young Queen was under the governance of Filippa the Catanese, an evil woman, greedy of power. This Filippa, once a washerwoman, had in her youth been chosen for her splendid health to be the foster-mother of Giovanna's father. Beloved of her foster-child, she had become perpetually installed at Court, married to a wealthy Moor named Cabane, who was raised to the dignity of Grand Seneschal of the kingdom, whereby the sometime washerwoman found herself elevated to the rank of one of the first ladies of Naples. She must have known how to adapt herself to her new circumstances, otherwise she would hardly have been appointed, as she was upon the death of her foster-son, governess to his infant daughters. Later, to ensure her hold upon the young Queen, and being utterly unscrupulous in her greed of power, she had herself contrived that her son, Robert of Cabane, became Giovanna's lover.

One of Giovanna's first acts upon her grandfather's death had been to create this Robert Count of Evoli, and this notwithstanding that in the meantime he had been succeeded in her favor by the handsome young Bertrand d'Artois. This was the group—the Catanese, her son, and Bertrand—that, with the Princes of the Blood, governed the Queen's party.

With what eyes Andreas may

have looked upon all this we have no means of determining. Possibly, engrossed as he was with his hawks and his hounds, he may have been stupidly blind to his own dishonor, at least as far as Bertrand was concerned. Another than Charles might have chosen the crude course of opening his eyes to it. But Charles was too far-seeing. Precipitancy was not one of his faults. His next move must be dictated by the decision of Avignon regarding the coronation.

This decision came in July of 1345, and it fell like a thunderbolt upon the Court. The Pope had pronounced in favor of Andreas by granting the Bull for the joint coronation of Andreas and Giovanna.

This was check to Charles. His uncle the Cardinal of Périgord had done his utmost to oppose the measure, but he had been overborne in the end by Ludwig of Hungary, who had settled the matter by the powerful argument that he was himself the rightful heir to the crown of Naples, and that he relinquished his claim in favor of his younger brother. He had backed the argument by the payment to the Pope of the enormous sum, for those days, of one hundred thousand gold crowns, and the issue, obscure hitherto, had immediately become clear to the Papal Court.

It was check to Charles, as I have said. But Charles braced himself, and considered the counter-move that should give him the advantage. He went to congratulate Andreas, and found him swollen with pride and arrogance in his triumph.

"Be welcome, Charles," he hailed Durazzo. "I am not the man to forget those who have stood my friends whilst my power was undecided."

"For your own sake," said the smooth Charles, as he stepped back from that brotherly embrace, "I trust you'll not forget those who have been your enemies, and who, being desperate now, may take desperate means to avert your coronation."

The pale eyes of the Hungarian glittered.

"Of whom do you speak?"

Charles smoothed his black beard thoughtfully, his dark eyes narrowed and pensive. There must be a victim, to strike fear into Giovanna's friends and stir them to Charles' purposes.

"Why, first and foremost, I should place Giovanna's counsellor Isernia, that man of law whose evil counsels have hurt your rights as king. Next come—"

But here Charles craftily paused and looked away, a man at fault.

"Next?" cried Andreas. "Who next? Speak out!"

The Duke shrugged.

"By the Passion, there is no lack of others. You have enemies

to spare among the Queen's friends."

Andreas paled under his faint tan. He flung back his crimson robe as if he felt the heat, and stood forth, lithe as a wrestler, in his close-fitting *côte-hardie* and hose of violet silk.

"No need, indeed, to name them," he said fiercely.

"None," Charles agreed. "But the most dangerous is Isernia. Whilst he lives you walk amid swords. His death may spread a panic that will paralyze the others."

He would say no more, knowing that he had said enough to send Andreas, scowling and sinister, to sow terror in hearts that guilt must render uneasy now, amongst which hearts be sure that he counted Giovanna's own.

Andreas took counsel with Friar Robert. Touching Isernia, there was evidence and to spare that he was dangerous, and so Isernia fell on the morrow to an assassin's sword as he was in the very act of leaving the Castel Nuovo, and it was Charles himself who bore word of it to the Court, and so plunged it into consternation.

They walked in the cool of evening in the pleasant garden of the Castel Nuovo, when Charles came upon them and touched the stalwart shoulder of Bertrand d'Artois. Bertrand the favorite eyed him askance, mistrusting and disliking him for his association with Andreas.

"The Hungarian boar," said Charles, "is sharpening his tusks now that his authority is assured by the Holy Father."

"Who cares?" sneered Bertrand.

"Should you care if I added that already he has blooded them?"

Bertrand changed countenance. The Duke explained himself.

"He has made a beginning upon Giacomo d'Isernia. Ten minutes ago he was stabbed to death within a stone's-throw of the castle." So Charles unburdened himself of his news. "A beginning, no more."

"My God!" said Bertrand. "D'Isernia! Heaven rest him." And devoutly he crossed himself.

"Heaven will rest some more of you if you suffer Andreas of Hungary to be its instrument," said Charles, his lips grimly twisted.

"Do you threaten?"

"Nay, man; be not so hot and foolish. I warn. I know this mood. I know what he intends."

"You ever had his confidence," said Bertrand, sneering.

"Until this hour I had. But there's an end to that. I am a prince of Naples, and I'll not bend the knee to a barbarian. He was well enough to hunt with and drink with, so long as he was Duke of Calabria with no prospect of being more. But that he

should become my king, and that our lady Giovanna should be no more than a queen consort—" He made a gesture of ineffable disgust.

Bertrand's eyes kindled. He gripped the other's arm, and drew him along under a trellis of vines that formed a green cloister about the walls.

"Why, here is great news for our Queen," he cried. "It will rejoice her, my lord, to know you are loyal to her."

"That is no matter," he replied. "What matters is that you should be warned—you, yourself in particular, and Evoli. No doubt there will be others, too. But the Hungarian's confidences went no further."

Bertrand had come to a standstill. He stared at Charles, and slowly the color left his face.

"Me?" he said, a finger on his heart.

"Ay, you. You will be the next. But not until the crown is firmly on his brow. Then he will settle his score with the nobles of Naples who have withstood him. Listen," and Charles' voice sank as if under the awful burden of his news; "a black banner of vengeance is to precede him to his coronation. And your name stands at the head of the list of the proscribed. Does it surprise you? After all, he is a husband, and he has some knowledge of what lies between the Queen and you—"

"Stop!"

"Pish!" Charles shrugged. "What need for silence upon what all Naples knows? When have you and the Queen ever used discretion? In your place I should not need a warning. I should know what to expect from a husband become king."

"The Queen must be told."

"Indeed, I think so, too. It will come best from you. Go tell her, so that measures may be taken. But go secretly and warily. You are safe until he wears the crown. And above all—whatever you may decide—do nothing here in Naples."

And on that he turned to depart, whilst Bertrand sped to Giovanna. On the threshold of the garden Charles paused and looked back. His eyes sought and found the Queen, a tall, lissome girl of seventeen, in a close-fitting, revealing gown of purple silk, the high, white gorget outlining an oval face of a surpassing loveliness, crowned by a wealth of copper-colored hair. She was standing in a stricken attitude, looking up into the face of her lover, who was delivering himself of his news.

Charles departed satisfied.

Three days later a man of the Queen's household, one Melazzo, who was in Duke Charles's pay, brought him word that the seed he had cast had fallen upon fertile soil. A conspiracy to destroy the King had been laid by Ber-

trand d'Artois, Robert of Cabane, Count of Evoli, and the latter's brothers-in-law, Terlizzi and Morcone. Melazzo himself, for his notorious affection for the Queen, had been included in this band, and also a man named Pace, who was body-servant to Andreas, and who, like Melazzo, was in Charles' pay.

Charles of Durazzo smiled gently to himself. The game went excellently well.

"The Court," he said, "goes to Aversa for a month before the coronation. That would be a favorable season to their plan. Advise it so."

The date appointed for the coronation was September 20. A month before—on August 20—the Court removed itself from the heat and reek of Naples to the cooler air of Aversa, there to spend the time of waiting. They were housed in the monastery of St. Peter, which had been converted as far as possible into a royal residence for the occasion.

On the night of their arrival there the refectory of the monastery was transfigured to accommodate the numerous noble and very jovial company assembled there to sup. The long, stone-flagged room, lofty and with windows set very high, normally so bare and austere, and hung now with tapestries, and the floor strewn with rushes that were mingled with lemon verbena and other aromatic herbs. Along the lateral walls and across the end of the room that faced the double doors were set the stone tables of the spartan monks, on a shallow daïs that raised them above the level of the floor. These tables were gay now with the gleam of crystal and the glitter of gold and silver plate. Along one side of them, their backs to the walls, sat the ladies and nobles of the Court. The vaulted ceiling was rudely frescoed to represent the open heavens—the work of a brother whose brush was more devout than cunning—and there was the inevitable *cenacolo* above the Abbot's table at the upper end of the room.

At this table sat the royal party, the broad-shouldered Andreas of Hungary, slightly asprawl, his golden mane somewhat tumbled now, for he was drinking deeply in accordance with his barbarian habit; ever and anon he would fling down a bone or a piece of meat to the liver-colored hounds that crouched expectant on the rushes of the floor.

They had hunted that day in the neighborhood of Capua, and Andreas had acquitted himself well, and was in high good-humor, giving now little thought to the sinister things that Charles of Durazzo had lately whispered, laughing and jesting with the traitor Morcone at his side. Behind him in close attendance stood his servant Pace, once a creature of Durazzo's. The Queen

sat on his right, making but poor pretence to eat; her lovely young face was of a ghostly pallor, her dark eyes were wide and staring. Among the guests were the black-browed Evoli and his brother-in-law, Terlizzi; Bertrand of Artois and his father; Melazzo, that other creature of Charles's, and Filippa the Catanese, handsome and arrogant, but oddly silent tonight.

But Charles of Durazzo was not of the company. It is not for the player, himself, to become a piece upon the board.

He had caught a whisper that the thing he had so slyly prompted to Bertrand d'Artois was to be done here at Aversa, and so Charles had remained at Naples. He had discovered very opportunely that his wife was ailing, and he developed such concern for her that he could not bring himself to leave her side. He had excused himself to Andreas with a thousand regrets, since what he most desired was to enjoy with him the cool, clean air of Aversa and the pleasures of the chase; and he had presented the young King at parting with the best of all his falcons in earnest of affection and disappointment.

The night wore on, and at last, at a sign from the Queen, the ladies rose and departed to their beds. The men settled down again. The cellarers redoubled their activities, the flagons circulated more briskly, and the noise they made must have disturbed the monks entrenched in their cells against these earthly vanities. The laughter of Andreas grew louder and more vacuous, and when at last he heaved himself up at midnight and departed to bed, that he might take some rest against the morrow's hunt, he staggered a little in his walk.

But there were other hunters there whose impatience could not keep until the morrow, whose game was to be run to death that very night. They waited—Bertrand d'Artois, Robert of Cabane, the Counts of Terlizzi and Morcone, Melazzo and Andreas' body-servant Pace — until all those who lay at Aversa were deep in slumber. Then at two o'clock in the morning they made their stealthy way to the loggia on the third floor, a long colonnaded gallery above the Abbot's garden. They paused a moment before the Queen's door which opened upon this gallery, then crept on to that of the King's room at the other end. It was Pace who rapped sharply on the panels thrice before he was answered by a sleepy growl from the other side.

"It is I—Pace—my lord," he announced. "A courier has arrived from Naples, from Friar Robert, with instant messages."

From within there was a noisy yawn, a rustle, the sound of an overturning stool, and, lastly, the rasp of a bolt being withdrawn.

The door opened, and in the faint light of the dawning day Andreas appeared, drawing a fur-lined robe about his body, which was naked of all but a shirt.

He saw no one but Pace. The others had drawn aside into the shadows. Unsuspecting, he stepped forth.

"Where is this messenger?"

The door through which he had come slammed suddenly behind him, and he turned to see Melazzo in the act of bolting it with a dagger to prevent any one from following that way—for the room had another door opening upon the inner corridor.

Instead, Melazzo might have employed his dagger to stab Andreas behind, and so have made an instant end. But it happened to be known that Andreas wore an amulet—a ring that his mother had given him—which rendered him invulnerable to steel or poison. And such was the credulity of his age, such the blind faith of those men in the miraculous power of that charm, that none of them so much as attempted to test it with a dagger. It was for the same reason that no recourse was had to the still easier method of disposing of him by poison. Accepting the amulet at its legendary value, the conspirators had resolved that he must be strangled.

As he turned now they leapt upon him, and, taking him unawares, bore him to the ground before he could realize what was happening. Here they grappled with him, and he with them. He was endowed with the strength of a young bull, and he made full use of it. He rose, beating them off, to be borne down again, bellowing the while for help. He smote out blindly, and stretched Morcone half senseless with a blow of his great fist.

Seeing how difficult he proved to strangle, they must have cursed that amulet of his. He struggled to his knees again, then to his feet, and, at last, with bleeding face, leaving tufts of his fair hair in their murderous hands, he broke through and went bounding down the loggia, screaming as he ran, until he came to his wife's door. Against that he hurled himself, calling her.

"Giovanna! Giovanna! For the love of God crucified! Open! Open! I am being murdered!"

From within came no answer —utter silence.

"Giovanna! Giovanna!" He beat frenziedly upon the door.

Still no answer, which yet was answer enough.

The stranglers, momentarily discomfited, scared, too, lest his cries should rouse the convent, had stood hesitating after he broke from them. But now Bertrand d'Artois, realizing that too much had been done already to admit of the business being left unfinished, sprang upon him sud-

denly again. Locked in each other's arms, those wrestlers swayed and panted in the loggia for a moment, then with a crash went down, Bertrand on top, Andreas striking his head against the stone floor as he fell. The Queen's lover pinned him there, kneeling upon his breast.

"The rope!" he panted to the others who came up.

One of them threw him a coil of purple silk interwrought with gold thread, in which a running noose had been tied. Bertrand slipped it over Andreas' head, drew it taut, and held it so, despite the man's desperate, convulsive struggles. The others came to his assistance. Amongst them they lifted the writhing victim to the parapet of the loggia, and flung him over; whilst Bertrand Cabane, and Pace bore upon the rope, arresting his fall, and keeping him suspended there until he should be dead. Melazzo and Morcone came to assist them, and it was then that Cabane observed that Terlizzi held aloof, as if filled with horror.

Peremptorily he called to him:

"Hither, and lend a hand! The rope is long enough to afford you a grip. We want accomplices, not witnesses, Lord Count."

Terlizzi obeyed, and then the ensuing silence was broken suddenly by screams from the floor below—the screams of a woman who slept in the room immediately underneath, who had awakened to behold in the gray light of the breaking day the figure of a man kicking and writhing at a rope's end before her window.

Yet a moment the startled stranglers kept their grip of the rope until the struggles at the end of it had ceased; then they loosed their hold and let the body go plunging down into the Abbot's garden. Thereafter they scattered and fled, for people were stirring now in the convent, aroused by the screams of the woman.

Thrice, so the story runs, came the monks to the Queen's door to knock and demand her orders for the disposal of the body of her husband without receiving any answer to their question. It remained still unanswered when later in the day she departed from Aversa in a closed litter, and returned to Naples escorted by a company of lancers, and for lack of instructions the monks left the body in the Abbot's garden, where it had fallen, until Charles of Durazzo came to remove it two days later.

Ostentatiously he bore to Naples the murdered prince—whose death he had so subtly inspired—and in the cathedral before the Hungarians, whom he had assembled, and in the presence of a vast concourse of the people, he solemnly swore over the body vengeance upon the murderers.

Having made a cat's-paw of Giovanna—through the person

of her lover, Bertrand d'Artois, and his confederate assassins—and thus cleared away one of those who stood between himself and the throne, he now sought to make a cat's-paw of Justice to clear away the other.

Meanwhile, days grew into weeks and weeks into months, and no atttempt was made by the Queen to hunt out the murderers of her husband, no inquiry instituted. Bertrand d'Artois, it is true, had fled with his father to their stronghold of St. Agatha for safety. But the others—Cabane, Terlizzi, and Morcone—continued unabashed about Giovanna's person at the Castel Nuovo.

Charles wrote to Ludwig of Hungary, and to the Pope, demanding that justice should be done, and pointing out the neglect of all attempt to perform it in the kingdom itself, and inviting them to construe for themselves that neglect. As a consequence, Clement VI issued, on June 2 of the following year, a Bull, whereby Bertrand des Baux, the Grand Justiciary of Naples, was commanded to hunt down and punish the assassins, against whom—at the same time—the Pope launched a second Bull, of excommunication. But the Holy Father accompanied his commands to Des Baux by a private note, wherein he straitly enjoined the Grand Justiciary for reasons of State to permit nothing to transpire that might reflect upon the Queen.

Des Baux set about his task at once, and inspired, no doubt, by Charles, proceeded to the arrest of Melazzo and the servant Pace. It was not for Charles to accuse the Queen or even any of her nobles, whereby he might have aroused against himself the opposition of those who were her loyal partisans. Sufficient for him to point out the two meanest of the conspirators, and depend upon the torture to wring from them confessions that must gradually pull down the rest, and in the end Giovanna herself.

Terlizzi, alive to his danger when he heard of the arrest of those two, made a bold and desperate attempt to avert it. Riding forth with a band of followers, he attacked the escort that was bearing Pace to prison. The prisoner was seized, but not to be rescued. All that Terlizzi wanted was his silence. By his orders the wretched man's tongue was torn out, whereupon he was abandoned once more to his guards and his fate.

Had Terlizzi been able to carry out his intentions of performing the like operation upon Melazzo, Charles might have been placed in a difficult position. So much, however, did not happen, and the horrible deed upon Pace was in vain. Put to the question, Melazzo denounced Terlizzi, and together with him Cabane, Morcone, and

the others. Further, his confession incriminated Filippa, the Catanese, and her two daughters, the wives of Terlizzi and Morcone. Of the Queen, however, he said nothing, because, one of the lesser conspirators, little more than a servant like Pace, he can have had no knowledge of the Queen's complicity.

The arrest of the others followed instantly, and, sentenced to death, they were publicly burned in the Square of Sant' Eligio, after suffering all the brutal, unspeakable horrors of fourteenth-century torture, which continued to the very scafford, with the alleged intention of inducing them to denounce any further accomplices. But though they writhed and fainted under the pincers of the executioners, they confessed nothing. Indeed, they preserved a silence which left the people amazed, for the people lacked the explanation. The Grand Justiciary, Hugh des Baux, had seen to it that the Pope's injunctions should be obeyed. Lest the condemned should say too much, he had taken the precaution of having their tongues fastened down with fish-hooks.

Thus Charles was momentarily baulked, and he was further baulked by the fact that Giovanna had taken a second husband, in her cousin, Louis of Taranto. Unless matters were to remain there and the game end in a stalemate, bold measures were required, and those measures Charles adopted. He wrote to the King of Hungary now openly accusing Giovanna of the murder, and pointing out the circumstances that in themselves afforded corroboration of his charge.

Those circumstances Ludwig embodied in a fulminating letter which he wrote to Giovanna in answer to her defense against the charge of inaction in the matter of her late husband's murderers:

"Giovanna, thy antecedent disorderly life, thy retention of the exclusive power in the kingdom, thy neglect of vengeance upon the murderers of thy husband, thy having taken another husband, and thy very excuses abundantly prove thy complicity in thy husband's death."

