The Pearls of Peace by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE saint® MAGAZINE

AUG.
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

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This issue, prophetically labelled "August," will of course first appear on the stands in July, and maybe even sooner in some places. This is traditional magazine practice, but must often have puzzled readers who are observant enough to wonder vaguely why a magazine purporting to be for August should not simply be for sale during the month for which it claims to cater, just as a newspaper is on sale for the day which appears on its dateline.

The explanation is that a month is about 30 times longer than a day, and if all magazines operated on what seems to be a strictly rational periodicity, there would be a two-day chaos of unimaginable proportions at each month-end change-over, with all the distributors trying simultaneously to pull all the July issues of everything off the racks on the 31st, and to put all the August issues out on the first – after which they would have practically nothing to do for 30 days, until the next madhouse overtook them.

The publishers therefore try to stagger their on-sale dates so as to catch a time when the distributors are not in a state of total turmoil and they may hope to get some individual attention. Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, no publisher wants to be the last to hang out with an "old" issue when all the others are burgeoning with new ones, or the last to come out with his latest number when all the competition is in full bloom. Thus there has ensued an unseemly jostling to sneak ahead of the other guy, with each panting publisher trying to steal a day or two in the scramble, which if continued long enough can only end with August issues appearing in September of the year before. Whereupon some real rip-roaring rule-buster will bring out his August issue in August, but dated a full year ahead, when at last we shall be back in sync again except for tedious people who insist on reading the very last digit of the smallest print.

Perhaps because I am less familiar with the special problems of their trade, I am quite unable to comprehend the reasons for a similar oddity in the clothing business. About this time of year, unless you have been impossibly prescient, you are liable to discover that your warm-weather holiday-style wardrobe needs replenishing. When you go shopping, you will find stocks depleted, selections and sizes haphazard and unpredictably limited; and when they can't suit or fit you, will be told: "I'm sorry, but we're stocking up for the fall and winter now. You should have come in April."

Now, there is no seasonal obsolescence in clothing, as there may be in magazines. A man wants a cool beach shirt in August, when he feels like wearing it, and he is not so likely to buy it on a chill damp April day just because it's in a prophetic shop window.

But I have always thought that what is uncomplimentarily called "the rag trade" is hidebound with more obstinate idiocies than any other. Why else would they doggedly insist on tailoring "standard sizes" to their purblind conviction that tall people must be proportionate in girth, whereas everyone else can see that most very tall people are skinny, while it's the short ones who tend to spread sideways?

Cecil Charles

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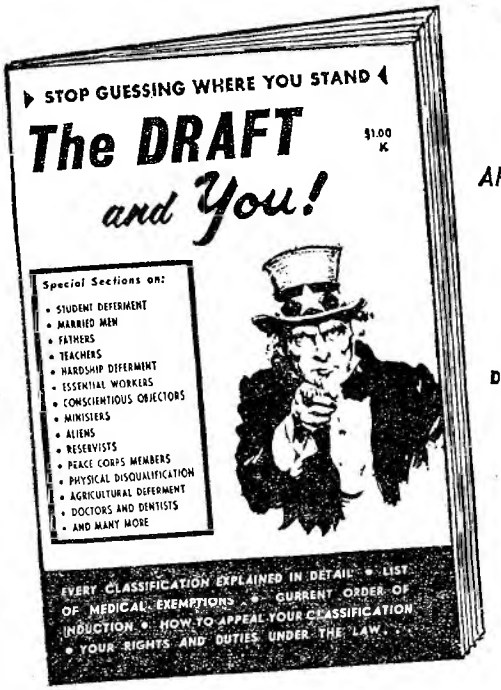

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the pearls of peace

by Leslie Charteris

Several readers have told me that this is one of their favorite Saint stories. It is certainly one of mine. L.C.

BEFORE the idea becomes too firmly established that Simon Templar (or, as it usually seems easier to call him, the Saint) never bothered to steal anything of which the value could be expressed in less than six figures, I want to tell here the story of the most trivial robbery he ever committed.

The popular conception of the meanest theft that can be committed is epitomized in the cliché of "stealing pennies from a blind man." Yet that, almost literally, is what the Saint once did. And he is perhaps prouder of it than of any other larceny in a list which long ago assumed the dimensions of an epic.