So far this was all as Charles of Durazzo could have desired it. But there was more. Ludwig was advancing now in arms to take possession of the kingdom, of which, under all the circumstances, he might consider himself the lawful heir, and the princes of Italy were affording him unhindered passage through their States. This was not at all to Charles' liking. Indeed, unless he bestirred himself, it might prove to be checkmate from an altogether unexpected quarter, rendering vain all the masterly play with which he had conducted the game so far.

It flustered him a little, and in

his haste to counter it he blundered.

Giovanna, alarmed at the rapid advance of Ludwig, summoned her barons to her aid, and in that summons she included Charles, realizing that at all costs he must be brought over to her side. He went, listened, and finally sold himself for a good price—the title of Duke of Calabria, which made him heir to the kingdom. He raised a powerful troop of lances, and marched upon Aquila, which had already hoisted the Hungarian banner.

There it was that he discovered, and soon, his move to have been a bad one. News was brought to him that the Queen, taken with panic, had fled to Provence, seeking sanctuary at Avignon.

Charles set about correcting his error without delay, and marched out of Aquila to go and meet Ludwig that he might protest his loyalty, and range himself under the invader's banner.

At Foligno, the King of Hungary was met by a papal legate, who in the name of Pope Clement forbade him under pain of excommunication to invade a fief of Holy Church.

"When I am master of Naples," answered Ludwig firmly, "I shall count myself a feudatory of the Holy See. Until then I render account to none but God and my conscience." And he pushed on, preceded by a black banner of death, scattering in true Hungarian fashion murder, rape, pillage, and arson through the smiling countryside, exacting upon the whole land a terrible vengeance for the murder of his brother.

Thus he came to Aversa, and there quartered himself and his Hungarians upon that convent of St. Peter where Andreas had been strangled a year ago. And it was here that he was joined by Charles, who came protesting loyalty, and whom the King received with open arms and a glad welcome, as was to be expected from a man who had been Andreas' one true friend in that land of enemies. Of Charles' indiscreet escapade in the matter of Aquila nothing was said. As Charles had fully expected, it was condoned upon the score both of the past and the present.

That night there was high feasting in that same refectory where Andreas had feasted on the night when the stranglers watched him, waiting, and where Charles was guest of honor. In the morning Ludwig was to pursue his march upon the city of Naples, and all were astir betimes.

On the point of setting out, Ludwig turned to Charles.

"Before I go," he said, "I have a mind to visit the spot where my brother died.

To Charles, no doubt, this seemed a morbid notion to be dis-

couraged. But Ludwig was insistent.

"Take me there," he bade the Duke.

"Indeed, I scarce know—I was not here, remember," Charles answered him, rendered faintly uneasy, perhaps by a certain grimness in the gaunt King's face, perhaps by the muttering of his own conscience.

"I know that you were not; but surely you must know the place. It will be known to all the world in these parts. Besides, was it not yourself recovered the body? Conduct me thither, then."

Perforce, then, Charles must do his will. Arm-in-arm they mounted the stairs to that sinister loggia, a half-dozen of Ludwig's escorting officers following.

They stepped along the tessellated floor above the Abbot's garden, flooded now with sunshine which drew the perfume from the roses blooming there.

"Here the King slept," said Charles, "and yonder the Queen. Somewhere here between the thing was done, and thence they hanged him."

Ludwig, tall and grim, stood considering, chin in hand. Suddenly he wheeled upon the Duke who stood at his elbow. His face had undergone a change, and his lip curled so that he displayed his strong teeth as a dog displays them when he snarls.

"Traitor!" he rasped. "It is you—you who come smiling and fawning upon me, and spurring me on to vengeance—who are to blame for what happened here."

"I?" Charles fell back, changing color, his legs trembling under him.

"You!" the King answered him furiously. "His death would never have come about but for your intrigues to keep him out of the royal power, to hinder his coronation."

"It is false!" cried Charles. "False! I swear it before God!"

"Perjured dog! Do you deny that you sought the aid of your precious uncle the Cardinal of Périgord to restrain the Pope from granting the Bull required?"

"I do deny it. The facts deny it. The Bull was forthcoming."

"Then your denial but proves your guilt," the King answered him, and from the leather pouch hanging from his belt, he pulled out a parchment, and held it under the Duke's staring eyes. It was the letter he had written to the Cardinal of Périgord, enjoining him to prevent the Pope from signing the Bull sanctioning Andreas' coronation.

The King smiled terribly into that white, twitching face.

"Deny it now," he mocked him. "Deny, too, that, bribed by the title of Duke of Calabria, you turned to the service of the Queen, to abandon it again for ours when you perceived your danger. You think to use us,

traitor, as a stepping-stone to help you to mount the throne—as you sought to use my brother even to the extent of encompassing his murder."

"No, no! I had no hand in that. I was his friend—"

"Liar!" Ludwig struck him across the mouth.

On the instant the officers of Ludwig laid hands upon the Duke, fearing that the indignity might spur him to quick retaliation.

"You are very opportune," said Ludwig; and added coldly, "Dispatch him."

Charles screamed a moment, even as Andreas had screamed on that same spot, when he found himself staring into the fearful face of death. Then the scream became a cough as a Hungarian sword went through him from side to side.

They picked up his body from the tessellated floor of the loggia, carried it to the parapet as Andreas' had been carried, and flung it down into the Abbot's garden as Andreas' had been flung. It lay in a rose-bush, dyeing the Abbot's roses a deeper red.

Never was justice more poetic.

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last year's bodies

by . . . Dorothy Dunn

THE wind cries around me now like a mournful dirge, sung by all the lost and lonely souls that have gone before me.

November is a sad time, anyway. It was always the saddest time. But more so this year. Madeline's voice rises in the wind's cry; and the low voice of Elizabeth; and the plaintive little-girl moan of Margaret. I hear their voices drifting back from last November, and I see them again, all three of them, covered with russet leaves that had fallen from the oaks near my cabin. Beautiful and dead, beneath the leaves.

I try to shut myself away from the wind and from my lost loves of last year. I loved all three, and I killed all three. All in one month. All in November.

I know that my winter is upon me, and there is nothing I can do about it. I know that I'll kill her.

And now, when the wind cries, the crying pierces my heart and I look at my wife, sitting in the pleasant living room of my cabin retreat, and it hurts me to look at her. Patricia is more fragile than Madeline, more beautiful than Elizabeth, and she loves me more than Margaret did.

She loves me with her eyes and her hands and with her deepest

What is in the mind of the murderer? How does he justify — explain away — or even boast of the act, and how does this act seem to him? Here is a hauntingly different story by Maine-born Dorothy Dunn, who has lived all over the country and is now teaching out in California.

dreams. She loves me with a great delicacy of heart, and I love her, too, as I loved the others—with a love too deep to be shared, too strong to be expressed.

I always love as much as I can and then the autumn comes and the wind cries and I know that my winter is upon me, and there is nothing I can do about it.

I wish the wind would stop, that I couldn't hear the crackle of dry leaves. I wish Patricia had not built the fire in the living room to take the chill out of the air. She looks so peaceful in the wingback chair, knitting the argyle socks for me. So peaceful, and so much my wife.

She hasn't been well this last week. I've worried about her, shown her every tender consideration, have loved her as gently as a man can love.

And now, if the wind keeps crying, I know that I'll kill her and pile the russet leaves around her white, dead body. But I don't want to kill her. Not yet. This is only the first of November. There are twenty-nine more days, and she is more beautiful than the others. She has gone deeper into my heart. She is my wife and the others were not; the others were just moods that lasted only a day or a week.

I pulled an ottoman up to her chair and laid my head against her breast with a sigh. The knitting fell to her lap and then I could feel her cool hands, moving across my temples, smoothing my hair, setting my neck alive.

"Tired, Max? Head ache? There was pain in your eyes when you came into the room. What is it, dear?"

"Not that kind of pain, Patricia. Not the kind you know. But there's a deep ache in my heart tonight that hurts terribly."

"Now, Max. You know I never understand you when you get to talking strangely. Aren't you happy with me?"

I had this inner agony. I was sure she could sense it. I made her look at me.

"You know I'm happy with you! This is something else. Look deeply, Patricia. Look all the way down into the burning core of my being, and you'll know the sadness, the pity . . ."

"Stop it, Max!"

I was trembling, trying to take her into my arms to ease the pain, to see if she could make me forget what I have to do.

She pushed me away. Gently, to be sure, but she shouldn't have withdrawn from me. Not then. Not at the very moment that might have made everything all right!

"You talk like your poetry sometimes, Max. You know it scares me. Please just be your sweet, normal self. I've been waiting here by the fire for you, Max, because it's such a gray night outside. So don't be com-

plicated, dear. Save that for your books. Just be yourself with me."

I stood up, feeling gauche and hurt. Patricia had pushed me away. My wife was refusing to recognize the depth of my mood. She was passing off the intensity as something inconsequential. She was telling me to be normal, be like everybody else. She was telling me she couldn't understand my poetry, which meant she could never understand me.

"I *was* being myself. I was wanting you with the desperation of a depth you didn't recognize. I was trying to reach you—before it was too late." I humbled myself enough to tell her, to explain.

Her tender smile infuriated me.

"You weren't wanting me, Max. You were looking for a dramatic outlet of some kind. You're such a serious darling sometimes, but it isn't good for you. Come and kiss me like a sweet boy. I love you. It's as simple as that. Nothing to be melancholy about. Come here!"

Her slender, white hands reached toward me, her red lips lifted in invitation. I could feel the hands without touching them, could taste the moist softness of her mouth as I looked at her. It was a shame, such a shame, that she had pushed me away just when the wind was crying within me. She could have stifled the cry and quieted me if she had felt my torture and equaled it with one of her own.

But no woman has been equal to my love, capable of real response. The three out there in the wind, all three of them failed. Patricia did better than they. I married her and she held me through the summer, had held me until now. Completely.

I just stood there staring at her, knowing it was all over at last. It surprised her. Her arms were outstretched and empty. She didn't know what to make of it.

"Max?" It was a question, an unbelievable moment for her.

"How does it feel?" I asked. "How does it feel to have a warmth you're ready to offer, and nobody there to meet that warmth? How do you like it, Patricia? How does it feel inside of you?"

"Max!" It was an exclamation this time, a cry of dismay, the first awareness in a complacent love that she might lose her love.

The look on her face thrilled me, and the tears that came to her eyes satisfied me a little. She had been slightly hurt, and I liked that. It gave me a taste of how the ultimate hurt would affect her, and the wind rose outside and the wind rose within me, and I remembered how it had been with the others. I remembered how they had cried, their first tears turning into vio-

lent sobs, then into fearful screams.

The first tears are subtle and stirring; the sobs are soul-shaking; the screams are primitive and all-satisfying.

Killing is like a musical composition. The tears are the gentle stirring of the strings and woodwinds; the sobs are the horns; and the screams are the kettle drums and the cymbals and the whole orchestra beating to a tumultuous climax before it shuts itself off into silence and death.

Killing is a creative impulse, an art, a godlike experience. It is like music, like poetry, to love a beautiful woman with all your love, and then inject the drama that is deeper than love, inflict the pain that is more stirring than pleasure.

And I, Max Hahn, will never be caught for killing. Who would suspect me? The greatest dramatic poet of the century, whose books are lauded by the literary and lauded, also, by the lesser minds who ape the opinions of their betters. The poet who has always insisted upon privacy for his work, who has dogs to guard his grounds, who admits no friends into his cabin in the woods.

Max Hahn, genius. That's what they call me. Genius and contemporary legend. Max Hahn, who breathes life into his work. Max Hahn, who writes as no other poet has ever written. The romantic Max Hahn, who knows life.

The critics have always said that I know life. They have never discovered that I know life only through my intimate association with death. They have always marveled that I know the full intensity of love. They do not yet know that love is never completed until it reaches an end in the human heart, until the heart of the inadequate one stops beating.

Patricia's hands were nervous on the knitting needles now, her cheeks dampened by the tears, her head lowered.

Very gently and sadly she said: "I thought you loved me, Max."

"I do, Patricia. I do! You'll never know how much. Will you go for a walk with me? It's too warm in here. I'm restless. I want to show you my grove of oaks by moonlight."

She looked up, smiling. Happy again that quickly. Shallow tears. A passing thing with her, a moment of no real import. I was her husband. She had suffered a tiny lover's tiff, that was all.

"Wonderful, Max! You've always refused to take me there, and I've been so curious. You describe it in "The Wind Cries," don't you?"

"Yes, Patricia. I'm surprised you remember. You said you didn't like that book of mine."

"I said I didn't understand it, darling. But I'd like to walk with

you. I'd like to see the oaks. I'll get my coat."

I thought about one small lyric in my long dramatic poem. The one about the leaves:

Beneath this tree the leathern oak leaves lie,
Their heavy edges curled and cup-like now;
All that is left where summer hurried by
Drops to the ground from this majestic bough.

And I have let my heart drop down with pain,
Just like the tree that drops the dried-out leaf,
Save that the brownish cups are filled with rain
Sooner or later, and my heart with grief.

Thinking of the poem, deepened my despair. Already, I was mourning the loss of Patricia, as I had mourned for the others. Her death would make me sad until spring. I knew it.

Mark, the central figure of my most widely read poem, is melancholy all winter. I would be like Mark, once I strangled Patricia in the oak grove. Her hands were so soothing. I'd miss them so much. There would come days when I would be in agony, thinking of her hands. I knew that. There would come days when I would go out and lie in the snow over the place where it happened, hoping to bring her warmth back.

There would be days when I'd be obsessed, almost crazy, wishing I hadn't killed her. But I knew I had to go through all that suffering. I have to suffer. There isn't any real art without suffering. And women don't want to suffer at all.

Every woman wants to lull me into her cradle of mediocrity forever, and Patricia came closer than any other. Patricia was a greater threat to my art than any other. I don't want to kill her, but I must. I'll lose myself, my own identity, if I don't.

She made me marry her, that was the first thing. She had held out for what she wanted.

There was a certain strength in Patricia.

Even now, as she went for her coat to wear to her death in the oak grove, there was something unique about her. The same quality, perhaps, that had driven me into marriage with her. A hint of the stubborn. A little set to her shoulders that let you know she intended to be met half-way. A tracing of character etched across her feminine beauty.

Killing the others had been so easy. But they had been weak. Mushy curves and soft flesh and soft bone, with pleasure concentrated in their own pliant bodies.

Even the flesh of Patricia was different. Her arms were womanly, without muscle. Her body was fluid. But underneath, was the

stiffness of the bone, and her breasts looked soft but were firm and hard. She was character clothed with curves.

Killing her was going to tax my own strength, tear me apart at the moment of execution. I had suffered for the others after the deed, only. With Patricia, the deed itself would bring conflict and agony. I was already feeling it.

I stood there waiting for her, wishing the wind would stop, that I could keep her for the rest of November.

She wore a red wool topper, tossed lightly over her shoulders. She met me in the hall, and in the dim light I saw just her eyes as she came toward me. The rest of her face was there, but I could not see it. Her eyes shone, a glassy gray, large, almost distended as they met mine. For a moment, I thought I detected a disembodied mask of accusation, and a wave of sickness swept over me, a wave of remorse. All I saw were the eyes. Like two things glowing, like two things that would stare into my soul forever.

"Ready?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

"Ready. I'm glad you suggested this, Max. You're so fond of prowling about outside. Makes me feel wonderful to be invited. As if you loved me especially tonight!" She said that, but her eyes didn't say it. Her eyes were wide and sad.

I gazed at her. Beauty? There was never a woman more beautiful. A beauty unto herself. You could find the same breast in another and it would fit the same hollow of your hand and be as lovely; you could find the same slim waist and lustrous hair, and you could hold it all. But the planes of her cheek, the light in her eye, the moist lips—never could you find that and have it be the same. Not that, combined with the rest of her.

I couldn't even remember the eyes of the others, now dead in the oak grove. Their bodies, yes. Naked and white, I could make some distinction. Margaret had been thin and passionate; Madeline, full-blown and placid; Elizabeth, athletic and health-giving. Just women; just bodies.

People without eyes. But Patricia had this face, this look, this power within that had made me want her enough to marry her. Patricia had a strength beyond me that had encompassed me from the very first.

I took her into my arms and kissed her. Gently, submissively.

"I love you," I whispered. "I wonder if you know how much I love you."

"Yes, Max. I know."

"How much, then? If you know, how much is it?"

"As much as you could love

anybody, Max. That much I'm sure of."

We went out into the cool, gray night.

The leaves were underfoot, dried and rattling. My arm was still around her.

"You think I lack the capacity for love? Is that it, Patricia? You think I love only myself?"

"I didn't say that, Max."

"But you're thinking it."

"I'm not thinking at all. I'm just walking with my husband. Isn't that enough?"

"Not quite," I said, wanting her to know at the last what manner of man had loved her. "Any bovine woman can walk with her husband. A husband is a habit, a thing you're used to. Why didn't you say your 'lover,' Patricia? That would be more like it."

"To me, that's what my husband is, Max. A lover. He always will be. But being used to him, having him a habit makes him more of a lover to me. Peaceful love, without conflict. That's what I want. That's the nicest thing of all about being married, isn't it, Max?"

"There isn't any love without conflict," I told her. "That's what love is. Drama. Conflict. Not peace. Peace comes only with the end of love."

We could see the grove of trees ahead in the light of the November moon. A shelter. A wall that nature had built to keep the world away. I like my cabin in the woods. The nearest neighbor is far away, actually. Three miles by day, but a million miles away at night when darkness falls. A timid lady lives there and won't ever venture out very far. My heart began to cry with the wind, began to pump faster with each step. We were so close!

Soon! Soon I would be destroying this woman who had such an attachment for ordinary living. She wanted to choke all the drama out of my soul and leave me spent and helpless on a mundane couch in her mundane world. She was trying to pull me down, to make me be like other people. But she wouldn't ever do it. Not to Max Hahn, she would not.

Soon I would be free to soar again and sink again. Farther up into the heights of fancy than she could ever go; lower into the depths of melancholy than she could even imagine. Soon it would all be over and I would write again.

Perhaps the music of words would pour out stronger than ever, because she had been stronger than the others. And perhaps there would be more heart in the composition because she had so deeply affected my heart. I wasn't sure about that. I had to kill her, to be without her, to discover how much she had really meant to me.

We entered the grove of trees, my arm still holding her close.

Her lips were parted, her breathing fast.

"It's lovely here, Max. Like an enchanted place. One could almost lie down here and go to sleep, in spite of the cold air."

The ground was like a russet carpet that reached our ankles.

"I'm glad you'd like to go to sleep here, Patricia. Very glad. I do love you, you know. Do you think you can die bravely, my darling?"

My hands moved up to her throat in a trembling caress of unendurable passion.

"Poor Max! I think I've always felt this streak of violence in you, but I didn't want it to be true. I never wanted to believe it, but I guess I've always known this could happen to you." Her eyes were very gentle.

"You mean you've always known that I would kill you?"

"Not exactly, Max. I just knew there was something wrong, something inside of you that would never let you be really happy. I've always known you'd take it out on me someday. I just didn't know when, nor expect it to be this soon."

My thumbs moved to her ears and I increased the pressure on her throat. But my hands seemed weak and not like my hands. I let her go, rubbing my palms together to warm them, to get the strength back.

"And yet you stayed with me and pretended to love me?"

"There wasn't any pretense, Max. I do love you. Even now. I love you more than myself. You can't understand that, can you?"

I took her by the shoulders and shook her, but her lack of resistance spoiled the thrill and I took my hands away again.

"You talk about love! You and your sock-knitting and your housekeeping and your preoccupation with today, with right now! What do you know about an all-consuming personal passion that doesn't care whether it eats or sleeps? What do you know about real love?"

"I know all there is to know, Max. My love is the kind that can last through the boredom of daily routine. My love is strong enough to increase with the years. Yours isn't. Your love is pallid play-acting . . ."

I struck her then and she fell to the ground at my feet. She was kneeling, but she didn't cry out. She just turned her face upward to mine, and once again I was seeing just the eyes.

"Play-acting love! Are you insane, Patricia? No, it's just that you have to have an excuse for your own cold heart, for your lack of real emotion. There's no fire in you, no life. You're about as satisfying as a stone statue, and you dare to say that you know all about love! There are three women buried here in the oak grove,

Patricia. Buried because they couldn't satisfy me. They all wanted a great lover, but they all spoiled the emotion I would have freely given them. Just as you spoiled my feeling for you. So, you'll be buried here, too. I can't live with a dead feeling. I prefer a dead woman. I'll like you better when you lie here as cold as your heart. I'm going to enjoy that moment of freedom, enjoy it a lot!"

She shifted from the kneeling position and sat down on the oak leaves. Her face had turned white, but her eyes still met mine with fearless, annoying speculation.

"I was wrong then, Max," she said softly. "I thought you really loved me to desperation and that it might drive you to violence. I had no idea that you found me cold. I didn't know you'd had other women and killed them. In fact, I don't even believe that. You're acting. You write dramatic poems and the reviews have gone to your head. You're posing. You're trying to make me think you're like the horrible, twisted characters you create."

Horrible characters! Mark, in "The Wind Cries," a horrible, twisted character! She didn't even have sense enough to know that she was talking about *me* when she talked about Mark. Mark *is* me. And she accused me of posing!

"You don't believe there are three women buried here, Patricia?"

"Of course not. You close yourself in your study and work too long at losing your identity. All I believe is that you're suffering from a temporary derangement, Max. I hope for your own sake that you're able to master it. If you kill me in this moment of madness, you're sure to get caught and your whole future will be ruined."

"I can show you how wrong you are, Patricia. I don't need words that you won't believe. I can *show* you. I'm going to make you look."

I had never shown the evidence to anybody, but I was going to kill Patricia and it would not make any difference.

I had concealed a shovel beside the largest oak tree. It was there waiting for the digging of Patricia's grave. But I would unearth the others first and make her look at them and know that I was telling the truth. She would know that I was really Mark, not a posing copy of my greatest character.

I wanted to look at the others myself. It had been a long time, and this was the same kind of a night. Once, in loneliness, I had dug into the ground with my fingers and had come to the hand of Madeline, but it hadn't looked like her hand and I had cried and scraped the earth back over it.

The grave from last year had

been exactly six steps from the big tree. I paced off the distance carefully and set to work. It wouldn't be hard work. There was just a twelve-inch covering of ground over them. Nobody ever came here, so I'd had no reason to bury them very deep.

Patricia was staring at me with fascination, crying nervously and biting her knuckles.

"Max! Oh, Max! If it's true, don't prove it. But I know it *isn't* true. It couldn't be. The man in your poem had three women that he killed, and you've let the idea get mixed up with your own life. Stop digging like that, Max! If you're going to kill me, do it quickly. Don't make me watch you the way you are now."

"You've got to look," I told her. "You've got to know that I haven't been acting, that I really do love with an all-consuming power that makes me destroy the objects of my love. You've got to look. It won't be long now. They're near the surface."

I had dug up quite a section, but the shovel had struck nothing. I was sure of the exact spot. I had even used it for Mark, in the poem, and I remembered the lines. Six steps from the big tree he paced the distance off. I had dug down far enough, surely. I went to my knees, suddenly alarmed. I felt into the hole of damp earth with my hands. More than a foot down. Almost two feet, and there was nothing! Not a single bone out of three whole skeletons! Not a whiff of the decomposed flesh. Nothing. Nothing except the damp earth under the leaves.

I scrabbled, forgetting Patricia. I dug my nails down in, expecting them to touch the human relics, knowing they had to be where I had put them. They had to be there! Nobody ever came here, and the bodies couldn't have been taken out, because the ground had not been disturbed.

I must have made animal sounds as I dug. Confusion. Frenzy.

Patricia was on her feet now, staring down at me.

"Stop it, Max! Stop it, and listen to me!"

"They're here! I put them here. You've got to look at them . . ."

"Never mind, Max. I know they're not there. I know more about it than you do. I married you for better or for worse, and most of it has been better. There's so much real love and sweetness in you, Max. But you fight it constantly, won't let it mature. Don't you know what has happened to you, darling?"

"They're here! They have to be here. Last winter I dug down to Madeline's hand. I saw it. I didn't touch it, but I saw it."

"Madeline is the name of one of the women in your poem, Max. Can't you see? It happened

to Mark, not you. It never happened to you, not really. It's derangement, Max. You've worked so hard that you've cracked. Stop, darling. Please stop, while there's still hope for you. You've never killed anybody!"

"You're crazy!" I shouted. "You're the one who's crazy. I killed them all last November on a night like this. I buried them here. Right here!"

"Mark did. Not you. You imagined it for Mark, and wrote it, and made him do it. You're brilliant, Max. Surely, you can understand how you might undergo a transference of identity with your fictional characters. Can't you? Now that you see this empty ground, can't you understand what happened to you? And once you understand, can't you stop the acting? Can't you stop pretending that you're in a rage to kill?"

Those words again. Acting. Posing. And she was sounding superior. The wind's cry rose to a scream.

I gripped the shovel handle tightly, trembling all over. She didn't believe me. She thought I was a weak, demented creature who lacked the strength to kill.

"They *were* here. Somebody moved them, I tell you. Somebody must have moved them. But nobody knows I did it, except you. They'll never know. Even though they discovered the bodies, they won't be able to prove I killed them!"

"Please, Max!"

"You'll never tell. You know that now, don't you? All at once, you know I'm not acting, and there's a different look on your face! Your eyes are full of terror, and you're backing away from me. You know *now*!"

The thrill was coming, the same thrill I'd experienced when I'd killed the others. The frozen horror on the face, the abject fear, the heightening of the musical drama. The brass section was pounding in me now, the deep, great melancholy music was soaring to a climax.

With the first roll of the tympani, I lifted the shovel.

The kettle drums began to boom and I pounded the shovel against her head again and again, harder and harder.

Then, the composition ended in silence and blood and death.

I stood there exalted in the grove of oaks beside the freshly turned earth and the bleeding body of the woman I loved so deeply.

I was Mark. In that one second of looking down at what I had done, with the silence all around me, I was still Mark, and I was glad, and I could feel the magnificent melancholia descending. I wished she could see me and believe in me.

She had never believed that I was being myself with her.

"Don't be complicated. Come here, and be a sweet boy. Kiss me. Be my husband!"

I was sorry I hadn't been able to show her something to make her know all about me before I proved myself by killing her. Her terror would have been much greater had she seen the others first. She might have begged for her own life, and that would have been pleasant. But, at least, she had known about me a split second before the first blow had struck her down.

Free. It was November, and I was free again. I didn't even bother to bury her body. I threw the shovel down and walked out of the oak grove toward the road. The wind was still crying, but there was a strange relief in me now that didn't respond to the wind.

I scuffed through the dead leaves, got to the road, and headed for the village, my head high, my heart proud.

The inner agony was gone, the turmoil of Patricia and my love for her were over. I didn't have to think what I was going to do, didn't have to plan. Everything was clear in my mind now. I knew exactly where I was going.

The certainty gave me peace.

There's a little bar in the village. I would walk there and have a drink and tell them what I had done. They wouldn't believe me. They would say I was crazy, that I was just acting the part of a genius and a poet.

But if they wanted to come back to the oak grove with me, I could show them. This time, I could really show them, and they would know at last that I wasn't just a crazy man who imagines things.

There was a damp spot on my jacket, where her blood had spattered. I fingered it gratefully all the way down the deserted road, and it gave me confidence. I walked with the easy stride of a man who has at last accomplished a deed he has long dreamed of executing.

It was good to feel sane again, to be a part of reality. Patricia had been amazingly astute in one part of her diagnosis. I have known for some time that my mind has played strange tricks of fancy upon me. I've worried about it. But fancy fled the moment I killed Patricia. That was something real. Even she would have had to admit that.

My mind was perfectly rational again. My fingers kept touching the damp blood on my jacket. Proof. Wet proof that I didn't make things up.

By the time I reached the edge of the village, I stopped and leaned against the first light standard. A villager passed, staring into my face, turning to stare again after he had passed.

Curiosity. A stranger. Max Hahn, the great poet. Perhaps he

recognized me. Or perhaps he thought I looked like an odd character. I couldn't stand his staring at me.

It was like a moment of life being repeated. My hand touched the cold iron of the lamp post, and I could see the blue neon of the tavern sign a block away. I had seen the sign before. Last year, last November, I had stood right here in this same spot, feeling the same way after the long walk.

I suppose it was the solid, cold feel of the metal post that drove my mind back into the old channel.

The oak grove. I had killed them all there and had come walking toward the village, wanting people to come and see.

But, once again, the stare of the first stranger had penetrated my consciousness.

I turned, as I had before, and went back up the road toward my cabin and the oak grove.

I remembered now. I remembered the thing I couldn't recall when I had wanted so much to show the bodies to Patricia. I remembered what I had done with the bodies!

The lime pit. Without thinking about it, I knew I had to go back and drag Patricia to the lime pit.

Nobody must see her, ever! She had been beautiful and lovely, and now the winter was coming. I must obliterate her loveliness and keep her unto myself, as I kept the others.

I would be all right until next November, when the wind would cry again and the leaves would fall.

I would be all right. I would be free for the suffering of the winter and the full artistic expression.

Perhaps next spring another woman may come into my life. My publisher is always forwarding silly notes from lonely women. Next spring I may answer one of the notes and love again for a little while with all the tenderness that lies within me.

But I'll choose one with less character than Patricia had. Character. The stubborn set of her shoulders. The clear look in her eyes. The firm breast. The strength of her love that could survive the monotony of daily routine.

I began to run, exhausted as I was.

Patricia wasn't like the others I had killed. Patricia had been stronger, had held me completely. She had been *different.*

Somehow, as I ran—stumbling through the darkness—I could see only her eyes, gazing at me steadily with reproach, like ghostly eyes that would forever be staring into mine.

A fear, a mounting inner agony of fear, struck my senses as I neared the oak grove.

I hadn't been able to strangle her with my hands, as I had the others. Killing her had been difficult, and I had blood on my clothes, and blood on the shovel.

There was so much to do! I wondered if there would be time.

My heart blocked up in my throat as I looked again at the hideous bloody heap that had been such a beautiful woman. There had been no blood before, and I hadn't felt like this.

I sank to the ground at last, gasping for air, my fingers slipping in pools of blood, my lungs bursting with pain.

There wasn't any wind now. There wasn't any air at all. There was just this new constriction in my throat, something that I had never felt before, that Mark had never felt.

I knew I wouldn't be able to drag Patricia's body to the lime pit. I wouldn't be able to touch her body. I had scarcely enough strength left to drag myself back to the cabin.

The dogs would find her first; then the vultures; then the police. But I couldn't make myself stay there in the cold any longer. I had an unbearable inward cold that was spreading rapidly through the flesh to the surface of my skin.

There was a fire that Patricia had built that evening, and I went back to the cabin to stir it to life.

November is over now, and they have me in a place that intensifies my usual winter melancholia. So much suffering. So much roughness from the attendants. But all this is good for the soul of artistry. I am writing a sequel to *The Wind Cries,* and once again Mark will be me and will take Patricia to the oak grove, and the critics will marvel that I know so much about love and life.

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case of the white elephant

by . . . Margery Allingham

Involves an international charitable organization, a Copenhagen porcelain fish, and a very angry Countess.

MR. CAMPION, piloting his companion through the crowded courtyard at Burlington House, became aware of the old lady in the Daimler partly because her chauffeur almost ran over him and partly because she gave him a stare of such vigorous and personal disapproval that he felt she must either know him very well indeed or have mistaken him for someone else entirely.

Juliet Fysher-Sprigge, who was leaning on his arm with all the weariness of a two-hour trek round the academy's Summer Exhibition, enlightened him.

"We were *not* amused, were we?" she said. "Old-fashioned people have minds that are just too prurient, my dear. After all, I have known you for years, haven't I, and I'm not even married to Philip. Besides, the academy is so respectable. It isn't as though she'd seen me sneaking out of the National Gallery."

Mr. Campion handed her into a taxicab.

"Who was she?" he enquired, hoisting his lank form in after her.

Albert Campion has been described as "an open defiance of the Sherlock Holmes tradition," and this is perhaps part of his charm for a generation that wanted something different, but had yet to be exposed to today's more basic — blondes, bottles and bullets — school of detection. . . .

From: MR. CAMPION: CRIMINOLOGIST, by Margery Allingham,
(1937. Doubleday)
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Juliet laughed. Her laughter was one of her most charming attributes, for it wiped the sophistication from her débutante's face and left her the schoolgirl he had known three years before.

"My dear, didn't you recognize her? That would have been the last straw for the poor darling! That's Florence, Dowager Countess of Marle. Philip's Auntie Flo."

Mr. Campion's pale blue eyes grew momentarily more intelligent behind his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Ah, hence the disgust," he said. "You'll have to explain me away. The police are always doing it."

Juliet turned to him with the wide-eyed ingenuousness of one who perceives a long-awaited opening.

"You still dabble in police and detection and things, then?" she said breathlessly and not very tactfully, since his reputation as a criminologist was considerable. "Do tell me, what is the low-down on these terribly exciting burglaries? Are the police really beaten or are they being bribed? No one talks of anything else these days. I just had to see you and find out."

Her companion leant back in the leathery depths of the cab and sighed regretfully.

"When you phoned me and demanded to be taken to this execrable exhibition I was vain enough to think it was my companionship you were after," he said. "Now it turns out to be merely a vulgar pursuit of the material for gossip. Well, my girl, you're going to be disappointed. The clever gentleman doesn't know a thing and, what's more, he doesn't care. Have you lost anything yourself?"

"Me?" Juliet's gratification at the implied compliment all but outweighed her disappointment. "Of course I haven't. It's only the really worth-while collections that have gone. That's why it's so interesting. The De Breuil diamonds went first. Then the Denver woman lost her emeralds and the glorious Napoleon necklace. Josephine Pharoah had her house burgled and just lost her tiara, which was the one really good thing she had, and now poor old Mrs. Dacre has had her diamonds and rubies pinched, including the famous dog collar. Forty-two diamonds, my dear!—each one quite as big as a pea. They say it's a cat burglar and the police know him quite well but they can't find him—at least, that's one story. The other one is that it's all being done for the insurance and the police are in it. What do you think?"

Mr. Campion glanced at her affectionately and noted that the gold hair under her small black hat curled as naturally as ever.

"Both stories are equally good," he announced placidly,

"Come and have some tea, or has Philip's Auntie Flo got spies everywhere?"

Miss Fysher-Sprigge blushed. "I don't care if she has," she said. "I've quarreled with Philip, anyway."

It took Mr. Campion several minutes, until they were seated at a table on the edge of the Hotel Monde's smaller dance floor, in fact, before he fully digested this piece of information. Juliet was leaning back in her chair, her eyes roving over the gathering in a frank search for old acquaintances, when he spoke again.

"Seriously?" he enquired.

Juliet met his eyes and again he saw her sophistication vanish.

"I hope not," she said soberly. "I've been rather an ass. Can I tell you about it?"

Mr. Campion smiled ruefully. It was a sign of the end of the thirties, he supposed, when one submitted cheerfully to the indignity of taking a young woman out only to hear about her hopes and fears concerning a younger man. Juliet went on blissfully, lowering her voice so that the heart searchings of the balalaika orchestra across the floor concealed it from adjoining tables.

"Philip is a dear, but he has to be so filthily careful about the stupidest things," she said, accepting a rhumbaba. "The F.O. casts a sort of white light over people, have you noticed? His relations are like it, too, only worse. You can't talk of anything without getting warned off. The aunt we saw today bit my head off the other evening for merely mentioning these cat burglaries, which, after all, are terribly exciting. 'My child,' she said, 'we can't afford to know about such things,' and went on talking about her old White Elephant until I nearly wept."

"White Elephant?" Mr. Campion looked blank. "The charity?"

Juliet nodded. " 'Send your white elephant to Florence, Countess of Marle, and she will find it a home where it will be the pet of the family,' " she quoted. "It's quite an important affair, patronized by royalty and blessed by every archbishop in the world. I pointed out it was only a glorified jumble sale and she nearly had a fit. She works herself to death for it. I go and help pack up parcels sometimes —or I did before this row with Philip. I've been rather silly. I've done something infuriating. Philip's livid with me now and I don't know what's going to happen when he finds out everything. I must tell somebody. Can I tell you?"

A faint smile passed over Mr. Campion's thin face.

"You're quite a nice girl," he said, "but you won't stay twenty-one for ever. Stop treating me as though I was a maiden uncle."

"You must be thirty-six at

least," said Miss Fysher-Sprigge brutally, "and I'm rather glad, because presumably you're sensible. Look here, if a man has a criminal record it doesn't mean he's always going to be stealing things, does it? Not if he promises to go straight?"

Her companion frowned. "I don't quite follow," he said. "Age is stopping the brain from functioning. I thought we were talking about Philip Graysby, Auntie Flo's nephew?"

"So we are," said Juliet. "He hasn't got the record, of course, but Henry Swan has. Henry Swan is—or, rather, was—Philip's man. He'd been with Philip for eighteen months and been perfectly good, and then this came out about him. Philip said he was awfully sorry but he'd have to go. Philip couldn't help it, I suppose—I do see that now—but at the time I was furious. It seemed so unfair, and we had a quarrel. I said some beastly things and so did he, but he wouldn't give in and Swan went."

She paused and eyed her companion dubiously. Mr. Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"It doesn't seem very serious," he said.

Juliet accepted the cigarette he offered her and seemed engrossed in the tip of it.

"No," she agreed. "That part isn't. But you see, I'm a very impulsive person and I was stupidly cross at the time and so when I had a wonderful idea for getting my own back I acted on it. I got Swan a job with the most respectable person I knew and, in order to do it, I gave him a reference. To make it a good reference I didn't say anything about the record. How's that?"

"Not so good," he admitted. "Who's the most respectable person harboring this human bomb?"

Juliet avoided his eyes. "Philip's Auntie Flo," she said. "She's the stiffest, thorniest, most conventional of them all. Philip doesn't go there often so he hasn't seen Swan yet, but when he does and makes enquiries and hears about me—well, it's going to be awkward. D'you think he'll ever forgive me? He stands to get a fortune from Auntie Flo if he doesn't annoy her. It was a silly thing of me to do, wasn't it?"

"Not bright," agreed Mr. Campion. "Are you in love with Philip?"

"Horribly," said Juliet Fysher-Sprigge and looked away across the dance floor.

Mr. Campion had spent some time expounding a wise course of action, in which a clean breast to all concerned figured largely, when he became aware that he was not being heard. Juliet was still staring across the room, her eyes puzzled.

"I say," she said unexpectedly,

"this place is wildly expensive, isn't it?"

"I hope not," said Mr. Campion mildly.

Juliet did not smile. Her cheeks were faintly flushed and her eyes questioning.