The Saint has been called by quite a thesaurus of romantic names, of which "The Robin Hood of Modern Crime" and "The Twentieth Century's Brightest Buccaneer" are probably the hardest worked. By public officials obligated to restrain his self-appointed and self-administered kind of justice, and by malefactors upon whom it had been

THE MAN SIMON TEMPLAR FINALLY FOUND WAS CERTAIN HE WOULD SOON RETURN TO THE WORLD HE HAD LEFT BEHIND, YEARS EARLIER. IT REMAINED FOR CONSUELO TO DO WHAT HER HEART TOLD HER . . .

exercised, he was described by an even more definitive glossary of terms which cannot be quoted in a publication available to the general public. To himself he was only an adventurer born in the wrong age, a cavalier cheated out of his sword, a pirate robbed of his black flag, with a few inconvenient ideals which had changed over the years in detail but never in principle. But by whatever adjectives you choose to delineate him, and with whatever you care to make of his motives, the sober arithmetical record certainly makes him, statistically, one of the greatest robbers of all time. Estimates of the total loot which at one time or another passed through his hands, as made by mathematically-minded students of these stories, vary in their net amount: his expenses were always high, and his interpretation of a tithe to charity invariably generous. But by any system of calculation, they run comfortably into the millions.

Such a result should surprise nobody. Simon Templar liked big adventures, and in big affairs there is usually big money involved, this being the sordid state of incentives in our day and age.

But the Saint's greatness was that he could be just as interested in small matters when they seemed big enough to him. And that is what the incident I am referring to was about.

This happened around the town of La Paz, which in Spanish means only "Peace."

La Paz lies near the southern tip of the peninsula of Baja California, "Lower California" in English — a long narrow leg of land which stretches down from the southern border of California and the United States. On account of the peculiarly ineradicable obsession of American statesmen with abstract lines of latitude and longitude as boundaries, instead of more intelligible geographic or ideographic frontiers, which accepted the ridiculous 38th-parallel partition of Korea as naturally as the quaint geometrical shape of most American state lines, this protuberance was blandly excluded from the deal which brought California into the Union, although topographically it is as obviously a proper part of California as its name implies. There is in technical fact a link of dry land south of the border connecting Baja California with the mainland of Mexico, but there is no practical transportation across it, no civilized way from one to the other without passing through the United States: for all the rest of its length, the Gulf of Lower California, or the Sea of Cortez as the Mexicans know it, thrusts

a hundred miles and more of deep water between the two.

Thus, like an almost amputated limb, Baja California hangs in the edge of the Pacific, bound to Mexico by nationality, to California by what terrestrial ligaments it has, nourished by neither and an anomaly to both. The highway artery leaps boldly across to Tijuana and contrives to keep going south to Ensenada, bearing a fair flow of tourist blood; but then almost at once it is a mere dusty trickle of an almost impassable road, navigable only to rugged venturers in jeeps, which meanders through scorched and barren waste lands for hundreds of empty miles to La Paz, which is the end of the line.

La Paz is a port of long defunct importance, seeming to survive mainly because its inhabitants have nowhere else to go. But that was not always true. Here in the fine natural harbor, once, toplifty Spanish galleons came to anchor, and bearded soldier-monks peered hungrily at the rocky shore, eager to convert the heathen with *pax vobiscums* or bonfires, but with some leaning towards the latter, and always with an eye to the mundane treasures that could be heisted from the pagans in exchange for a sizzling dose of salvation. But the gold of that region, though it was there and is still there, was too hard to extract for their voracious appetite, and they sailed on towards the richer promise of the north. Others, however, who came later and stayed, discovered treasure of another kind under the pellucid warm blue waters near by; once upon a time, the pearl fisheries of La Paz were world famous, far surpassing the product of the South Pacific oyster beds which most people think of in that connection today.

And that is what this story began to be about.

"It was the Japs," Jocelyn Ormond said. "They put something in the water that killed off all the oysters. They were all up and down this coast just before the war, pretending to be fishermen, but really they were taking soundings and mapping our fortifications and getting ready for all kinds of sabotage. Like that."

"I know," said the Saint lazily. "And every one of them had a Leica in his pocket and an admiral's uniform in his duffel bag. Some of it's probably true. But can you tell me how destroying the Mexican pearl industry would help their war plans against the United States? Or do you think it was some weird Oriental way of putting a hex on everything connected with pearls, like for instance Pearl Harbor?"

"You're kidding," she said

sulkily. "The oysters *did* die. You can't get away from that."

When they were first introduced by a joint acquaintance he had a puzzling feeling that they had met somewhere before. After a while he realized that they had—but it had never been in the flesh. She was a type. She was the half-disrobed siren on the jacket of a certain type of paperbound fiction. She was the girl in the phony-tough school of detective stories, the girl that the grotesque private eye with the unpaid rent and the bottle of cheap whisky in his desk drawer is always running into, who throws her thighs and breasts at him and responds like hot jelly to his simian virility. She had all the standard equipment — the auburn hair, the bedroom eyes, the fabulous mammary glands, the clothes that clung suggestively to her figure, the husky voice, the full moist lips that looked as if they would respond lecherously enough to satisfy any addict of that style of writing — although the Saint hadn't yet sampled them. He couldn't somehow make himself feel like the type of cut-rate Casanova who should have been cast opposite her. He couldn't shake off a sense of unreality about her perfect embodiment of the legendary super-floozy. But there was no doubt that she was sensational, and in a cautious way he was fascinated.