"Don't be a fool. You know what I mean. This is probably the most expensive place in London, isn't it? How queer! It looks as though Auntie Flo really has got her spies everywhere. That's her manicurist over there, having tea alone."

He glanced casually across the room.

"The woman sitting directly under the orchestra?" he enquired. "The one who looks like a little bull in a navy hat? She's an interesting type, isn't she? Not very nice."

Juliet's eyes were still thoughtful.

"That's her. Miss Matisse. A visiting manicurist," she said. "She goes to dozens of people I know. I believe she's very good. How funny for her to come to tea alone, here of all places . . ."

Mr. Campion's casual interest in the small square figure who managed somehow to look flamboyant in spite of her sober clothes, showed signs of waning.

"She may be waiting for someone," he suggested.

"But she's ordered her tea and started it."

"Oh well, perhaps she just felt like eating."

"Rubbish!" said Juliet. "You pay ten and sixpence just to sit in this room because you can dance if you want to."

Her host laughed. "Auntie Flo has a pretty turn of speed if she tracked us down here and then whipped round and set her manicuring bloodhound on us, all in half an hour," he said.

Juliet ignored him. Her attention had wandered once again.

"I say," she murmured, "can you see through that mirror over there? See that man eating alone? I thought at first he was watching Miss Matisse, but I believe it's you he's most interested in."

Her companion turned his head and his eyes widened.

"Apologies," he said. "I underestimated you. That's Detective Sergeant Blower, one of the best men in the public-school and night-club tradition. I wonder who he's tailing. Don't watch him—it's unkind."

Juliet laughed. "You're a most exciting person to have tea with," she said. "I do believe . . ."

The remainder of her remark was lost as, in common with all but one visitor in the room, she was silenced by what was, for the Hotel Monde, a rather extraordinary incident.

The balalaika orchestra had ceased to play for a moment or so and the dance floor was practically deserted when, as though taking advantage of the lull, the woman in the navy hat rose from

her chair and shouted down the whole length of the long room, in an effort, apparently, to attract the attention of a second woman who had just entered.

"Mrs. Gregory!" Her voice was powerful and well articulated. "Mrs. Gregory! Mrs. Gregory!"

The newcomer halted as all eyes were turned upon her, and her escort expostulated angrily to the excited maître d'hotel who hurried forward.

Miss Matisse sat down, and in the silence Mr. Campion heard her explaining in a curiously flat voice to the waiter who came up to her.

"I am sorry. I thought I recognized a friend. I was mistaken. Bring me my bill, please."

Juliet stared across the table, her young face shocked.

"What a very extraordinary thing to do," she said.

Mr. Campion did not reply. From his place of vantage he could see in the mirror that Detective Sergeant Blower had also called for his bill and was preparing to leave.

Some little time later, when Mr. Campion deposited Juliet on her Mount Street doorstep, she was in a more cheerful mood.

"Then you think if I go to Philip and tell him the worst and say that I'm sorry he'll forgive me?" she said as they parted.

"If he's human he'll forgive you anything," Mr. Campion assured her gallantly.

Juliet sighed. "Age does improve the manners," she said unnecessarily. "I'll forgive you for disappointing me about the burglaries. I really had hoped to get all the dirt. Good-bye."

"Damn the burglaries!" said Mr. Campion and took a taxi home.

Three days later he said the same thing again but for a different reason. This reason arrived by post. It came in a fragrant green box designed to contain a large flask of familiar perfume and it lay upon his breakfast table winking at him with evil amusement. It was Mrs. Dacre's ruby-and-diamond dog collar and it was not alone. In a nest of cotton wool beneath it were five diamond rings of considerable value, a pair of exquisite ruby ear clips, and a small hooped bracelet set with large alternate stones.

Mr. Campion, who was familiar with the "stolen" list which the police send round to their local stations and circularize to the jewelers and pawnbrokers of the kingdom, had no difficulty in recognizing the collection as the haul of the last cat burglary.

The sender of so dubious a gift might have been harder to identify had it not been for the familiarity of the perfume and the presence of a small card on which was printed in shaky, ill-

disguised characters a simple request and a specious promise:

Get these back where they belong and I'll love you forever, darling.

Mr. Campion had a considerable respect for the law but he spent some time that morning in acquiring a box of similar design but different and more powerful perfume, and it was not until the jewelry was freshly housed and the card burned that he carried his responsibility to Scotland Yard and laid it with a sigh of relief on the desk of Chief Detective Inspector Stanislaus Oates, his friend and partner in many adventures.

The original wrapping he decided to retain. Its ill-written address might have been scrawled by anyone and the fact that it was grossly overfranked showed that it had been dropped into a public box and not passed over a post office counter.

He let the chief, who was a tall, disconsolate personage with a gray face and dyspepsia, recover from his first transports of mingled relief and suspicion before regretting his inability to help him further. Oates regarded him.

"It's my duty to warn you that you're under suspicion," he said with the portentous solemnity which passed with him for wit.

Campion laughed. "My cat-burglary days are over," he said. "Or am I the fence?"

"That's more like it." The chief passed his cigarette case. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see this lot. But it doesn't help us very much unless we know where it came from. These cat jobs are done by The Sparrow. We knew that as soon as we saw the first one. You remember him, Campion?—a sleek, handsome chap with an insufferable manner. These jobs have his trademarks all over them. Pane cut out with a diamond and the glass removed with a sucker—no fingerprints, no noise, no mistakes." He paused and caressed his ear sadly. "It's getting on my nerves," he said. "The commissioner is sarcastic and the papers are just libellous. It's hard on us. We know who and where the fellow is but we can't get him. We've held him as long as we dared, three separate times this summer, but we haven't got a thing we can fix on him. I've been trusting the stuff would turn up somewhere so that we could work back on him from that angle, but frankly this is the first scrap of it I've seen. Where's all the early swag? This was only pinched five days ago."

Mr. Campion remained unhelpful. "I got it this morning," he said. "It just came out of the air. Ask the postman."

"Oh, I know . . ." The chief waved the suggestion aside.

"You'll help us just as much as you can, which means as much as you care to. Some society bit is mixed up in this somewhere, I'm sure of it. Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put my cards on the table. This isn't official; this is the truth. Edward Borringer, alias The Sparrow, is living with his wife in digs in Kilburn. They're very respectable at the moment, just a quiet hard-working couple. He takes classes in the local gym and she does visiting manicure work."

"Under the name of Matisse?"

"Exactly!" The inspector was jubilant. "Now you've given yourself away, my lad. What do you know about Margot Matisse?"

"Not much," his visitor confessed affably. "She was pointed out to me as a manicurist at a thé dansant at the Hotel Monde on Tuesday. Looking round, I saw Blower on her trail, so naturally when you mentioned manicurists I put two and two together."

"Who pointed her out to you?"

"A lady who had seen her at work in a relation's house."

"All right." The policeman became depressed again. "Well, there you are. It's quite obvious how they're working it. She goes round to the big houses and spots the stuff and the lie of the land, and then he calls one night and does the job. It's the old game worked very neatly. Too neatly, if you ask me. What we can't fathom is how they're disposing of the stuff. They certainly have not got it about them, and their acquaintance just now is so respectable, not to say aristocratic, that we can barely approach it. Besides, to make this big stuff worth the risk they must be using an expert. Most of these stones are so well known that they must go to a first-class fellow to be recut."

Mr. Campion hesitated. "I seem to remember that Edward Borringer was once associated with our old friend Bertrand Meyer and his ménage," he ventured. "Are they still functioning?"

"Not in England." The chief was emphatic. "And if these two are getting their stuff out of the country I'll eat my hat. The customs are co-operating with us. We thought a maid in one of the houses which the Matisse woman visits might be in it and so if you've heard a squawk from your society pals about severity at the ports, that's our work. I don't mind telling you it's all very difficult. You can see for yourself. These are the Matisse clients."

Mr. Campion scanned the typewritten page and his sympathy for his friend deepened.

"Oh yes, Caesar's wives," he agreed. "Every one of 'em. Servants been in the families for years, I suppose?"

"Unto the third and fourth

generations," said the chief bitterly.

His visitor considered the situation.

"I suppose they've got alibis fixed up for the nights of the crimes?" he enquired.

"Fixed up?" The chief's tone was eloquent. "The alibis are so good that we ought to be able to arrest 'em on suspicion alone. An alibi these days doesn't mean anything except that the fellow knows his job. Borringer does, too, and so does his wife. We've had them both on the carpet for hours without getting a glimmer from them. No, it's no use, Campion; we've got to spot the middleman and then the fence, and pin it on to them that way. Personally, I think the woman actually passes the stuff, but we've had Blower on her for weeks and he swears she doesn't speak to a soul except these superior clients of hers. Also, of course, neither of them post anything. We thought we'd got something once and got the postal authorities to help us, but all we got for our trouble was a p.c. to a viscountess about an appointment for chiropody."

Mr. Campion was silent for some time.

"It was funny, her shouting out like that in the Hotel Monde," he said at last.

The chief grunted. "Mrs. Gregory," he said. "Yes, I heard about that. A little show for Blower's benefit, if you ask me. Thought she'd give him something to think about. The Borringers are like that, cocky as hell."

Once again there was thoughtful silence in the light airy office and this time it was Stanislaus Oates who spoke first.

"Look here, Campion," he said, "you and I know one another. Let this be a word of friendly warning. If you suspect anyone you know of getting mixed up in this—for a bit of fun, perhaps—see that she's careful. If The Sparrow and his wife are still tied up with the Meyer lot, and they very well may be, the Meyer crowd aren't a pretty bunch. In fact, you know as well as I do, they're dirty and they're dangerous."

His visitor picked up the list again. Philip Graysby's aunt's name headed the second column. He made up his mind.

"I don't know anything," he said. "I'm speaking entirely from guesswork and I rely on you to go into this in stockinged feet and with your discretion wrapping you like a blanket. But if I were you I should have a little chat with one Henry Swan, employed by Florence, Dowager Countess of Marle."

"Ah," said the chief with relief, "that's where the wind blows, does it? I thought you'd come across."

"I don't promise anything,"

Campion protested very mildly.

"Who does?" said Stanislaus Oates and pulled a pad towards him. . . .

Mr. Campion kept late hours. He was sitting up by the open window of his flat in Bottle Street, the cul-de-sac off Piccadilly, when the chief detective inspector called upon him just after midnight on the evening of his visit to Scotland Yard. The policeman was unusually fidgety. He accepted a drink and sat down before mentioning the purpose of his visit, which was, in fact, to gossip.

Campion, who knew him, let him take his time.

"We pulled that chap Swan in this afternoon," he volunteered at last. "He's a poor weedy little beggar who did a stretch for larceny in twenty-three and seems to have gone straight since. We had quite a time with him. He wouldn't open his mouth at first. Fainted when he thought we were going to jug him. Finally, of course, out it came, and a very funny story it was. Know anything about the White Elephant Society, Campion?"

His host blinked. "Nothing against it," he admitted. "Ordinary charity stunt. Very decently run, I believe. The dowager does it herself."

"I know." There was a note of mystification in the chief's voice. "See this?"

From his wallet he took a small green stick-on label. It was an ornate product embellished with a design of angels in the worst artistic taste. Across the top was a printed heading:

This is a gift from the White Elephant Society (Secy, Florence, Countess of Marle) and contains— A blank space had been filled up with the legend *Two Pairs of Fancy Woolen Gloves* in ink.

The address, which was also in ink, was that of a well-known orphanage and the addressee was the matron.

"That's how they send the white elephants out," Oates explained. "There's a word or two inside in the countess's own handwriting. This is a specimen label. See what it means? It's as good as a diplomatic pass with that old woman's name on it."

"Who to?" demanded Mr. Campion dubiously.

"Anyone," declared the chief triumphantly. "Especially the poor chap in the customs office who's tired of opening parcels. Even if he does open 'em he's not going to examine 'em. Now here's Swan's story. He admits he found the jewelry, which he passed on to a friend whose name he will not divulge. That friend must have sent it to you. It sounds like a woman to me but I'm not interested in her at the moment."

"Thank God for that," mur-

mured his host devoutly. "Go on. Where did he find the stuff?"

"In a woolen duck inside one of these White Elephant parcels," said the chief unexpectedly. "We've got the duck; homemade toy with little chamois pockets under its wings. The odd thing is that Swan swears the old lady gave the parcel to him herself, told him to post it, and made such a fuss about it that he became suspicious and opened it up."

"Do you believe that?" Mr. Campion was grinning and Oates frowned.

"I do," he said slowly. "Curiously enough I do, in the main. In the first place, this chap honestly wants to go straight. One dose of clink has put him in terror of it for life. Secondly, if he was in on the theft why give the whole game away? Why produce the duck? What I do think is that he recognized the address. He says he can't remember anything about it except that it was somewhere abroad, but that's just what he would say if he recognized it and thought it was dangerous and was keeping quiet for fear of reprisals. Anyway, I believed him sufficiently to go down and interview the old lady."

"Did you, by Jove!" murmured Mr. Campion with respect.

Stanislaus Oates smiled wryly and ran his finger round the inside of his collar.

"Not a homely woman," he observed. "Ever met someone who made you feel you wanted a haircut, Campion? I was very careful, of course. Kid gloves all the way. Had to. I tell you one funny thing, though: she was rattled."

Mr. Campion sat up. He knew his friend to be one of the soberest judges of humanity in the police force, where humanity is deeply studied.

"Sure?" he demanded incredulously.

"Take my dying oath on it," said the chief. "Scared blue, if you ask me."

The young man in the horn-rimmed spectacles made polite but deprecating noises. The chief shook his head.

"It's the truth. I gave her the facts—well, most of them. I didn't explain how we came to open the parcel, since that part of the business wasn't strictly orthodox. But I gave her the rest of the story just as I've given it to you, and instead of being helpful she tried to send me about my business with a flea in my ear. She insisted that she had directed each outgoing parcel during the last four weeks herself and swore that the Matisse woman could never have had access to any of them. Also, which is significant, she would not give me a definite reply about the duck. She was not sure if she'd ever seen it before. I ask you!—a badly made yellow

duck in a blue pullover. Anyone'd know it again."

Mr. Campion grinned. "What was the upshot of this embarrassing interview?" he enquired.

The chief coughed. "When she started talking about her son in the Upper House I came away," he said briefly. "I thought I'd let her rest for a day or two. Meanwhile, we shall keep a wary eye on Swan and the Borringers, although if those three are working together I'll resign."

He was silent for a moment.

"She certainly was rattled," he repeated at last. "I'd swear it. Under that magnificent manner of hers she was scared. She had that set look about the eyes. You can't mistake it. What d'you make of that, my lad?"

"I don't," said Campion discreetly. "It's absurd."

Oates sighed. "Of course it is," he agreed. "And so what?"

"Sleep on it," his host suggested and the chief took the hint. . . .

It was unfortunate for everyone concerned that Mr. Campion should have gone into the country early the following morning on a purely personal matter concerning a horse which he was thinking of buying and should not have returned to his flat until the evening. When he did get back he found Juliet and the dark, good-looking Philip Graysby, with whom she had presumably made up her differences, waiting for him. To Mr. Campion they both seemed very young and very distressed. Juliet appeared to have been crying and it was she who broke the news.

"It's Auntie Flo," she said in a small tragic voice. "She's bunked, Albert."

It took Mr. Campion some seconds to assimilate this interesting development, and by that time young Graysby had launched into hurried explanations.

"That's putting it very crudely," he said. "My aunt caught the Paris plane this morning. Certainly she traveled alone, which was unusual, but that may not mean anything. Unfortunately, she did not leave an address, and although we've got into touch with the Crillon she doesn't seem to have arrived there."

He hesitated and his dark face became suddenly ingenuous.

"It's so ridiculously awkward, her going off like this without telling anyone just after Detective Inspector Oates called on her last night. I don't know what the interview was about, of course—nobody does—but there's an absurd feeling in the household that it wasn't very pleasant. Anyway, the inspector was very interested to hear that she had gone away when he called round this afternoon. It was embarrassing not being able to give him any real information about her return, and precious little about her departure. You see, we shouldn't

have known she'd taken the plane if the chauffeur hadn't driven her to Croydon. She simply walked out of the house this morning and ordered the car. She didn't even take a suitcase, which looks as though she meant to come back tonight, and, of course, there's every possibility that she will."

Mr. Campion perched himself on the table and his eyes were grave.

"Tell me," he said quietly, "had Lady Florence an appointment with her manicurist today?"

"Miss Matisse?" Juliet looked up. "Why, yes, she had, as a matter of fact. I went round there quite early this morning. Swan phoned me and told me Aunt had left rather hurriedly so I—er—I went to see him."

She shot an appealing glance at Philip, who grimaced at her, and she hurried on.

"While I was there Miss Matisse arrived and Bennett, Aunt's maid, told her all the gossip before I could stop her. Oh my dear, you don't think . . . ?"

Instead of replying Mr. Campion reached for the telephone and dialed a famous Whitehall number. Chief Detective Inspector Oates was glad to hear his voice. He said so. He was also interested to know if Mr. Campion had heard of the recent developments in The Sparrow case.

"No," he said in reply to Mr. Campion's sharp question. "The two Borringers are behaving just as usual. Blower's had the girl under his eye all day. . . . No, she hasn't communicated with anyone. . . . What? . . . Wait a minute. I've got notes on Blower's telephoned report here. Here we are. 'On leaving the Dowager Countess of Marle's house Miss Matisse went to the Venetian Cinema in Regent Street for the luncheon programme.' Nothing happened there except that she pulled Blower's leg again."

"Did she shout to someone?" Mr. Campion's tone was urgent.

"Yes. Called to a woman named Mattie, who she said she thought was in the circle. Same silly stunt as last time. What's the matter?"

Campion checked his exasperation. He was desperately in earnest and his face as he bent over the instrument was frighteningly grave.

"Oates," he said quietly, "I'm going to ring you again in ten minutes and then you've got to get busy. Remember our little talk about the Meyers? This may be life or death."

"Good . . ." began the chief and was cut off.

Mr. Campion hustled his visitors out of the flat.

"We're going down to see Swan," he said, "and the quicker we get there the better."

Henry Swan proved to be a small frightened man who was inclined to be more than diffident until he had had matters

explained to him very thoroughly. Then he was almost pathetically anxious to help.

"The address on the duck parcel, sir?" he said, echoing Mr. Campion's question nervously. "I daren't tell the police that. It might have been more than my life was worth. But if you think her ladyship—"

"Let's have it," cut in Graysby irritably.

"Please," murmured Juliet.

Mr. Swan came across. "Nineteen A, Rue Robespierre, Lyons, France," he blurted out. "I've burned the label but I remember the address. In fact, to tell you the truth, it was because of the address I opened the box in the first place. I never had such a fright in all me life, sir, really."

"I see. Who was the parcel sent to?" Mr. Campion's manner was comfortingly reassuring.

Henry Swan hesitated. "Maurice Bonnet," he said at last, "and I once met a man who called himself that."

Mr. Campion's eyes flickered. "On those occasions when he wasn't calling himself Meyer, I suppose?" he remarked.

The small man turned a shade or so paler and dropped his eyes.

"I shouldn't like to say, sir," he murmured.

"Very wise," Campion agreed. "But you've got nothing to worry about now. We've got the address and that's all that matters. You run along. Graysby, you and I have got to hurry. I'll just have a word with Oates on the phone and then we'll nip down to Croydon and charter a plane."

Juliet caught his arm. "You don't mean Philip's aunt might be in *danger*?" she said.