He knew that other men had been less backward. She was Mrs. Ormond now, but she had discarded Ormond some time ago in Reno. Before Ormond, there had been another, a man with the earthy name of Ned Yarn. It was Ned Yarn whose resuscitated ghost was with them now, intangibly.

"I mean," she said, "they were all supposed to have died — until I got that letter from Ned."

Simon went to the rail of the balcony which indiscreetly connected their rooms, and gazed out over the harbor and the ugly outlines of La Paz, softened now by the glamor of night lights. They were sitting outside to escape from the sweltering stuffiness of their rooms, the soiled shabbiness of the furniture and the sight of the giant cockroaches which shared their tenancy. For such reasons as that, and because your chronicler does not want to be sued for libel, the hotel they were staying at must be nameless.

"Let me see it again," he said.

She took the worn sheet of cheap paper from her purse and gave it to him, and he held it up to read it by the light from inside the room.

Dear Joss,

I know you will be surprised to hear from me now, but I

had no heart to write when I could only make excuses which you wouldn't believe. You were quite right to divorce me. But now I have found the pearls I came for. I can pay everyone back, and perhaps make everything all right with you too.

The only thing is, it may be delicate to handle. Say nothing to anyone, but send somebody you can trust who knows pearls and doesn't mind taking a chance. Or come yourself. Whoever comes, go to the "Cantina de las Flores" in La Paz and ask for Consuelo. She will bring him to me. I won't let you down this time.

Always your
Ned

The writing was awkward and straggly, up hill and down dale, the long letters overlapping between lines.

"Is this his writing?" Simon asked.

"It wasn't always that bad. Maybe he was drunk when he wrote it. Now that we're here, I wonder why I came on this wild-goose chase." She stared at the anentic residue in her glass. "Fix me another slug, Saint."

He went back into the room, fished melting ice cubes from the warming water in the pitcher, and poured Peter Dawson over them. That was how she took it, and it never seemed to affect her much. Another characteristic that was strictly from literature.

"That letter is dated over five months ago," he said. "Did it take all that time to reach you, or did you only just decide to do something about it?"

"Both," she said. "I didn't get it for a long time — I was moving around, and it was just lucky that people kept forwarding it. And when I got it, I didn't know whether to believe it, or what to do. If I hadn't met you, I mightn't ever have done anything about it. But you know about jewels."

"And I'm notorious for taking chances."

"And I like you."

He smiled into her slumbrous eyes, handing her the refilled glass, and sat down again in the other chair, stretching his long legs.

"You liked Ormond when you married him, I suppose," he said. "What was the mistake in that?"

"He was a rich old man, but I thought he needed me. I found out that all he wanted was my body."

"It sounds like a reasonable ambition."

"But he wanted a bird in a gilded cage. To keep me in purdah, like a sultan. He didn't want to go places and do things. He'd give me presents, but he wouldn't let me have a penny of my own to spend."

"An obvious square," said the Saint. "But you fixed him. What about Ned?"

"I was very young then, just a small-town girl trying to crash Hollywood and making doughnut money as an extra. And it was during the war, and he was young too, and strong and healthy, and that Navy uniform did something for him. It happened to a lot of girls. . . . And then the war was over, and I woke up, and he was just a working diver, a sort of submerged mechanic, earning a mechanic's wages and going nowhere except under docks and bridges."

Simon nodded, leaning back with his freebooter's profile turned up impersonally to the stars. He had heard all this before, of course, but he wanted to hear it once again, to be sure he had heard it all.

"That's all this Tiltman wanted," she said. "A good working diver. Percival Tiltman —what a name! I should have known he was a phony, with that name, and his old-schooltie British accent. But he knew where the richest oyster bed of all was, and it was one that the Japs had missed somehow, and he had some real pearls to prove it. . . . Of course, he needed money too — for equipment, and a boat, and bribes. Mostly for bribes. That should have been the tip-off, all by itself."

"I don't know," said the Saint. "I can believe that the Mexican Government might take a dim view of foreigners coming down and walking off with their pearls."

"Well, anyway, he got it."

"It was about ten thousand dollars, wasn't it?"

"Exactly eleven thousand. Most of it was from my friends —people I'd known in the studios. Ned's best friend put some in. And twentyfive hundred was my own savings, from what Ned had sent me while he was overseas."

"And Ned and Brother Tiltman took off with it all in cash?"

"All of it. And that's the last anyone heard of them — until I got that letter."

"How hard did you try to find him?"

"What could I do? I didn't have an address. Ned was going to write to me when he got down here. He never did."

"There's an American vice consul."

"We tried that, after a while. He never heard of them."

"How about the police?"

"I wrote to them. They took three weeks to answer, and then they just said they had no information. Perhaps some of the money *was* used for bribes, at that."

"I mean the American police.

Didn't anyone make a complaint?"

"How could I? And make myself the wife of a runaway crook? Our friends were very nice about it. They were sorry for me. I've never felt so humiliated. But it was all too obvious. Ned and Tiltman had just taken our money and run off with it. It wasn't even worth anybody's while to come down here and try to trace them. They'd had too long a start. By the time we realized what they'd done, they could have been anywhere in South America — or anywhere in the world, for that matter. I just waited till Ned had been gone a year, and divorced him as quietly as I could, for desertion."

"But," said the Saint, "it looks now as if he'd been here all the time, after all."

Mrs. Ormond swished the Scotch around over the ice in her glass with a practised rotary motion, brooding over it sullenly.

"Perhaps he came back. Perhaps he spent all his share of the money, and now he thinks he can promote some more with the same gag. Who knows?"

"It was nearly ten years ago when he disappeared, wasn't it?" said the Saint. "If he got half the loot, he's lived on less than six hundred a year. That's really making it last. If he was going to try for more, why would he leave it so long? And why did he disappear when he did, without any kind of word?"

"Don't ask me," she said. "You're the detective. All I know is, there's something fishy about it. That's why I wouldn't have come here alone. You'd better be careful. I hope you're smarter than he is."

Simon raised an eyebrow.

"When this started, you gave the impression that he was almost boringly simple."

"That's what everyone thought. But look what he did. He must have had us all fooled. You can't believe anything he says."

"I'm not exactly notorious for buying wooden nickles — or plasticine pearls. I'll keep my guard up."

"Do that in more ways than one. I told you, he was a very husky guy. And he could be plenty tough."

"I can be tough too, sometimes."

She eyed him long and appraisingly.

"Come here," she said, in her throatiest voice.

He unfolded himself languidly and stood beside her.

"No, don't tower over me. Come down to my level."

He squatted goodhumoredly on his heels, close to her chair.

"You look strong," she murmured, "in a lean leathery way. But I never found out how far it went. That's why I like you.

You're different. Most men are in such a hurry to show me."

Her hand felt his arm, sliding up under his short sleeve. Her eyes widened a little, and became soft and dreamy. The hand slid up to his shoulder, and the tip of her tongue touched her parted lips.

Simon Templar grinned, and stood up.

"I'm strong enough," he said. "And I'll be very careful."

He had already located the Cantina de las Flores — had, in fact, been inside it earlier in the evening. It was a small and dingy bistro in a back street of unromantic odors, and the only flowers in its vicinity were those which were painted in garish colors on the sign over the door. An unshaven bartender in a dirty shirt had informed him that Consuelo would not be there until ten. It was only a few minutes after that hour when the Saint strolled towards it again.

He would probably have been less than human if he had not thought more about Jocelyn Ormond than about Consuelo on the way over. Consuelo was only a name; but Mrs. Ormond was not easy to forget.

He tried to rationalize his reaction to her, and couldn't do it. According to all tradition, there should have been no problem. She not only had all the physical attributes, in extravagant abundance, but she knew every line in the script, in all its cereal ripeness. The dumbest private eye on the newsstands could have taken his cue and helped himself to the offering. Yet the Saint found a perverse pleasure in pretending to be blandly unconscious of the routine, in acting as if her incredible voluptuousness left him only amused. Which was an outright glandular lie.

He shook his head. Maybe he was just getting too old inside . . .

The bar, which had been drably deserted when he was there before, was now starting to jump. There were a dozen and a half cash customers, a few obviously local citizens but a majority with the heterogeneous look of seamen from visiting freighters—a sterling and salty clientele, no doubt, but somewhat less than elegant. There were also half a dozen girls, who seemed to function occasionally as waitresses, but who also obviously offered more general hospitality and comradeship. Instead of the atmospheric obbligato of guitars with which no Hollywood producer could have resisted backgrounding such a set, an enormous juke box blared deafening orchestrations out of its rococo edifice of plastic panels behind which colored lights flowed and blended like delirious rainbows, a dazzling

and stentorian witness to the irresistible march of North American culture.

Simon went to the counter and ordered a beer. The bartender, only a few hours more unshaven and a few hours dirtier than at their first meeting, looked at him curiously as he poured it.

"You are the *señor* who was looking for Consuelo."

"Is she here now?"

"I will tell her," the man said.

Simon took his glass over to the juke box and stood reading the list of its musical offerings, toying with the faint hope that he might find a title which suggested that in exchange for a coin some slightly less earsplitting melody might be evoked.