Mr. Campion smiled down at her. "Some people do resent interference so, my dear," he said, "especially when they have quite a considerable amount to lose. . . ."

The Rue Robespierre is not in the most affluent quarter of Lyons and just before midnight on a warm spring evening it is not seen at its best. There silent figures loll in the dark doorways of houses which have come down in the world, and the night life has nothing to do with gaiety.

From Scotland Yard the wires had been busy and Campion and Graysby were not alone as they hurried down the center of the wide street. A military little capitaine and four gendarmes accompanied them, but even so they were not overstaffed.

As their small company came to a stop before the crumbling façade of number nineteen A an upper window was thrown open and a shot spat down upon them. The capitaine drew his own gun and fired back, while the others put their shoulders to the door.

As they pitched into the dark musty hall a rain of fire met them from the staircase. A bullet took Mr. Campion's hat from his

head, and one of the gendarmes stepped back swearing, his left hand clasping a shattered right elbow.

The raiding party defended itself. For three minutes the darkness was streaked with fire, while the air became heavy with the smell of cordite.

The end came suddenly. There was a scream from the landing and a figure pitched over the balustrade onto the flags below, dragging another with it in its flight, while pattering footsteps flying up to the top story testified to the presence of a fugitive.

Mr. Campion plunged forward, the others at his heels. They found Florence, Dowager Countess of Marle, at last in a locked bedroom on the third floor. She had defended herself and had suffered for it. Her black silk was torn and dusty and her coiffure disheveled. But her spirit was unbroken and the French police listened to her tirade with a respect all the more remarkable since they could not understand one word of it.

Graysby took his aunt back to her hotel in a police car and Mr. Campion remained to assist in the cleaning up.

Bertrand Meyer himself actually succeeded in getting out onto the roof, but he was brought back finally and the little capitaine had the satisfaction of putting the handcuffs on him.

One of the gang had been killed outright when his head had met the flagstones of the hall, and the remaining member was hurried off to a prison hospital with a broken thigh.

Mr. Campion looked at Meyer with interest. He was an oldish man, square and powerful, with strong sensitive hands and the hot angry eyes of a fanatic. His workroom revealed many treasures. A jeweler's bench, exquisitely fitted with all the latest appliances, contained also a drawer which revealed the dismembered fragments of the proceeds of the first three London burglaries, together with some French stones in particular request by the Sureté.

Campion looked round him. "Ah," he said with satisfaction, "and there's the wireless set. I wondered when some of you fellows were going to make use of the outside broadcasting programmes. How did you work it? Had someone listening to the first part of the first programme to be broadcast from a London public place each day, I suppose? It really is amazing how clearly those asides come, her voice quite fearless and yet so natural that it wasn't until some time afterwards that I realized she had been standing just below the orchestra's live microphone."

Meyer did not answer. His face was sullen and his eyes were fixed on the stones which the Frenchmen were turning out of

little chamois leather bags onto the baize surface of the bench....

It was some days later, back in the flat in Bottle Street, when Chief Detective Inspector Oates sipped a whiskey and soda and beamed upon his friend.

"I take off my hat to the old girl," he said disrespectfully. "She's got courage and a great sense of justice. She says she'll go into the witness box if we need her and she apologized handsomely to me for taking the law into her own hands."

"Good," said Mr. Campion. "You've got the Borringers, of course?"

The chief grinned. "We've got 'em as safe as a couple of ferrets in a box," he declared. "The man's an expert, but the woman's a genius. The story she told the old lady, for instance. That was more than brains. After she'd got her ladyship interested in her she broke down one day and told a pretty little yarn about her cruel husband in France who had framed a divorce and got the custody of the kid. She told a harrowing story about the little presents she had made for it herself and had had sent back to her pronto. It didn't take her long to get the old woman to offer to send them as though they'd come from the White Elephant Society. Every woman has a streak of sentimentality in her somewhere. So all the Borringer —alias Matisse—girl had to do was to bring along the toys in her manicure case from time to time and have 'em despatched free, gratis, with a label which almost guaranteed 'em a free pass. Very nice, eh?"

"Very," Campion agreed. "Almost simple."

The chief nodded. "She did it well," he said; "so well that even after I'd given the old lady the facts she didn't trust me. She believed so strongly in this fictitious kid that she went roaring over to Lyons to find out the truth for herself before she gave the girl away. Unfortunately, the Borringers had that means of wireless communication with Meyer and so when she arrived the gang was ready for her. It's a good thing you got there, Campion. They're a hot lot. I wonder what they'd have done with her."

"Neat," muttered Mr. Campion. "That wireless stunt, I mean."

"It was." Oates was still impressed. "The use of the names made it sound so natural. What was the code exactly? Do you know?"

His host pulled a dictionary from a shelf at his side and turned over the leaves until he came to a small section at the end.

"It's childish," he said. "Funny how these people never do any inventing if they can help it. Look it all up."

The chief took the book and read the heading aloud.

"The More Common British Christian Names and Their Meanings."

He ran his eyes down the columns.

"Gregory," he read. *"A watcher.* Good Lord, that was to tell 'em Blower was on their track, I suppose. And Mattie . . . what's Mattie?"

He paused. *"Diminutive of Matilda,"* he said at last. *"Mighty Battle Maid.* I don't get that."

"Dangerous, indignant and female," translated Mr. Campion. "It rather sums up Philip Graysby's Auntie Flo, don't you think?"

It was after the chief had gone and he was alone that Juliet phoned. She was jubilant and her clear voice bubbled over the wire.

"I can't thank you," she said. "I don't know what to say. Aunt Florence is perfectly marvelous about everything. And I say, Albert . . ."

"Yes?"

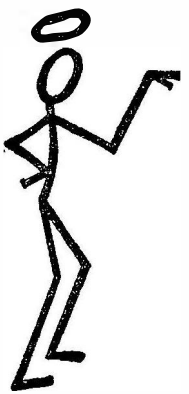
"Philip says we can keep Swan if we have him at the country house. We're going to be married quite soon, you know. Our reconciliation rather hurried things along. . . . Oh, what did you say?"

Mr. Campion smiled. "I said I'll have to send you a wedding present then," he lied.

There was a fraction of silence at the other end of the wire.

"Well, darling . . . it would be just too terribly sweet if you really *wanted* to," said Miss Fysher-Sprigge.

PALM TREES IN THE OASIS



As we go to press, the insurgent junta in Algiers is broadcasting mysterious messages to a France which may have a new regime by the time you read this, messages reminding you of the cryptic "weather reports" and the like that were broadcast to the French underground from London during the last War.

In one instance a message was repeated over and over again—"The chapel will be illuminated tonight."

Where?

The Government controlled radio in France was sending equally obscure messages. An announcer ended one news broadcast from Bordeaux as follows: "Attention! Attention! Attention! The palm trees are in the oasis . . . ."

THE saint's RATINGS

Look before you leap

but never forget that he who hesitates is lost. This must be the way the Mystery Reader feels these days when he reaches into the book rack for a paperback. This month's catch is a good example—as alike on the surface as so many herring in a school. Girls and guns on the cover, and the blurb inside about how her clothes dropped away, and... Not that our reviewer doesn't like girls, mind you. Why he likes them so much that sometimes he even thinks he invented them. It is just that he keeps looking for a yardstick that will separate the great from the gruesome before reading. After years of intensive research he has sighed and pronounced it hopeless. At least for him.

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ashcan

THE ACCUSED, by Harold R. Daniels (Dell, 35¢)

Pick this book up—and you will find yourself reading through to the end before dropping it. This in spite of the fact the killer's trial opens on the first page and you know whodunit. Quite a change from the big-jawed private-eyes.

GIRL OUT BACK, by Charles Williams (Dell, 35¢)

Despite the cover-cleavage, the girl has very little to do with this yarn. Swamp-lore, murder and a fortune in small bills provide the interest—lessened by the hero. He does such preposterous things with such slight reasons. The story survives this blow, however.

DEATH AT FLOOD TIDE, by Louis A. Brennan (Dell, 25¢)

A pedestrian murder-mystery is saved by its unique location. Set against the intriguing locale of a flooded town, the story gets a third-dimension that grapples it back from oblivion. Also a touch of Warped Sex for those who tire quickly of the eternal rain.

THE BEST FROM MANHUNT, selected by Scott and Sidney Meredith (Permabooks, 25¢)

Ranging from the incredibly bad (the story by Evan Hunter) to the pocket classic ("Mugger Murder" by Richard Deming) this collection usually hits somewhere in between.

THE LUSTING DRIVE, by Ovid Demaris (Gold Medal, 25¢)

The Ovid who wrote the "Art of Love" would spin in his grave if he read this Ovid's writings. This murder story would be interesting if it wasn't shoveled over with the kind of writing usually found on walls.

THE SCRAMBLED YEGGS, by Richard S. Prather (Gold Medal, 25¢)

The dreariest Shell Scott to date. If possible, avoid.

BRAD DOLAN'S MIAMI MANHUNT, by William Fulier (Dell, 25¢)

Action in Miami where everything that glitters isn't necessarily gold, and the ladies—at least in these novels—smell good, and are expensive—and deadly.

easter devil

by . . . Mignon C. Eberhart

Has anyone talked to you of death, she asked, as Felicia wondered if it would be very difficult. Did one regret?

SUSAN DARE sipped her coffee and quietly contemplated devils. Outside, rain beat down upon cold, dark streets, but inside the drawn curtains of Susan's small library it was warm, with a fire cheerful in the grate, and the dog lazy upon the rug, and cigarettes and an old book beside the deepest armchair. An armchair which Susan just then decorated, for she had dressed for her dinner *á seul* in soft trailing crimson. Too bad, thought Susan regretfully, that her best moments were so often wasted: a seductive crimson gown, and no one to see it. She smashed her cigarette sadly and returned to her book.

Devils and devil-possessed souls! Of course there were no such things, but it was curious how real the old writers made both. Susan, who was a successful young writer of thrilling mystery novels, was storing up this knowledge for future use.

Then the doorbell rang. The dog barked and scrambled to his feet and bounced into the hall, and Susan followed.

Two men, beaten and wet with

There have been occasional references made in these pages to the so-called "crinoline school of letters," actually quite necessary in this field where so many of the writers—Mignon C. Eberhart, Agatha Christie, and others —are women. Her WHILE THE PATIENT SLEPT *won the Scotland Yard Prize, and her books sold several hundred thousand copies in this country.*

rain, were waiting, and one of them was Jim Byrne, with a package under his arm.

"Company?" asked Jim tersely, looking at the dress.

"No. I was alone—"

"You remember Lieutenant Mohrn?"

Of course she did! It was her volunteer work with him on a recent Chicago crime that had led the police force to regard her as a valuable consultant.

"How do you do?" said Lieutenant Mohrn. "I hope you don't mind our coming. You see, there's something—"

"Something queer," said Jim. "In point of fact, it's—"

"Murder," said Lieutenant Mohrn.

"Oh," said Susan. Her own small warm house—and these two men with sober faces looking at her. She smoothed back her hair. "Oh," she said again.

Jim pushed the package toward her.

"I got size thirty-six," he said. "Is that right?—I mean, that's what we want you to wear."

That was actually Susan's introduction to the case of the Easter Devil. Fifteen minutes later she was getting out of the glamorous crimson gown and into a brown tweed suit with a warm topcoat, and tossing a few things into a bag—the few things included the contents of the package, which proved to be several nurse's uniforms, complete with caps, and a small kit of tools which were new and shiny.

"Do you know anything about nursing?" Jim Byrne had asked.

"Nothing," said Susan. "But I've had appendicitis."

"Oh," said Jim, relieved. "Then you can—oh, take a pulse, make a show of nursing. She's not sick, you know. If she were, we could not do this."

"I can shake a thermometer without dropping it," said Susan. "If the doctor will help—"

"Oh, he'll help all right," said Lieutenant Mohrn somewhat grimly. "We have his consent and approval."

She pulled a small brown hat over her hair and then remembered to change gold slippers to brown oxfords.

In the hall Jim was waiting.

"Mohrn had to go," he said. "I'll take you out. Glenn Ash is about an hour's run from town."

"All right," said Susan. She scribbled a note to Huldah and spoke soberly to the dog, who liked to have things explained to him.

"I'm going to a house in Glenn Ash," she said gravely. "Be a good dog. And don't chase the neighbor's cat."

He pushed a cold nose against her hand. He didn't want her to go, and he thought the matter of Petruchkin the cat might better have been ignored. Then the front door closed and he heard presently two doors bang and a

car drive away. He returned to the library. But he was gradually aware that the peace and snugness were gone. He felt gloomily that it would have been very much better if the woman had stayed at home.

And the woman, riding along a rainswept road, rather agreed with him. She peered through the rain-shot light lanes ahead and reviewed in her mind the few facts that she knew. And they were brief enough.

At the home of one Gladstone Denisty in Glenn Ash a servant had been murdered. Had been shot in the back and found (where he'd fallen) in a ravine near the house. There was no weapon found, and anyway he couldn't have shot himself. There were no signs of attempted burglary. There were, indeed, no clues. He was a quiet, well-behaved man and an efficient servant and had been with the Denisty family for some time; so far as could be discovered, his life held no secrets.

Yet that morning he had been found in the ravine, murdered.

The household consisted of Gladstone Denisty and his wife; his mother and brother, and two remaining servants.

"It's Mrs. Gladstone Denisty —her first name is Felicia— whom we want you to nurse," Lieutenant Mohrn had said. "There's more to the thing than meets the eye. You see, the only lead we have leads to the Denisty home; this man was killed by a bullet of the same caliber as that of a revolver which is known to have been in the Denisty house —property of nobody in particular—and which has disappeared within the last week. But that's all we know. And we thought if we could get you inside the house —just to watch things, you know. There's no possible danger to you."

"There's always danger," said Jim brusquely, "where there's murder."

"If Miss Dare thinks there's danger, she's to leave," said Lieutenant Mohrn wearily. "All I want her to do is get a—line on things."

And Jim, somehow grudgingly, had said nothing; still said nothing.

It was a long ride to Glenn Ash, and that night a difficult one, owing to the rain and wind. But they did finally turn off the winding side road into a driveway and stop.

Susan could barely see the great dark bulk of the house looming above with only a light or two showing.

Then Jim's hand was guiding her up some brick steps and across a wide veranda. He put his mouth to her ear: "If anything happens that you don't like, leave. At once." And Susan whispered, "I will," and Jim was gone, and the wide door was

opening, and a very pretty maid was taking her bag and leading her swiftly upstairs. The household had retired, said the maid, and Mrs. Denisty would see her in the morning.

"You mean Mrs. Gladstone Denisty?" asked Susan.

"Oh, no, ma'am. *Mrs.* Denisty," said the maid. "Is there anything—? Thank you. Good night, ma'am."

Susan, after a thoughtful moment, locked her door and presently went to bed and listened to the rain against the windowpanes and wished she could sleep. However, she must have fallen asleep, for she awakened suddenly and in fright. It had stopped raining. And somewhere there had been a sound.

There had been a sound, but it was no more. She only knew that it had waked her and that she was ridiculously terrified. And then all at once her heart stopped its absurd pounding and was perfectly still. For something—out there in the long and empty hall—had brushed against her bedroom door!

She couldn't, either then or later, have persuaded herself to go to that door and open it and look into the hall. And anyway, as the moments dragged on, she was convinced that whoever or whatever had brushed against her door was gone. But she sat, huddled under blankets, stonily wide awake until slow gray dawn began to crawl into the room. Then she fell again into sleep, only to be waked this time by the maid, carrying a breakfast tray and looking what she thought of trained nurses who slept late. Mrs. Denisty, she informed Susan, wished to see her.

Not, thought Susan, getting into the unaccustomed uniform, an auspicious beginning. And she was shocked to discover that she looked incredibly young and more than a little flip in the crisply tailored white dress and white cap. She took her horn-rimmed spectacles, which improved things very little, and her thermometer, and went downstairs, endeavoring to look stern enough to offset the unfortunate effect of the cap.

But on the wide landing of the stairs she realized that the thick, white-haired woman in the hall below was interested only in the tongue-lashing she was giving two maids. They were careless, they were lying, they had broken it—all of it. She looked up just then and saw Susan and became at once bland.

"Good morning, Miss Dare," she said. "Will you come down?" She dismissed the servants and met Susan at the foot of the stairs. "We'll go into this drawing room," she said. She wore a creamy white wool dress with blue beads and a blue handkerchief and did not ask Susan to sit down.

"The household is a little upset just now," she said. "There was an unfortunate occurrence here, night before last. Yes—unfortunate. And then yesterday or last night the maid or cook or somebody managed to break some Venetian glass—quite a lot of it—that my daughter-in-law was much attached to. Neither of them will admit it. However, about my daughter-in-law, Mrs. Gladstone Denisty, whom you are here to care for: I only wished to tell you, Miss Dare, that her nerves are bad, and the main thing, I believe, is merely to humor her. And if there is anything you wish to know, or if any—problem—arises, come to me. Do you understand?"

Susan wondered what was wrong with the room and said she understood.

"Very well," said Mrs. Denisty, rising. "That is all."

But that was not all. For there was a whirlwind of steps, and a voice sobbing broken phrases swept through the door, and a woman ran into the room clutching in both hands something bright and crimson. A queer little chill that she could never account for crept over Susan as she realized that the woman clutched, actually, broken pieces of glass.

"Did you see, Mother Denisty?" sobbed the woman. "It's all over the floor. How much more—how much more—"

"Felicia!" cried Mrs. Denisty sternly. "Hush—yes, I know. It was an accident."

"An accident! But you know—you know—"

"The nurse is here—Miss Dare."

The young woman whirled. She was—or had been—of extraordinary beauty. Slender and tall, with fine, fair hair and great, brilliant gray eyes. But the eyes were hollow and the lids swollen and pink, and her mouth pale and uncertain.

"But I don't need a nurse."

"Just for a few days," said Mrs. Denisty firmly. "The doctor advised it."

The great gray eyes met Susan's fixedly—too fixedly, indeed, for the look was actually an unwavering stare. Was there something, then, beyond Susan—near Susan—that she did not wish to see?

"Oh," said Felicia Denisty with a thin sharp gasp and looked at her hand, and Susan ran forward. On the slender white hand was a brighter, thicker crimson than the Venetian glass which was just then and quite slowly relinquished.

"You've cut your hand," said Susan inadequately. Felicia had turned to the older woman, who was unmoved.

"See," she said, extending her bleeding hand. "Just to be in the room with it—"

Mrs. Denisty moved forward then.

"Will you go upstairs with Mrs. Gladstone, Miss Dare," she said firmly, "and dress her hand."

Upstairs Susan blessed a brief course of Red Cross lectures which during school days she had loathed, and made a fairly workmanlike job of bandaging the wound.

But it was not so easy to spend the long hours of the slow gray day with Felicia Denisty, for she had fallen into a brooding silence, sat and stared either at her bandaged hand or out the window upon a dreary balcony, and said practically nothing.

The afternoon passed much as the morning, except that with the approach of dusk the wind rose a bit and rattled shutters, and Felicia grew restless and turned on every available light in her room.

"Dinner," she said to Susan, "is at seven-thirty." She looked fully at Susan, as if for the first time. "You've been inside all day, Miss Dare. I didn't think—would you like to take a walk before dinner?"

Susan said she would, and hoped she wasn't too eager.

But at the end of half an hour's walk through rapidly increasing gray dusk she was still no wiser than she had been, except that she had a clearer notion of the general plan of the house—built like a wide-flung T with tall white pillars running up to the second-story roof of the wide double porch, which extended across the front of the house—and of the grounds.