"You were asking for me?" a voice said at his shoulder.

The Saint turned.

He turned slowly, because the quality of the voice had jolted him momentarily off balance. It was an amazing thing for a mere voice to do at any time, and against the strident din through which he had to hear it, it was almost incredible. Yet that was what it achieved, without effort. It was the loveliest speaking voice he had ever heard. It had the pure tones of cellos and crystal bells in it, and yet it held a true warmth and a caress and a passion that made the untrammeled sexiness of Jocelyn Ormond's voice sound like a crude rasp. Just those few words of it stippled goose-pimples up his spine. He wanted the space of a breath to re-establish his equanimity before he saw the owner.

Then he saw her; and the goose-pimples tightened and chilled as if at a touch of icy air, and the jolt he had felt turned to a leaden numbness.

She could have been under thirty, but she was aged in the cruel way that women of her racial mixture, in that climate, will age. You could see Spanish blood in her, and Indian, and undoubtedly some African. Her figure might once have been enticingly ripe, but now it was overbrown and mushy. Her black hair was lank and greasy, her nose broad and flat, her painted mouth coarse and thick. Even under a heavy layer of powder that was several shades too light, her complexion showed dark and horribly ravaged with pockmarks. She smiled, showing several gold teeth.

"I am Consuelo," she said in that magical voice.

Somehow the Saint managed to keep all reaction out of his face, or hoped he did.

"I am looking for an American, a Señor Yarn," he said. "He wrote a letter saying that one should come here and ask for you."

Her eyes flickered over him oddly.

"Si," she said. "I remember. I will take you to him. *Un momentito."*

She went to the bar and spoke briefly to the bartender, who scowled and shrugged. She came back.

"Come."

Simon put down his glass and went out with her.

The sidewalk was so narrow that there was barely room for them both, and when they met any other walkers there was a subtle contest of bluff to decide which party should give way.

"It was a long time ago that he told me to expect someone," she said. "Why did you take so long?"

"His letter took a long time. And there were other delays."

"You have the letter with you?"

"It was not written to me. I was sent by the person to whom he wrote."

Some instinct of delicacy compelled him to evade a more exact naming of the person. He said, cautiously: "You know what it was about?"

"I know nothing."

Her high heels clicked a tattoo of fast short steps, hobbled by a skirt that was too tight from hip to knee.

"I have never met Señor Yarn," he said. "What kind of a man is he?"

She stopped, looking up to search his face with a kind of vehement suddenness.

"He is a good man. The best I have ever known. I hope you are good for him!"

"I hope so too," said the Saint gently.

They walked on, zigzagging through alleys that grew steadily narrower and darker and more noisome; but the Saint, whose sense of direction could be switched on like a recording machine, never lost track of a turn. The people who shared the streets with them became fewer and vaguer shadows. Life went indoors, and barricaded itself against the night behind shutters through which only an occasional streak of yellow light leaked out. It revealed itself only as a muffled grumbling voice, a sharp ripple of shrill laughter, the wail of a baby, the faint tinny sound of a cheap radio or phonograph; and against that dim sound track the clatter of Consuelo's heels seemed to ring out like blows on an anvil. If the Saint had not stepped silently from incurable habit, he would have found himself doing it with a selfconscious impulse to minimize his intrusion. If he could conceivably have picked up Consuelo, or any of the other girls, in the Cantina de las Flores, without an introduction, and had found himself being led where he was for any other reason, he would have been

tense with suspicion and wishing for the weight of a gun in his pocket. But he did not think he had anything to fear.

When she stopped, a faint tang of sea smells penetrating the hodgepodge of less natural aromas told his nostrils that they were near another part of the waterfront. The shack that loomed beside them was different only in details of outline from the others around it—a shanty of crumbling plaster and decaying timbers, with a rambling roof line which could consist of nothing but an accumulation of innumerable inadequate repairs.

"Here," she said.

She opened the cracked plank door, and Simon followed her in.

The whole house was only one little room. There was a brass bedstead against one wall, with a faded chintz curtain across the corner beside it which might have concealed some sort of sanitary facilities. In another corner, there was an ancient oil cooking stove, and a bare counter board with a chipped enamel basin. On shelves above the counter, there were cheap dishes and utensils, and a few canned foods. Clothing hung on hooks in the walls, between an assortment of innocuous lithographs pinned up according to some unguessable system of selection.

"Ned," Consuelo said very clearly, "I have brought the Americano you sent for."