On two sides of the house was a placid brown lawn, stretching downward to roadway and to rolling meadows. But on the south lay the ravine, an abrupt, irregular gash, masked now and made mysterious by dripping shrubbery. Beyond it appeared the roof of a house, and at the deepest point of the ravine it was crossed by a small wooden bridge which lost itself in the trees at the farther end. It must lead, thought Susan, to the house, but she did not explore it, although she looked long at the spot where (as revealed by a discreet inquiry of the pretty housemaid) the butler had been murdered.

It was perhaps ten feet from the entrance to the small wooden bridge and just behind a large clump of sumach. It was not in view from the windows of the Denisty house.

Susan, made oddly uneasy by the fog-enshrouded shadows of the trees, made her way back.

Once inside she turned at once to the drawing room. It was dark, and she fumbled for the light and found it. The room was exactly as she remembered it from the morning; a large room of spaces and many windows and massive furniture. Not somehow a pleasant room. It was too still, perhaps, too chilly, too—she

turned suddenly as if someone had spoken her name and saw the Easter image.

And she realized what was wrong with the room.

It stood there beside the fireplace—a black, narrow image of a man—a terribly emaciated man, with protruding ribs and a queer, painted face, roughly carved. It was perhaps two feet tall and there were white marks on it that looked like, but were not chalk. Its emaciation and its protruding ribs suggested that it was a remnant of that strangely vanished race from mysterious, somber Easter Island. When you looked at it analytically, that was all there was to see.

But it was singularly difficult to look at it analytically. And that was because of the curiously repellent look in its face; the air of strange and secret sentience that somehow managed to surround the small figure. There was a hint of something decadent, something faintly macabre, something incredibly and hideously wise. It was intangible: it was not sensible. But, nevertheless, it was there.

Yet, Susan told herself sternly, the image itself was merely a piece of wood.

A carved piece of wood from Easter Island: a souvenir, probably, of a journey there. It had no connection with the murder of a butler, with the shattered fine fragments of Venetian glass.

Susan turned suddenly and left the drawing room. But when in the hall the door behind her opened. Susan all but screamed before she saw the man who had entered. He flung off hat and coat and reached for a stack of letters on the hall table and then finally looked at her and said: "Oh, hullo. You must be the nurse. Miss—"

"Dare," said Susan. He was thick, white-haired, brusque, with a blunt nose and bright, hard blue eyes. He wasn't over forty-five, and he must be a Denisty.

"Dare," said he. "Nice name. Well, take care of my wife." His blue eyes shot a quick glance up the stairway, and he bent and kissed at Susan; turned, humming, toward the library, and vanished.

Kissed at her; for what she felt would have been a rather expert kiss had been pretty well deflected by some quick action on her part.

Well, that was Gladstone.

And Marlowe Denisty, the brother, who turned up at dinner, was a handsome Byronic-looking youth who talked enthusiastically of practically everything.

It was Marlowe who later, in the drawing room, spoke of the Easter image.

He had brought it, he told Susan expansively, from Easter Island himself. It was a present to Gladstone.

"An akuaku," said Susan absently.

"A *what?*" said Gladstone, turning sharply to look at her.

Susan wished she had not spoken, and Marlowe flashed her a glance of bright approval.

"An akuaku," he said. "An evil god. You remember, Glad, I told you all about it when I brought the thing home. These wooden figures, or moai miro, were made first, so far as can be discovered, by Tuukoihu, who ruled the island following Hotu Matua. These small figures with protruding ribs were thought to be reminders of the imminence of death, threats of—"

"Thank you, I can read the encyclopedia myself," said Gladstone Denisty sharply. "And anyway, it's all nonsense. A piece of carved wood with white painting on it can't possibly have any sort of significance."

"It *can* have," cried Felicia with sudden unexpected violence. "It *does* have!"

Mrs. Denisty, with a glance at Gladstone, interrupted. "Felicia, dear child," she cried in a deprecating way. "How can you be so absurd!"

"Hush!" Felicia's voice was all at once taut; her eyes were wide and dark, and she flung out her hand toward the image. "Don't you realize that it hears you? Don't you realize what it has brought into this house? Misfortune—suffering—murder—"

"*Felicia!*" The interruption was loud and covered anything Felicia might have continued to say, and Mrs. Denisty went on swiftly. "You are hysterical, my dear, and not quite yourself. As to misfortune, we have lost no more than other people and are still very comfortable. And your illness couldn't possibly have been induced by a wooden image—"

"An evil god—an evil influence," muttered Felicia, staring at the image.

Mrs. Denisty swept on, though her mouth was tight.

"And William's death, which I suppose you are referring to, was the result of his discovering an attempt to burglarize the house. It is dreadful, of course. But it had no possible connection with this—this piece of wood."

Felicia was trembling. Susan put a hand upon her arm but could not stay the uneven torrent of words.

"What of the things that have happened to me?—Why, even my kitten died. Flowers die if I touch them. Something happens to everything that is mine. Why—just last night—the glass—" She was sobbing. "William—he was kind to me—he—"

Gladstone intervened.

"Take her upstairs, Miss Dare," he said quietly. "See if you can quiet her. She has some capsules the doctor gave her—try to calm yourself, Felicia."

"Oh, I'll go. I'll go."

She sobbed weakly. But she said no more, and once in her room upstairs took the sedative and afterwards lay quiet, staring at the ceiling with great tragic eyes.

"Your illness," said Susan gently. "The doctor didn't tell me—"

Felicia did not look at her.

"Nerves, he says. That's all any of them say. But I was all right until he brought the image home. About a year ago." The sedative was beginning to take effect, and she spoke calmly. "It is the image, you see, Miss Dare. It hates me. I feel it. I know it. And—I heard the story—of a woman in Tahiti, an Englishwoman who had one, and it hated her, and it brought evil and suffering and misfortune, and finally—death."

She spoke the last word in a whisper.

"Did Marlowe tell you about it?"

"Yes. He told us. We thought nothing of it—then. Mother Denisty says it is wrong of me to fear it. She's religious, you know."

"She holds very firmly to the church?"

"Oh, yes. Except in the modern trend. That is—divorce, you know. She is very much against divorce." Owing perhaps to the capsule, Felicia was beginning to talk in a rambling way. "She says my feeling about the image is superstition."

"How was William kind to you?" asked Susan.

"Oh, in so many little ways. I think he liked me. It was he who told me about the flowers. Of course, I didn't believe him. I know why they died. But he told me that, so I would feel better." She was becoming drowsy, and her words were soft and slow.

Susan felt and stifled with rather shocking ease a scruple against further questions and said: "What did he tell you?"

"Oh—something about acid in the water. I don't know—it couldn't have been true. Flowers died because they were mine. And I don't want to study French any more."

"French," said Susan. *"French!"*

Felicia's drooping eyelids flared open. She stared hazily but intently at Susan and suddenly lifted herself on one elbow and leaned toward her and whispered hoarsely: "It's Dorothy. She knows about the image. I can see it in her eyes. In her eyes." She dropped back upon the pillow, repeated, "In her eyes—in her eyes," and then quite suddenly was heavily asleep.

After a long time Susan tiptoed away.

But at midnight she was still broadly awake, strongly aware, as one is at night, of the house

about her and all that it held—including the thing that brooded over a downstairs room.

Only a piece of wood.

And what possible connection was there between a piece of wood, some shattered fine glass, and a murdered butler? French lessons and dead flowers and an acid? A kitten—dead, also. An image that represented the imminence of death. A hysterical woman—talking of death.

That night, if anyone brushed against her door, Susan did not know it, for she fell at length into an uneasy sleep.

Her second day in the Denisty household was in many ways a replica of the first, except that nothing at all happened.

Once during the morning she heard Mrs. Denisty telephoning to someone she called Dorothy and saying that Felicia would not be able to do French that morning, which left Susan little wiser than she had been. And once she herself was called to the telephone for what proved to be an extremely guarded conversation with Jim Byrne. She succeeded only in reassuring him as to her own personal safety, told him carefully that she did not know how long the "case" would last, and hung up.

That night, too, was quiet. But the next day things happened.

In the first place, "Dorothy" came to call. Susan, just entering Felicia's room with the morning paper, heard her voice on the stairs.

"Is Mrs. Gladstone in her room?"

"Yes, Mrs. Laasch," replied the housemaid's voice.

"So I thought. No, no—I know the way. Mrs. Gladstone won't mind."

Susan waited. In another moment the owner of the voice came along the hall, glanced at Susan, and preceded her into Felicia's room with the ease of very old and intimate acquaintance.

"Oh, good morning, Dorothy," said Felicia.

So this was Dorothy. Dorothy Laasch. Susan gave Felicia the paper and at Felicia's gesture sat down near her.

"Mother Denisty tells me there'll be no more French until you are feeling better," Dorothy was saying. She was a handsome woman in perhaps her middle thirties; a blonde with short hair, vivacious if rather large features, and light, swift eyes. She wore a green wool suit, no hat, and suède pumps. Felicia murmured something and Dorothy went on:

"Since Mother Denisty says so, I suppose that settles it. You ought to rouse yourself, Felicia. You let that woman rule you. Just because she controls the purse strings—"

"Dorothy," said Felicia in a remonstrating way.

Dorothy shot a quick glance toward the door into the hall.

"She's outdoors. I met her down by the bridge."

"But—" said Felicia.

"Oh, you mean the nurse." Dorothy looked at Susan and laughed. "Nurses neither hear nor care, do they, Miss—"

"Dare," said Felicia. She turned briefly to Susan. "This is Mrs. Laasch. I thought you'd met. Let's put off the French lesssons for a couple of weeks, Dorothy."

"Nonsense," said Dorothy vigorously. "You'll be all right in a day or two. How's Mother Denisty taking this business of William's death?"

"I—don't know," faltered Felicia.

"No, I don't suppose you do know," said Dorothy with something like exasperation. "Really, Felicia, you can't see anything. Have the police done anything?"

"About William, you mean? Nothing more. At least, nothing that I know of."

Dorothy patted Felicia's hand briskly.

"Then why do you worry? Mother Denisty can't live forever. And think of the insurance she—"

"Mother Denisty is very kind to me," said Felicia. Her hands were trembling.

"Kind," said Dorothy. She laughed abruptly. "You are all afraid of her. Every one of—"

"Ah, there you are, Dorothy," said Mrs. Denisty's bland voice from the doorway. Dorothy turned quickly, Felicia bent closer over her knitting, and Susan felt quite suddenly as if something had shifted and moved under her feet. Like quicksand, she thought, only it was nothing so perceptible.

"I hope you've cheered up Felicia," said Mrs. Denisty. Her eyes were as blank and cold as two blue beads, but her voice was pleasant. If she had heard Dorothy's words, she gave no indication of it.

"I've tried to," said Dorothy. She rose. "I must run now. Good-bye, Felicia. Good-bye, Miss Dare. Good-bye, Mother Denisty."

She kissed Felicia's white face; she kissed Mrs. Denisty. But Susan rose and walked downstairs and out the wide front door with Dorothy, who accepted her company with the breezy manner that seemed characteristic of her.

"Poor Felicia," said Dorothy. "Do walk along to the bridge with me, Miss Dare. The path goes this way. I live just across the ravine, you know. I should be so alone but for Felicia. I'm a widow, you know. Tell me, just how *is* Felicia?"

"She seems not much changed," said Susan.

"That's what I feared. It seems so queer and useless for her to brood over William. I can't imagine—" She checked herself ab-

ruptly and then continued in the same rapid way: "I don't believe any of them realize the state Felicia is in. And Miss Dare—I am afraid for her."

"Afraid! Of whom?"

Dorothy paused before she said, very slowly: "I'm afraid Felicia has Felicia to fear more than anyone else."

Suicide! Brooding over William. Was that what Dorothy meant? At their right was the patch of brown, dripping sumach. Susan said: "That's where the man was murdered, isn't it?"

"About there, I believe," said Dorothy. She met Susan's eyes for a long moment. "Take care of Felicia—watch her, Miss Dare. Good-bye."

Her heels tapped the wooden floor of the bridge. Susan watched, thinking of her last words, until Dorothy's blonde head vanished around the curve in the path beyond the bridge. Then Susan turned. As she did so something about the floor of the bridge caught her eye, and she bent to look.

Presently she rose and very thoughtfully went back to the house. But it was exactly then that terror clutched at Susan and would not be shaken off.

Yet, at the moment, there was nothing at all that she could do. Nothing but wait and listen and look.

It made it no easier when, that dreary afternoon, Felicia talked of death. Talked absently, queerly, knitting on a yellow afghan. What did Susan think it would be—did she think it would be difficult—would one regret at the last—when it was too late—would one—

"Has anyone talked to you—of death?" asked Susan sharply.

"N-no," said Felicia. "That is, Dorothy and I have talked of it. Some. And Marlowe always likes to discuss such things."

"But that is wrong," said Susan abruptly. "You are sad and depressed."

"Perhaps," said Felicia agreeably. She knitted a long row before she said:

"Dear Glad—he is so good to me. He would, really, give me anything I want. Why, he would even give me a divorce if I asked for it: he has often said so. Not that I want a divorce. It only shows that he would put my wishes, even about that, ahead of Mother Denisty's."

"Then why," said Susan very gently, "does he keep the—Easter image?"

Felicia flinched visibly, but replied:

"Why, you see, Miss Dare, he—he believes in its power. And he keeps it because he says it would be very weak to give in to his—feeling about it."

"But he talks as if—" began Susan irrepressibly and checked herself.

"Oh, yes," said Felicia. "But

that's only because he doesn't like to admit it to other people."

It was that night that the thing happened in the drawing room. And that was the matter of the yellow afghan.

While they were at dinner, somehow, some time, under the very eyes of the Easter image, the knitting was unraveled.

They found it when they entered the chill and quiet drawing room immediately after dinner. It lay in an untidy heap of crinkly yellow yarn, half on the chair where Felicia had left it, half on the floor.

Felicia saw it first and screamed.

And even Mother Denisty looked gray when she saw the heap of yarn. But she turned at once commandingly to Susan and told her to take Felicia back upstairs.

Gladstone took Felicia's arm, and Susan followed, and somehow they got her out of the room. As they passed the still, black Easter image Felicia shuddered.

Upstairs, however, she managed to reply to Gladstone's inquiries.

Yes, she said, she had left the knitting there on the chair just before dinner.

"You are sure, Felicia?"

"Why, of course. I knew we would come into the drawing room for coffee and I—I wanted to have my knitting there. It—keeps me from looking at the image—"

"Nonsense, Felicia. The image won't hurt you."

Felicia wrung her hands.

"Glad, don't keep up this pretense. You know you are afraid of it, too. And Miss Dare knows—"

"Miss Dare—" He turned, his eyes blue and cold and exactly like his mother's, plunged into Susan's eyes and Felicia cried:

"So there's no need to pretend because she is here."

"My wife," said Gladstone to Susan, "seems to be a bit hysterical—"

"Oh, no, no," moaned Felicia. "Don't you see? Listen to me, Glad." She was leaning forward, two scarlet spots in her cheeks and her great eyes blazing. "I left the knitting there in the chair. I was the last one in the dining room—do you remember?"

"Y-yes," said Gladstone unwillingly.

"No one left the table. No one was in the drawing room. And when I returned, it was completely raveled out. Oh, it isn't the knitting that matters: I don't care about that. But it's the—the cruelty. The—" she paused searching for the word, wringing her hands again. Finally it came: "The persecution," said Felicia Denisty.

"Nonsense," said Gladstone heavily. "You are making too

much of an absurdly trivial thing. Now, Felicia, do be sensible. Take one of your capsules and go to sleep. The image simply couldn't have pulled your knitting loose—if that's what you mean."

"The image," said Felicia slowly, "couldn't have killed William, either. But William is dead."

"Don't be morbid, Felicia," said Gladstone. He paused with his hand on the doorknob. "Miss Dare, will you help me a moment, please?"

It was, of course, an absurdly transparent excuse. Felicia said nothing and Susan followed Gladstone into the hall. He closed the door.

"Did my wife unravel the knitting herself, Miss Dare?" he said directly.

"I don't know."

His hard blue eyes, so strangely like his mother's, were plumbing her own eyes, seeking for any thought that lay behind them.

"She seems to have been talking to you a great deal," he said, slowly.

"No," said Susan quietly, "not a great deal."

He waited for her to say more. But Susan waited, too.

"I hope," he said at length, "that you realize to what her talk is due."

Susan smoothed back her hair.

"Yes," she said truthfully. "I believe I do."

He stared at her again, then suddenly turned away.

"That's good," he said. "Good night, Miss Dare."

He went down the stairs at once. In a moment, Susan heard the heavy outside door close. He had not, then, joined his mother and Marlowe, whose voices, steadily and blandly talking, were coming from the drawing room. The room where the Easter image brooded and waited. She returned to Felicia.

"I took two capsules," said Felicia wearily. "You needn't stay, Miss Dare. I'll be asleep in no time."

Two capsules. Susan resolved to talk to the doctor the next day, did what she could for Felicia, and left. This time she met Marlowe, his arms full of yellow wool.

"Oh, hello there, Miss Dare," he said. "I was just looking for you. What shall we do with this? Mother is frightfully upset about it. Glad is the apple of her eye, you know. It's never been exactly a happy marriage—you've probably guessed it. Poor mother. And now Felicia's got this queer notion about the Easter image."

"How did she get the notion?" said Susan. "I mean—has it been long?"

"M-m—a few months. Seems to have got worse since these unlucky things have been happening. Just accidents, of course. But it is a bit queer. Isn't it?"

"Very," said Susan. "Tell me, is she interested in the French lessons?"

"With Dorothy, you mean? Oh, I don't know. She goes regularly, nine o'clock every morning. Mother sees to that. But I don't know that she likes it much. Funny thing, psychology, isn't it? I suppose you see a lot of queer things in your profession, don't you?"

"Well," said Susan guardedly, "yes and no. Good night. Oh, I don't think it would be a good thing to give the yarn to her just now. Anyway, she's asleep."

He turned toward the stairway, his arms still full of yellow yarn.

In her room, Susan locked the door as she had done carefully every night in the silent haunted house. Haunted by a wooden image.

And then, vehemently, she rejected the thought. It was no wooden image that menaced that house and those within it. It was something far stronger.

And yet she was shaken in spite of herself by the incident of the knitting. After all, *had* Felicia herself unraveled it? The family were all at the table and no one left it even momentarily. And the pretty housemaid who was, since William's death, acting as waitress, had been busily occupied and also, naturally, the cook.

But Susan was dealing only with intangibles. There was still no definite, material clue.

She turned, smoothed back her hair, and sat down at the writing desk. And set herself to reducing intangibles to tangibles.

It was after midnight when she leaned back and looked at what she had written.

A conclusion was there, of course, implicit in those facts. But she needed one link. And, even with that one link, she had no proof. Susan turned off the light and opened the window and stood there for a moment, looking out into the starless, quiet night.

Through the darkness and quiet a small dull sound came, beating with rhythmic little thuds upon her ears. And quite suddenly it was as if a small far-away tom-tom was beating out its dark and secret message.

Easter Island and a devil.

"This," said Susan firmly to herself, "is fantastic. The sound is made by footsteps on the wooden bridge."

She listened, and faintly the footsteps came nearer. She could see nothing through the soft damp blackness. But suddenly, not far below her window, the footsteps ceased. Whoever was on the bridge then had now reached the path.

There was no way to know who had passed.