The man sat in the one big chair in the room. It was an overstuffed chair of old-fashioned shape, with a heavily patched slip cover, but he looked comfortable in it, as if he had used it a lot. He had untidy blond hair and a powerful frame, but the flesh on his big bones was soft and shrunken and unhealthy, although his skin had a good tan; and his clean cotton shirt and trousers hung loosely on him. His face had the cragginess of a skull, an impression which was accentuated by the shadows of the dark glasses he wore even though the only light was an oil lamp turned down so low that it gave no more illumination than a candle. He turned only his head.

"I was afraid no one was ever coming," he said.

"My name is Templar," said the Saint. "I was sent by—the party you wrote to."

"My wife," the man said. "You don't have to be tactful. Consuelo knows about her."

"Your ex-wife," said the Saint.

Ned Yarn sat still, and the dark lenses over his eyes were a mask.

"I guess I'd sort of expected that. How did she get it? Desertion, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Is she . . . ?"

"She was married again, to a man named Ormond."

"I don't know him."

"They're divorced now."

"I see." Yarn's bony fingers moved nervously. "And you?"

"Just an acquaintance. Nothing more. What with changing her name, and changing her address several times, apparently your letter took a long time to find her. And then she didn't want to come here alone, and couldn't decide who else to trust. Now I seem to be it."

"Sit down," Ned Yarn said.

Simon sat on a plain wooden chair by the oilcloth-covered table. Yarn looked around and said: "Do we have anything to drink, Consuelo?"

"Some tequila."

She brought a half-empty bottle and three small jelly-glasses, and poured a little for each of them. She put one of the glasses on the edge of the table nearest to Yarn. Yarn stretched out his hand, touched the edge of the table, and slid his fingers along it until they closed on the glass.

"You must excuse me seeming so helpless," he said harshly. "But you see, I'm blind."

The Saint lighted a cigarette, and put his lighter away very quietly. He glanced at Consuelo for a moment as she sat down slowly on the other wooden chair at the table, and then he looked at Ned Yarn again.

"I'm sorry," he said. "How long ago did that happen?"

"Almost as soon as I got here." The other gave a kind of short two-toned grunt that might have been meant for a laugh. "How much did she tell you about all this?"

"As much as she knows, I think."

"I can figure what else she thinks. And what everybody else thinks. But you know as much now as I knew when I came down here with Tiltman. That's the truth, so help me."

"I hope you'll tell me the rest."

Yarn sipped his drink, and put it down without a grimace, as if he was completely inured to the vile taste.

"We flew down here from Tijuana, and I thought it was all on the level. A chance to make some big money legitimately—that is, if we weren't bothered about bribing a few Mexicans not to watch us too closely. I'm just a sucker, I guess, but I fell for it like all the others. I was even carrying the money myself. We checked in at a hotel, the Perla."

"And yet the American vice-consul and the police couldn't find any trace of you. That seems like an obvious place for them to have started asking."

"Tiltman registered for us both—only he didn't use our names. If you want to check up on me,

ask if they've got a record of Thompson and Young. He told me that later."

"How long did he play it straight?"

"We had dinner. Tiltman was supposed to have arranged for a boat before we left Los Angeles. I was all excited and raring to go, of course. I didn't even want to wait till morning to look it over. I wanted to see it that night. He tried to stall me a bit, and then he gave in. We set out walking from the hotel. He led me through all kinds of back streets — I haven't the faintest idea where. Presently, in one of the darkest of them, we came to a bar, and he said let's stop in for a drink."

"The Cantina de las Flores?"

"No. I don't even know the name of it. But anyway, we went in. We had a drink. And then, as calmly as anything, he said: 'Look, Ned, I'm going to stop beating about the bush. There isn't any boat. There isn't any diving equipment—all that stuff we ordered sent down here from Los Angeles, I cancelled the order and got your money back.' "

"And the great lost bed of pearl oysters?"

"He said: 'That's just a rumor I heard when I was down here, sort of a local legend. But I don't know where it is, and nobody else does. It just gave me the idea for a good story to pick up a nice lot of money with. All that money you've got in your pocket,' he said."

"That must have called for another drink," murmured the Saint.

"At first I thought he was kidding. But I soon knew he wasn't. He said: 'I could've taken it from you tonight and left you holding the bag. But I like you, Ned, and I could use a partner. I've got tickets for both of us on a plane to Mazatlán. Let's split the money and go on and make a lot more like it.' "

Simon barely touched his glass to his lips.

"And you said no?"

"I swear it. I told him he'd never get his hands on any of the money I had. I was taking it right back to Los Angeles, and I'd see what the police here could do about getting back the refund he'd gotten on the diving equipment. And I walked out." Ned Yarn twisted his knuckles tensely together. "I didn't get very far. He must have followed me and crept up behind me. Something hit me on the head, and I was out like a light. It's been lights out for me ever since."

"The money was gone, of course."

Yarn nodded. He said: 'You tell him, Consuelo."