Yet quite suddenly Susan knew as surely as if she had seen.

And with the knowledge came the strangest feeling of urgency. For she knew, with a blinding flash of light, what those footsteps on the bridge meant.

She snatched a dark silk dressing gown and flung it around her shoulders, unlocked her door and fled down the hall. She waited in the dusk above the stair railing, until the door below opened and she caught a glimpse of the person who entered. It was as she expected, and she turned and was at Felicia's door by the time steps began to ascend the stairs.

If Felicia's door were locked! But it was not. She opened it and slipped inside and leaned against it, her heart pounding as if she'd been racing. Felicia was sleeping quietly and peacefully.

Now what to do? If there were only time—time to plan, time to make arrangements. But there was not.

And she had no proof.

And the feeling of urgency was stronger.

Felicia lay so sunk in sleep that only her heavy drugged breathing told Susan that she was alive.

At the bedside table was a telephone—a delicate gold and ivory thing—resting on a cradle.

Did she dare use it?

She must take the risk. She would need help.

She went to the telephone, lifted it, and called a number very softly into the ivory mouthpiece, and waited.

"Hello—hello—" It was Jim Byrne's voice and sounded sleepy and far away.

"Jim—Jim, this is Susan."

"Susan—do you want me?"

"Yes." Did she imagine it or did the floor creak very softly just below the door? If anyone were out there, if her voice, not Felicia's, were heard—

"Susan—what are you doing? *Susan—*"

Even at a distance the vibration from the telephone might be heard.

"Susan!" cried Jim and very softly Susan replaced the telephone on its cradle. Suddenly his voice was gone. And he was miles and miles away.

The floor under the door did not creak again. If she could only have told Jim what to do, what she was trying to do, where to wait until she signaled. Well, the thing now was to get Felicia out of danger.

She turned to the bed.

It was terrifically difficult to rouse Felicia. Susan was exhausted and trembling by the time she had managed to half carry and half push Felicia into the small dressing room. A chaise-longue was there, and when Felicia's slack, inert figure collapsed upon it gracelessly, she fell again into the horribly heavy slumber from which she had never fully aroused. And all the time there had been that dreadful necessity for haste.

Susan, panting from the sheer physical strain, very softly closed the door of the dressing room.

Then, with the utmost caution, she turned the shade of the light so that it would not fall directly upon the door into the hall and yet so that anyone entering the room would be obliged to cross that narrow band of light.

Then, because she was shaking from cold and nerves and the strain of the past few moments, she took Felicia's place on the bed. And waited.

And in the waiting, as always happens, she became uncertain. All the other possibilities crowded into her mind. She was mistaken. There was no proof. This attempt to trap the murderer would fail. She was wrong in thinking that the attack would be made that night.

She knew that Jim Byrne, and probably Lieutenant Mohrn and a number of extremely active and husky policemen, were at that very moment speeding along the road to Glenn Ash.

The thought of it was inexpressibly comforting. But it was also fraught with dangerous possibilities. They might easily arrive too soon. They couldn't arrive too late, she thought, as, once she had proof, that was enough.

But there were so many ways the thing could go wrong, thought Susan rather desperately as the minutes ticked away on the little French clock on the mantel. And her own rapidly conceived plan was so weak, so full of loopholes, so dependent upon chance. Or was it?

After all, it had been intuitional, swift, certain. And intuition with her, Susan reminded herself firmly, was actually a matter of subconscious reasoning. And subconscious reasoning, she went on still firmly, was far better than conscious, rule-of-thumb reasoning. And anyway, the rule-of-thumb reasoning was clear too.

The attack upon Felicia must come. It had already been prepared and ready once, but then William, poor William, had come into it and interfered and had had to be murdered.

She was in the deep shadow, there on Felicia's bed. But the door into the hall was in deep shadow, too. Would she hear it when it opened?

How long was it since she had telephoned to Jim? Where was he now? What would he do when he arrived?

She became more and more convinced that the police would arrive too soon.

Yet, unless she was entirely mistaken, the attack must come soon. Although planned perhaps for months, that night it would be in one way an impulsive act.

She did not shift her eyes from the door. It was so quiet in the house—so terribly quiet and so cold. It was as if the Easter im-

age downstairs had extended the realm of his possession. So cold—

It was then that Susan realized that the cold was coming from the window and that it was being opened, moving almost silently inward. Her eyes had jerked that way, and her heart gave a great leap of terror, but otherwise she had not moved.

She hadn't thought of the window.

A figure, black in the shadow, was moving with infinite stealth over the sill.

"From the porch, of course," thought one part of Susan's mind. "There are stairs somewhere; there must be." And then she realized coldly what a dangerous thing she had undertaken to do.

But it was done, and there she was in Felicia's place. And she must get one clear glimpse of that figure's face.

It was so dark in the shadows by the window. Susan realized she must close her eyes and did so, feigning sleep and listening with taut nerves.

A rustle and a pause.

It was more than flesh and blood could bear. Surely that figure was far enough away from the window by this time so that it could not escape before Susan had a look at its face.

She moved, and there was still silence. She flung one arm outward lazily and sat up as if sleepily and opened her eyes.

"Is that you, Mrs. Denisty?" she asked drowsily.

And looked at the figure and directly into a revolver.

There was to be no pretense then. Susan's vague plan of talk, of excuses on both sides, collapsed.

"If you shoot," she said in a clear low voice that miraculously did not tremble, "the whole house will be here before you can escape."

"I know that." The reply was equally low and clear. "But you know too much, my dear."

The last thing Susan remembered before that pandemonium of struggle began was the revolver being placed quite deliberately upon the green satin eiderdown. Then all knowledge was lost, and she was fighting—fighting for balance, fighting for breath, fighting against blackness, against faintness, against death. If she could get the revolver—but she could not. She could not even gasp for breath, for there were iron hands upon her throat. She twisted and thrust and got free and had a great gasp of air and tried to scream, and then hands were there again, choking the scream.

She kept on pulling at those hands—pulling at something—pulling—but it was easy to drop into that encircling blackness—

easy to become part of it—part of it . . .

Somewhere, somehow, in some curious, dim nether world very much time had passed. And someone was insisting that she return, forcing her to come back, making her open her eyes and listen and leave that dizzy place of blackness.

"She's opened her eyes," cried a voice with a curious break in it. Susan stirred, became curious, opened her eyes again, saw a confused circle of faces bending over her, remembered, and screamed:

"Let me go . . . *let me go* . . ."

"It's all right—it's all right, Susan. Look at me. See, I'm Jim. You are all right. Look at me."

She opened her eyes again and knew that Jim was there, and Lieutenant Mohrn and a great many other people. And she knew she was being wrapped in the eiderdown, and that Lieutenant Mohrn and Jim made a sort of a chair with their arms and carried her out of the room and down the stairs. And then all at once she was in Jim's car, warm and snug.

"I'll get the story from her when she's better," said Jim shortly to Lieutenant Mohrn, who stood at the side of the car. Susan, in a very luxury of tears, was crying her heart out.

Jim let her cry and drove very swiftly. His profile looked remarkably grim. He said nothing even when they reached Susan's house, beyond ordering Huldah to fix some hot milk.

The story of the Easter image ended, as, for Susan, it had begun, in her own small library with a fire blazing cheerfully and the dog at her feet.

"What happened?" she said abruptly.

"Don't talk."

"But I must talk."

He looked at her.

"All right," he said. "But don't talk too much. We got in at the window. Saw the open window on the upper porch and heard—sounds. Got there just in time." He looked back at the fire and was suddenly very grim again.

"Where is—*she*?" whispered Susan.

"Where she belongs. Look here, if you must talk, Sue, how did you know it was that woman? She confessed; had to. She had the gun, you know. The one that killed the butler."

"It couldn't be anyone else," Susan said slowly. "But there wasn't any evidence."

"Huh?" said Jim, in a startled manner.

"I mean," said Susan hurriedly, "there was only my own feeling, the things I saw and heard and felt about the people involved. It was all intangible, you see, until I put the things I knew on paper—chronologically, as they revealed themselves. Then

all at once there was a tangible answer. But there weren't ever any direct material clues. Except the gun, there at the last. And the attack upon Felicia."

A paper rustled in Jim's hand.

"Are those my notes?" asked Susan interestedly.

"Yes — Lieutenant Mohrn wanted you to explain them—"

"Very well," she said. "But it's rather like a—a—"

"Problem in algebra," suggested Jim, smiling.

"No," said Susan hastily. She had never been happy with algebraic terms. "It was more like a—a patchwork quilt. Just small unrelated scraps, you know, and a great many of them. And then you put them together in the only way they'll all fit, and there you have a pattern."

Jim read:

"'*Noise in night that must have been crash of Venetian glass and someone brushed my door; thus person breaking glass probably one of household.*' What on earth is that?"

"Part of the campaign against Felicia," said Susan. "It was evident from the first that there was a deliberate and very cruel campaign in progress against Felicia. The glass broken, her flowers dying always (William had said, she told me, something about acid in the water), her kitten, the knitting—it was all part of the plot. Go on."

"'*Why is Felicia the focus of attack?*' Obviously someone wanted her either to do something that she had to be forced to do, or wanted her out of the way entirely."

"Both," said Susan and shivered,

"'*Gladstone has a roving eye.*'"

"Kisses maids," said Susan. "Kisses anything feminine in a uniform."

"Did he—" said Jim, threatening.

"Slightly," said Susan, and added hurriedly: "The whole thing, though, was centered about the Easter devil."

"The *what!*" said Jim.

She told him, then, the whole story.

"So you see," she said finally. "It seemed to me that this was the situation. Mrs. Denisty ruled the household, controlled the purse strings, and was against divorce. Someone was deliberately playing on Felicia's nerves by threatening her with the Easter devil and by contriving all sorts of subtle ways of persecution. In this campaign the murder of the butler began to look like nothing more than an incident, for evidently the campaign was continuing. Then, when I found that the bridge had been tampered with (you can see for yourself tomorrow) — there's a place where it is quite evident; the nails holding the planks there in the middle have been taken out

and then replaced. It would have been a very bad fall, for it's just over the deepest point of the ravine—and I realized that owing to the French lessons Felicia would have been the first to cross the bridge in the morning, was, in fact, the only one in the household who crossed it daily and at a regular time. I knew thus that the campaign against Felicia had already reached its climax once, and yet had been, for some reason, interrupted."

"Then you think William was murdered because he saw too much?"

"And because he would have told. And his necessary murder, of course, delayed the plot against Felicia. Delayed it until the murderer realized that it could be used as a tool."

"Tool?"

"A reason for what was to appear to be Felicia's suicide."

Jim looked at the paper and read: "'*Dorothy inquires about William; Dorothy seems sincere only when she talks of Mother Denisty ruling the house. Why? Dorothy hints that Mother Denisty knows something of William's murder. Why? Is this smoke screen or sheer hatred of Mrs. Denisty? Dorothy nervous and quick-spoken until I lead her to spot where William was killed; is then poised and calm. Dorothy hints at Felicia becoming suicide. Why?*'"

"Exactly," said Susan. "Why, if not because she's keenly interested in the police inquiry—because she resents Mrs. Denisty's influence, and thus in some way Mrs. Denisty must have opposed Dorothy's own purposes—because she knows too much of the murder herself to permit herself to be anything but extremely guarded and careful in speech and manner when the subject is brought up. When you add up everything, there's just one answer. Just one pattern in which everything fits. And the knitting brought Dorothy directly into it again; that is, none of the family could have pulled out the knitting, the image didn't do it, I felt sure Felicia hadn't, and that left only Dorothy who was free to come and go in the house. But Gladstone pretended publicly that he wasn't afraid of the image, and told Felicia privately that he was afraid of it. Believed in its power for evil. You see, Gladstone had to make an issue of something. So he chose the Easter image. It was at the same time a point of disagreement between him and Felicia and a medium through which to work upon Felicia—it's nothing but a painted piece of wood—but I don't like it myself," said Susan. "He couldn't have chosen a better tool. But it was Dorothy who murdered and was ready to murder again."

"Then Gladstone—"

"Gladstone wanted a divorce,

but wanted to drive Felicia to ask for it herself, owing to his mother's feeling about divorce. Dorothy had to be in the conspiracy, for she was strongly and directly concerned. But there was this difference: Gladstone (who must have thought he had hit on an exceedingly ingenious plan) only wanted to induce Felicia to leave him. *But Dorothy had other plans.* It wasn't fear that Felicia saw in her eyes: it was hate. I knew that when she talked to me of Felicia's possible suicide. There was the strangest impression that she was paving the way, so to speak; it was then that I realized Felicia's danger. Yet I had no proof. It was, as I said, altogether intangible. Nothing definite. Except, of course, the bridge. If I'd had only one real, material clue I shouldn't have worried so. The footsteps on the bridge, though, were a help, because then I had a link between Dorothy and Gladstone, and I hadn't had that—except intangibly—up till then. But I also realized then that he must have told Dorothy the things Felicia had said to me, that Dorothy would realize that it was dangerous to permit Felicia to talk and that Dorothy would probably act at once. Would carry out the plan that had once been interrupted."

"But you were not sure of this. You had no proof."

"Proof?" said Susan. "Why, no, there was no proof. And no evidence. But I would not have dared deny the evidence of my —intangibles."

Jim grinned rather apologetically at her. "After all," he said. "There's plenty of proof now. They think Dorothy intended to kill Felicia and leave the gun with Felicia's fingerprints on it, thus indicating suicide and also that Felicia had shot the butler herself—hence her possession of the gun, hence also the suicide. Remorse. Of course, there were a hundred ways for Dorothy to have secured the gun."

He paused and looked thoughtfully and soberly into the fire.

"Intangibles," he said presently. "But not so darned intangible after all. But all the same, young woman, you are going to get the worst scolding you ever had in all your life. The *chance* you took—" He stopped abruptly and looked away from Susan, and Susan smoothed back her hair.

"Yes," she said in a small voice. "But I've got to go back there."

"Go back!" cried Jim Byrne explosively. "There?"

"Yes, I forgot to burn the Easter image," said Susan Dare blandly.

The dog grunted and stretched. The fire was warm, the house at peace, the woman at home where she ought to be, and she hadn't seen the scratch on his nose after all.

BUREAU FOR THE RECOVERY OF LOST PERSONS

Seven hundred people were reported missing in New York in 1868, proof of the need for the Bureau that had been organized in November of 1867. As soon as it was clear that the person had disappeared from home, the nearest relative would go to police headquarters and report the disappearance. The age, height and build; whiskers, if any; color of eyes, dress, hair; the place where last seen, the habits and disposition of the person, were all noted down. The description of the missing one was compared with the returns made every twenty-four hours by the Morgue to the police. Should the description fit the clothing or body of anyone found there, that would be that. Otherwise, five or six hundred cards, containing all available data on the missing person, would be printed and sent to all police precincts with—to quote a contemporary account—"instructions to the captains to have his men make active and energetic search for the person."

There were of course a lot of reasons why people—including girls in their teens—would disappear in the city called "the great Babylon of America." The circulars sent to the police precincts showed this . . .

"LEFT her home, at Hyde Park, Scranton City, Pa., on Monday, June 14, Sarah H—, aged 15, tall for her age, short brown hair, light eyes, and fair complexion. Had on a tan-colored dress, light cape, drab hat, trimmed with ribbon of the same color. Had with her a dress with a yellow stripe, made short. Information to be sent to Inspector — —."

"TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS REWARD will be paid for information that will lead to the arrest or recovery of Henrietta V—, aged 16 years. She left Secaucus, Hudson County, New Jersey, Tuesday, July 21, about 7 A. M. She is tall, slim built, and a little stooped; brown hair, blue eyes, long, thin, pale face. Dressed in a full suit of black. The gratitude of a father, who desires to save his daughter, will be added to the above reward."

"FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD. Missing from Bay Street, Stapleton, Staten Island, since Wednesday, November 25, 1868, Willy Hardgrove, a boy eight years of age, medium size, dark hair, dark complexion, blue eyes; has a recent scar on his cheek, made by the scratch of a pin; dressed in a dark striped jacket and pants; the pants button on the jacket with light bone buttons; old, strong boots, no hat. He is rather an attractive boy, and very familiar with strangers. It is feared he has been abducted, from the fact of his musical abilities. He can sing, in a good tenor voice, any tune he may hear once played, but can't speak plain. The above reward will be paid by his father, Terence M. Hardgrove, Stapleton, for such information as will lead to his recovery. Information may be sent to Inspector Dilks, Police Headquarters, 300 Mulberry Street."

shell game

by . . . George Dillon

THEY were all there, waiting like greedy vultures for the payoff, as Danny Eagle stepped through the door of Big Al Kapola's apartment. Pete Zundo, Kapola's strong-arm man, followed him in, shut the door firmly, and leaned his huge bulk against it, effectively blocking any hope of escape. He was an ex-wrestler known for his brutality, but Danny suspected that everyone of the four men facing him was potentially even more dangerous. Danny, a mild-looking young man of medium height, wet his lips and prepared for the storm.

As he moved into the room, they watched him intently, eyes burning with exultant anticipation. Then, as they saw that his hands were empty, that nowhere on his person could he be carrying half a million dollars worth of freshly-cut diamonds, their eyes turned cold and deadly.

Brown stared indignantly. Did Danny think he should be fussy where he shot at a time like that? Bah!

Big Al Kapola, who had been leaning on an expensive, high-fidelity record player, slammed the top shut, and advanced threateningly. He was an impressive man with well-tailored clothes, magnificently groomed hair, and eyes

George Dillon, author of HAREM SLAVE, *a historical novel scheduled for publication by Shasta, Chicago, returns with this story of an undercover man. The author, who took part in the famous "Battle of Alcatraz," wrote this and a second historical novel while a prisoner at Leavenworth.*

as hard and unfeeling as granite.

"Well, where's the stuff?" he demanded. "You got it from Ace at the airport thirty-eight minutes ago. What're you trying to pull?"

"Not a damned thing," Danny said bitterly. "Somebody conked me as I was getting into the car—and when I came to, the diamonds were gone."

"Crap!" Kapola snorted, and all five of them closed in on him angrily.

Kapola grabbed Danny by the lapels and jerked him up till their faces were on a level. "Listen, punk! We brought you in from outside and cut you in on a half million score. Don't think we'll let you cross us and live." He slammed Danny against the wall and jolted him with two short punches. "Now, where's the rocks?"

Fire flashed behind Danny's gray eyes; then he forced himself to remember the importance of his task. He had to keep on acting like the underworld character he pretended to be.

"Take it easy!" he pleaded. "Use your heads! You oughta know I wouldn't cross you. Mugs Malotte sent me to you, didn't he? And you had your pipeline to the police station check my criminal record, didn't you? Holy smoke! Feel these lumps on my head. Two of them! Either one woulda knocked me cold. How could I give myself two?"

They hesitated, eyeing him in stony silence. He couldn't tell whether he'd gotten to them or not.

"Somebody crossed us," he argued. "That's a cinch. But it wasn't me. Give me a chance, and maybe I can get the rocks back."

"How?" Kapola sneered. "Play *eeny, meenie, miny, mo,* with eight million people?"

"Look!" Danny said, appealing to all of them. "Four of you, besides me, are being cheated of your rightful cut—and I'm being made the patsy! The only one of you that's got anything to lose is the guy that grabbed the whole boodle. Suppose we go back over the caper, each of us covering his actions, and see what we can come up with?"

He let his glance travel questioningly from man to man, and he saw that he had them. Four of them still hoped to get their share of the loot, and no one wanted to protest for fear of being thought the traitor.

"All right," Kapola grunted. "Ace, you start it off. Tell us what happened."

Ace Russell, ex-fighter pilot and now co-pilot on a trans-Atlantic airliner, rubbed tense fingers across his mouth.

Still a youngster when he'd shot down five enemy planes in Korea, he'd learned to take reckless chances, and to kill. But he'd never matured, and now only beautiful, expensive women and fast-money games seemed to sat-

isfy his intense craving for excitement. He'd lost heavily in Kapola's gambling club, and had signed I.O.U.'s for more than he could earn in a year.

"Well," he said. "When the shipment came aboard from the Amsterdam diamond cutters, I had everything ready, like we planned. I made up an identical package, duplicating all markings, and managed to switch packages. I put the real stones in my kit bag, and when we landed, went to the desk to report, as usual. I set my bag down. Danny came up, set his bag down beside it, asked the man behind the desk a question, then picked up the bag with the stones in it and walked calmly off. Nobody noticed a thing. The bag he left, of course, was really mine, complete with soiled linen, toilet articles, and everything just as it should be in case the Custom officials or police got nosey. That's all there was to it."

"Did you keep your eye on this rat?" Kapola asked.

"Naturally. When I finished checking in, I strolled to the door, lit a cigarette, and watched him get in the car. He sat there for about five minutes, then drove out of the lot."

"Five minutes, huh?" Kapola said. "He coulda pulled anything in that time."

"Not when I was knocked colder'n a deep freeze," Danny said hotly. "Listen, Ace! This is important. Did you see anyone else near my car in the parking lot?"

Ace frowned, then a startled look crossed his face. "Uh—yes, come to think of it, I did see a shadowy figure there for a moment. Then a car about fifty yards away pulled out without turning its lights on."

Pete Zundo gave Danny's head a violent shove. "Could've been wise guy's pick-up man," he said. His voice was hoarse and raspy as though his throat had been crushed in one of his wrestling bouts.

Big Al turned on him. "Where were you?" he demanded.

Pete looked at his boss indignantly. "Right outside the airport where I was supposed to be. Soon as this rat drove out, I cut in right behind him and stayed there till now. We drove slow and careful so we wouldn't get picked up by cops, and I made sure he came straight here."

Kapola gave him a searching glance. "Did you see anyone near Danny's car?"

"Aw, boss," Pete protested. "How could I see anyone that far away? Besides, there was cars and people coming and going all the time. I just made sure I spotted wise guy when he come out and got on his tail."

Danny turned an inquiring eye on Ben Bautzer, the crooked, cut-rate jewelry manufacturer who was to turn their loot into cash.

He had frequently been suspected by the police of handling stolen jewelry, but they had never been able to produce the slightest evidence.

His dark eyes were moist and protruding, but he had taught them never to betray his greedy, scheming thoughts. And he used an oily smile that came too easily to his thick lips to conceal his cruel, treacherous nature. Everything about him was deceptive, even the plump body that was much stronger and faster-moving than it looked. Ben Bautzer, Danny decided, was about as safe to fool with as a king cobra.

"Where were you, Ben?" he asked.

Bautzer gave him the fat-lipped, oily smile. "Having dinner with friends, as we agreed. Friends, you will recall, whose word is beyond doubt."

"I'll never crack that alibi," Danny thought, and turned his attention to Karl Wrandt, the remaining member of the gang. Karl was the finger-man, an employee of the large, reputable manufacturing firm that had ordered the diamonds shipped from Amsterdam.

A tall, blond, self-centered man with a sly smile, he liked to pose as a sophisticate and master of international intrigue. Given a little encouragement, he would relate numerous adventures with the Dutch underground during the Nazi occupation. All of these stories were filled with intrigue, gore, and treachery, and featured Karl Wrandt. But there were people who whispered that more often than not he actually had been the villain of the piece, and had played both sides for his own profit. At any rate, it was obvious that Bautzer had known him in Europe, and that this was not the first crooked deal they'd pulled together. The finger-man, Danny decided, was the type who might betray his fellows for the pleasure of outwitting them, particularly if he could add profit to pleasure.

"What were you doing, Karl?" he asked, knowing the question was futile.

Karl sneered. "It was agreed, wasn't it, that I, most of all, must have an alibi beyond reproach? Well, I have that alibi. But you are dragging red herrings. If you do not produce those diamonds, I will show you what we did to traitors in the underground."

Pete Zundo pushed forward. "This doesn't get us the stones."

Kapola grabbed Danny by the lapels again and shook him viciously. "That's right, punk. We want the rocks. Maybe you got robbed; maybe you stole 'em yourself; but if you wanta live—you'll get them back! We'll give you just two hours—say, till midnight—to show up with them rocks."

He shoved Danny toward the door. "Get going!" he growled. "And Pete. Stay with him. If he

makes a wrong move, make him wish he'd never been born."

Pete grinned happily. "Will do, boss," he said and followed Danny down to the street.

As they were getting into the car, Danny said, "Let's try the airport first."

The big man grunted his assent and put the car into motion.

For the first time, Danny had a chance to review his complex and dangerous situation. The man who'd conked him and snatched the diamonds had really fouled him up. His boss, the crusty chief investigator for World Wide Insurance, had wanted to make the pinch at the airport while Ace Russell was still in possession of the stolen diamonds, but Danny had insisted on doing it his way.

Afraid that Kapola, Bautzer, and the rest of the gang might beat the rap, he'd planned on switching a package of imitation diamonds for the real ones to safeguard his company's client, then have the police raid Kapola's apartment just as he was turning the package over to the assembled gang. That way, he'd have gotten everyone of them dead to rights, and still protected the client.

But now, he was in real trouble. He didn't have a scrap of real court evidence against any of them, and he'd personally lost the client's property—half a million dollars worth! That would most certainly cost him his job, might even get him a prison sentence. "But that," he thought wryly, "won't matter much. I'll be lucky if I can stay alive over two hours."

While Pete Zundo wheeled the big sedan through the streets with powerful, hamlike hands and single-minded purpose, Danny began looking for a subway entrance. He finally saw one in exactly the right spot just as Pete was turning a corner. He remembered Kapola's parting admonition to Pete, but the situation was as promising as he could expect, and he had to run the risk. Taking hold of the door handle with one hand, he grabbed the steering wheel with the other and jerked.

"Look out, you fool!" he yelled as though Pete were about to hit something.

Pete threw all his strength into bringing the car back under control. But it was too late. They crashed into a light pole. Danny burst from the car at the moment of impact and raced for the subway entrance.

"Stop or I'll blast you!" Pete yelled. But before he could shoot, Danny dived out of sight.

He shoved a token into the turnstile and ran for a subway train that was taking on a last half dozen passengers. Fifteen minutes later he entered the lobby of his hotel. He knew he was jumping right back into the tiger's mouth. The whole gang knew where he

was staying, but there was no alternative. He had to get the gun he had concealed there, and the package of phony diamonds he'd rigged up for the switch but been unable to use.

The Devlin Hotel was not one he'd have chosen for himself. It was owned by a friend of Big Al Kapola's, was a popular underworld hangout, and Kapola had made reservations for him there—probably so he could have him watched.

"If I was smart," Danny thought, "I'd head for the Fiji Islands." But, somehow, he couldn't give up without making at least one more attempt to crack the case, and recover the diamonds—however dangerous.

As he crossed the lobby, he saw the shifty-eyed hotel clerk come to life and surreptitiously reach for a telephone. And, leaning on the cigar counter was a lean, hard, hatchet-faced man with a brown hat pulled low on his forehead. Danny noted the alert interest that came suddenly into the man's eyes.

"Kapola's watchdog," he thought, and still with one eye over his shoulder, barged into the rickety old self-service elevator.

The barrel of a Luger pistol jammed into his belly, hard, making him gasp for breath. He stared up into the cold, implacable eyes of Karl Wrandt.

"I figured you'd come here," Karl hissed.

"So what?" Danny snapped. "I had to start hunting some place."

"What did you do with Pete?"

"I left him with the car," Danny said, and pushed the starter button.

Karl withdrew the Luger. "Proceed to your room like you started," he said. "I came to make certain you don't leave with the diamonds—or without them."

While the elevator rose slowly toward the third floor, Danny's mind worked furiously. When the cage stopped, he opened the doors and said pleasantly, "No reason why you and I can't be friends. Come on into my room and we'll have a drink."

Karl shied away from him suspiciously. "No, I'll wait here. But don't think you can get away. We're guarding the fire escape, too."

Having won a few precious minutes alone, Danny opened the door of his room, made sure no one was hidden there, then lifted his suitcase to the bed. Hurriedly dumping its contents, he removed a false bottom, and from the hidden compartment, lifted a super .38 Colt automatic and an extra clip of ammunition, and dropped them into his pocket. Then he lifted out the package of imitation diamonds he'd prepared, and hefted them thoughtfully. His plan was extremely dangerous, he realized, but he couldn't think of anything else that even had a prayer for success.

At that moment, his room phone rang. He went to it and lifted the receiver. "Danny Eagle speaking," he said.

"I've got to talk to you alone," a tense voice said. "This is Ace Russell. Listen, Danny! *I know who the man is that I saw by your car at the airport!*"

"Who?" Danny asked eagerly. "Holy smoke, man! Don't fool around with this. Tell me, quick!"

"Not on the phone. It's dynamite. I'm phoning from a drugstore around the corner. Get down here right away and—oh-h—don't! Don't shoot!"

This last was a terrified, desperate cry. Then over the phone, Danny heard the shattering blast of shots.

"Ace!" he yelled. "Hello—Ace! Hello!"

Slamming down the phone, he ran out the door. Karl Wrandt had disappeared. "The murderous so and so," Danny thought, and plunged down the stairs, three steps at a time. Slowing to a more sedate pace as he crossed the lobby, he saw the hatchet-faced man in the brown hat still loitering there, back turned, but watching him intently in a wall mirror.

In the street he had no trouble finding the right drugstore. A crowd was already collecting. He elbowed his way through and saw Russell lying in a welter of blood. Two of the shots had caught him in the face, and even his best friend wouldn't have cared for it now.

The distant wail of a police car or ambulance could be heard approaching, and several eye-witnesses were giving wildly divergent accounts of the shooting. None of them helped him. Under a magazine rack, he spotted a bright glitter. Stooping, he picked up an empty brass cylinder and noted the markings.

"Forty-five automatic," he muttered and slid it into his pocket.

Then he stepped into one of the phone booths, and hurriedly called the chief investigator for his company. "Hi, boss," he said. "Danny Eagle reporting. Russell, the co-pilot stole the diamonds in transit. I got them from him at the airport, as scheduled—but then things went wrong! Somebody knocked my head half off, and snatched them."

"What!" A wild roar rattled the phone. "You mean to tell me you let someone get away with those diamonds? Ye gods, man! The company's out half a million dollars—and you and I are out of jobs. You lunkhead! Report to this office at once."

"Can't, chief," Danny said. "I'm busier'n three wildcats in a gunnysack trying to get them back. Besides, that isn't all. Somebody gunned Ace Russell just as he was going to tell me who got the diamonds. Yeah,

boss, he's dead. Too dead to talk. Listen, chief. I'll need help in—"

Danny glanced up and met the baleful eyes of Pete Zundo. Pete was reaching for the door of the phone booth with his left hand. His right held a menacing bulge in his coat pocket. He brought out the gun to give Danny a chilling view of its ugly black muzzle. "Uh—I'll call you later, darling," Danny said lovingly into the phone and hung up.

Pushing the door open, he pretended to stumble, and fell against Pete, letting his face come against the barrel of the gun.

Pete kneed him viciously and pulled away. "Get going," he said, shoving the pistol back in his pocket but keeping it trained on Danny. "The cops'll be here in a minute."

Danny led the way through the crowd, and they began looking for a taxi. "Thought you'd get away, wrecking the car, didn't you, wise guy?" Pete sneered.

"You got me all wrong," Danny said earnestly. "You were just about to run over that little girl crossing the street."

"What little girl?" Pete snorted. "I didn't see no girl."

"Naturally!" Danny said. "That's why I had to grab the steering wheel. You wouldn't want to be jugged for manslaughter at a time like this, would you?"

"How come you scrammed?"

"Holy smoke, man! I couldn't risk getting held up by some traffic cop, asking a lot of silly questions. Not till I got this business straightened out. I only have till midnight."

Pete grunted sceptically.

Danny shook the package of imitation diamonds under the big man's nose. "Well, I succeeded, didn't I? Here's the rocks. What more can you ask?"

Pete snatched the package from Danny's hand, and motioned for him to go ahead. "I think you're a lyin' rat," he said. "We'll talk a little more about it when we get to Kapola's apartment."

They found a taxi, but in the heavy, after-show traffic it took them a full half hour to reach the apartment. Danny glanced at his watch. It was still six minutes till midnight. This was the showdown—but not as he'd planned it. Not only had every detail gone wrong, but he had been unable to arrange for help in making the pinch. Feeling like a condemned man walking to the gallows, he opened Kapola's door.

All the gang was assembled there, and waiting—all but Ace Russell. Their faces seemed to have aged two years in two hours and each wore a look of intense strain, even Kapola's.

Pete Zundo tossed the package on a carved ebony table that stood in the center of the room. "Wise guy come up with the rocks," he said.

Danny tried to watch the reaction on each man's face, but their widely separated positions in the room made it impossible to catch more than fleeting, uncertain impressions. Ben Bautzer's face revealed little more than its usual avarice; Karl Wrandt's something more than arrogant egoism, but what? And even in this tense moment, Big Al Kapola managed to maintain the impassive expression of a professional gambler.

Kapola picked up the package, started to open it, then abruptly changed his mind and tossed it back on the table. "We've got more important business to settle first," he said grimly. "Somebody rubbed out Ace Russell?" He let his bleak, stony eyes fall on Danny.

Danny's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Just what does that mean?"

"It means," Ben Bautzer said, his thick lips spreading in a calculating grin, "that we each get sixteen grand more."

Kapola grunted disdainfully. "What it means is we're gonna find the rat that did it—and put him out of business."

Danny looked swiftly around the room and decided to toss the guilty man to the wolves. "I'll tell you who," he said.

From behind him came Pete Zundo's hoarse snarl. "You did it, wise guy!"

"Sure, he did," Bautzer agreed. "But why?"

"Because wise guy's a dick," Pete said. "I heard him phoning in a report."

"That does it," Kapola said, a .45 automatic appearing in his fist. "We're taking this rat for a ride."

Danny dived under the ebony table and, as at least three shots crashed into the wood, he came to his feet, lifting the heavy table with his shoulders and heaving it onto Big Al Kapola. In the same split second, he got his .38 into action, dropping Zundo before he could find his back with a .45 slug. He threw a quick shot at Karl Wrandt whose Luger was spitting lead, and another at Bautzer who was blazing away at him with a snub-nosed revolver.

Danny moved fast and shot faster, but something crashed against his head, knocking him off his feet. Fighting an engulfing red haze, he rolled toward the doubtful shelter of the overturned table, trying desperately to avoid the lethal blast of three guns.

The door burst open and another gun joined the fray. Danny saw that it was the hatchet-faced man and feared that everything was over for him now. He could see death reaching for him with eager, bloody fingers. But hatchet-face ignored him. He gunned down Ben Bautzer, took two blasts almost in the face from Kapola's .45, and a flank shot from Wrandt's Luger.

Danny came to life, steadied

his hand, and put a careful shot into Karl Wrandt. Seeing him fall, he turned to face Big Al Kapola. But he was too late. Kapola was crumpling to the floor with a black, ugly hole in the center of his forehead.

The sudden quiet in the room was almost oppressive. Danny stared a little dazed around the apartment. In thirty seconds it had become a shambles, full of dead bodies, wrecked furniture, and the choking stench of burnt powder. At last his gaze lifted to take in hatchet-face.

They stared at each other with slight amazement and mutual respect. "Who the hell are you?" Danny said with a grin.

Hatchet-face flashed a badge. "Post office inspector Nat Brown," he said. "When you tried to hog all the fun on this caper, your chief called me in to keep an eye on you."

Danny laughed. "And all the time, I thought you were Kapola's watchdog." Then remembering the gambler's completely lifeless state, he frowned. "Did you have to kill him?" he asked crossly.

Nat Brown stared at him indignantly. "You think I should be fussy where I shoot at a time like that?"

Danny began to search Big Al's pockets. "He's the one who conked me and took the diamonds. I needed him alive to find out where they are."

He got up empty-handed. "Just as I thought," he said bitterly. "Not a thing on him to indicate where they might be. Now, we may never find them. But you can tag him for the murder of Ace Russell."

"How you figure?" Nat asked.

Danny pulled the empty .45 shell from his pocket and handed it to the post office inspector. "I picked this up where Russell was killed. Compare the extractor and breech markings with a shell from Kapola's gun, and you'll find they match." He pointed toward the big automatic still clutched in Kapola's hand.

Nat Brown looked around the room at the other fallen men. "Zundo was using the same kind of gun."

"That's right," Danny said. "But I smelled the barrel of his gun right after the shooting and there was no odor of burnt powder. It hadn't been fired recently."

The postal inspector frowned. "But how did you know that Big Al was the one who double-crossed you all and got the diamonds?"

"I didn't, at first, but he seemed to have the most likely combination of character traits."

"Hell!" Nat scoffed. "They were all crooked, treacherous rats, ready to kill for that kind of money."

Danny nodded. "But Kapola was just a little more so, and in

addition, he had the cool gambler's nerve required to carry the treachery through without betraying himself. Still, he finally did."

"How's that?"

"The way he acted when I brought in the phony diamonds first tipped me off. The others were dying for a look at those gorgeous, glittering rocks, but he knew they had to be phony. He figured that if he got rid of me before they opened the package, he could claim I had hidden the real stones somewhere, nobody could expose him, and he'd come clear with all the loot. From that moment, I was sure. But I couldn't prove it—not till I could prove he'd murdered Russell."

The two men suddenly became aware of the wail of police sirens converging on the scene. "Holy smoke!" Danny said, staring frantically about the room. "I gotta find those diamonds before the cops get here."

Nat Brown scratched his head with the butt of a pistol. "Kapola would've been too smart to bring them here," he said.

Danny stood motionless in the center of the room for perhaps five seconds, deep in thought, while the scream of the sirens drew steadily closer. Then he strode to the high-fidelity record player that had somehow escaped damage, and began to search the cabinet thoroughly.

"Well, it isn't here," he said at last. "But, still, it's got to be!"

"What, for Pete's sake?"

"The key to a public locker. Being so treacherous himself, he wouldn't have trusted *anyone* with those diamonds, and he didn't have time to put them anywhere else. He must have just arrived when Zundo and I got here from the airport, and he was leaning on this record player."

They heard the first of the police sirens moan to a stop in front of the building.

Frantically, Danny began searching the record player again. Then all at once he snapped his fingers excitedly, as a thought struck him. Quickly, he raised the turntable. There, underneath, lying near the spindle where Big Al had hastily shoved it, lay a common public locker key.

"Ah, that wraps it up!" Danny said happily, and handed the small piece of metal to Brown. "Find the locker that key will open, and you'll have the missing diamonds."

They heard the police entering. "You take it from here," Danny said. "I'm gonna have to take a pinch."

"Why?" Brown said, staring at him with amazement. "I can clear you."

"I know," Danny said. "But let me stay in jail a few days. I don't want to face my boss right now."

—Continued from Back Cover

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