She said: "I found him. It was just outside here. I was going to

work. I thought he was drunk. Then I saw the blood. I could not leave him to die. I took him in my house. Then, when he did not get well quickly, I was afraid. I thought, if I call the police, they will say I did it to rob him. I sent for a doctor I know. Together we took care of him. He was sick for a long time. And then I could not turn him out, because he was blind."

"And you've looked after him ever since," said the Saint, and deliberately averted his eyes.

"I was glad to." He heard only her voice. "Because then I had fallen in love."

And now the Saint understood at least a part of that strange story, with a fulness that left him for a little while without speech.

Ned Yarn had never seen Consuelo. He had met her only as a voice, a voice of indescribable sweetness, just as the Saint had first met her; but Ned Yarn had never been able to turn his eyes and have the mental vision that the voice created shattered by the sight of her coarse raddled face. And the woman who spoke with the voice had been kind to him in a way that fulfilled all the promise of its rich tenderness. Her figure would have been better then, and perhaps even her face less marred; and his fingers, when they clumsily explored her features, would not have been sensitive enough to trace them as they really were. They could easily have confirmed to him a picture that his imagination had already formed and was determined to believe. And in his perpetual darkness there could be no disillusion . . .

"Maybe you think I'm a bum," Ned Yarn said. "Maybe I am. But what could I do? I didn't have a penny, and I couldn't go more than a few steps by myself. Tiltman probably thought he'd killed me with that crack on the head. He might almost as well have. It was months before I really knew what was going on. And even then I still couldn't think straight, I guess."

"You figured by that time everyone would have decided you'd run off with Tiltman and the money," said the Saint.

"Even Joss. I couldn't blame her. I was just too ashamed to try to write and explain. I didn't think anyone would believe me. I guess I was wrong; but by the time I started to think it out properly, it was later still—that much more too late. And by then . . ." The premature lines in his face softened amazingly. "By then I was in love too. I didn't really want to go back."

Ash tumbled from the Saint's long-neglected cigarette as he put it to his mouth again.

"But you finally wrote to Jocelyn," he said.

"I'm coming to that. After a

while, I realized I couldn't go on for ever doing nothing but being sorry for myself, letting Consuelo keep me on the money she made as a waitress."

From the matter-of-fact way Yarn said it, Simon knew that the man could never have had any idea of the kind of place she worked in. He was aware of the woman's eyes on him, but he gave no sign of it.

"Her doctor thought there might be a chance of getting my sight back if I could go to a first-class specialist," Ned Yarn said. "But that would cost plenty of money. And I couldn't go back to the States for treatment when it'd probably mean being put in jail. I needed even more money, to pay everybody back what I'd helped them to lose through Tiltman. I wanted to do that anyway. When I finally got my guts back, I knew that was what I had to do somehow—pay everyone off, and get my eyes fixed, and make a fresh start."

"You still believed in that overlooked oyster bed?"

"It was the only chance I could think of. Eventually I talked Consuelo into helping me. She has a friend who's a fisherman, and he'd let us borrow his boat sometimes. We went out as often as we could. We searched all over, everywhere."

"You went diving, when you were blind?"

"No, Consuelo did that. With a face mask. She can swim like a fish, she tells me. I just sat in the boat. And then, when at last she found oysters, I'd haul up the baskets she filled, and help her to open them. And as I wrote to Joss, we finally did it. We found those pearls!"

"The jackpot?" Simon asked.

Ned Yarn shook his head.

"I don't know. Quite a few, so far. Consuelo sold a few small ones, to get money to make us just a little more comfortable. And six months ago we bought a boat of our own, so we could go out more often. Of course she got practically nothing for them, because of the way she had to sell them. And she couldn't show any of the big ones without attracting too much attention. That's why I had to get in touch with someone who'd know their real value, and perhaps be able to sell them properly up north."

At Simon's side, the woman turned abruptly, her over-plucked eyebrows drawn together.

"Is he a buyer of pearls?" she asked. "Is that why he is here? You did not tell me, Ned."

"I know." The man smiled awkwardly. "I told you I was sending for someone who would help us to buy some real diving equipment, so we could really bring up those oysters after I taught you to use it. I was afraid of getting your hopes too high.

But actually, that's just what he might do."

"If the pearls are not worth so much, you will use the money to buy diving equipment to look for more?"

"That's right."

"But if they're worth enough," said the Saint, "you want to pay back eleven thousand dollars to various people, and see if something can be done about your eyes?"

"Yes."

"And then come back to Consuelo," said the Saint softly.

"Oh, no," Ned Yarn said. "I wouldn't leave here unless she came with me."

Consuelo stood up with a sudden rough movement that shook the table. She stood beside Yarn with a hand on his shoulder, and his hand went up at once to cover hers.

"I do not like it," she said. "How do you know you can trust him?"

"I'll have to risk it," Yarn said grimly. "Show him the pearls, Consuelo."

She stared at the Saint defensively, her eyes hot and hostile and shifting like the eyes of a cornered animal.

"I will not."

"Consuelo!"

"I cannot," she said. "I have already sold them."

"What?"

"Si, si," she said quickly. "I sold them. To a dealer I met at the Cantina. I was going to surprise you. He gave me five hundred dollars——"

"Five hundred dollars!"

"For a start. He will bring me the rest soon. I have it here." She twisted away towards the bed and rummaged under the mattress. In a moment she was back, thrusting crumpled bills into his hands. "There! Count them. It is all there. And there will be more!"

Ned Yarn did not count the bills. He did not even hold them. They spilled over his lap and fluttered down to the floor. He had caught one of Consuelo's wrists, and clung to it with both hands, and his blind face turned up towards her strickenly.

"What is this?" he said in a terrible hoarse voice. "I never thought you lied to me. But you're lying now. Your voice tells me."

"I do not lie!"

"Templar," said Yarn, with a straining throat. "Please help me. There's a pottery jar on the top shelf, in the corner over the stove. Look in it and tell me what you find."

Simon got to his feet, a little uncertainly. Then he crossed to the corner in three quick strides. There was only one jar that fitted the description. With his height, he could just reach it.

Consuelo writhed and twisted

in Yarn's grip like a lassoed wildcat, so that the chair he sat in rocked, and pounded on his head and shoulders with her free fist.

"No, no!" she screamed.

But the blind man's grip held her like an anchor, and she fell still at last as the Saint tilted the jar over one cupped hand, so that the ripple of things rolling from it could be heard over the heavy breathing which was the only other thing that broke the silence.

Simon Templar looked at the dozen or so cheap beads of various sizes brought together in the hollow of his palm, and looked up from them to the defiant streaming eyes of Ned Yarn's woman.

"I think these are the most beautiful pearls I ever saw," he said.

The woman slid down to the floor beside Yarn and sat there with her face pressed against his thigh.

"Why did you lie, Consuelo?" Yarn asked puzzedly. "What on earth upset you like that?"

"I think I can guess," said the Saint. "She was just trying to protect you. After all, neither of you knows me from Adam, and you are taking rather a lot on trust. Probably she wanted time to talk it over with you first."

The woman sobbed.

Ned Yarn caressed her stringy hair, murmuring little soothing sounds as she clung to his legs.

"It's all right, *querida.*" His face was still troubled. "But the money—the five hundred dollars. Where did that come from?"

"I bet I can answer that too,' said the Saint. "She'd held out two or three more small pearls and sold them, and she was saving the money for a surprise present of some kind. Is that right, Consuelo?"

She lifted her head and looked at the Saint.

"No," she said. "It is my own money. I earned it and saved it myself. I kept it from you, Ned. I did not want to spend quite all our money on the search for pearls. I thought, perhaps we will never find any pearls, but I would keep saving, and one day perhaps I could take you myself to see if you could be cured. That is the truth."

Yarn lifted her up and kissed her.

"How blind can a man be?" he said huskily.

"Some people would give their eyes for what you've got," Simon said.

"And I wish I had mine most so that I could see it. I know how beautiful she must be, but I would like to see her. She is beautiful, isn't she?"

"She is beautiful, Ned."

"Please, you must both forgive

me," Consuelo said in a low voice. "Let us have some tequila."

Simon looked down at the little heap of beads in his hand.

"What do you want me to do with the pearls?" he asked.

The blind man's dark glasses held his gaze like hypnotic hungry eyes.

"Are they really valuable?"

"I'd say they were, but I'm not an expert," Simon replied, improvising with infinite care. "They'd have to be sold in the right place, of course. As you may know, individual pearls don't mean so much, unless they're really gigantic. Most pearls are made into necklaces and things like that, which means that they have to be matched, and they gain in value by being put together. And then it's a funny market these days, on account of all the cultured pearls that only an expert can tell from real ones. There are still people who'll spend a fortune on the genuine article, but you don't find them waiting on every jeweler's doorstep. It takes work, and preparation, and patience—and time."

"But—eventually—they should be worth a lot?"

"Eventually," said the Saint soberly, "they may mean more to you than you'd believe right now."

Ned Yarn's breath came and went in a long sigh.

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "I can wait some more. I guess I'm used to waiting."

"Do you want me to take the pearls back to the States and see what I can do with them?"

"Yes. And Consuelo and I will go on fishing for more. At least we'll know we aren't wasting our time. Where's that drink you were talking about, Consuelo?" She put the glass in his hand, and he raised it. "Here's luck to all of us."

"Especially to you two." Simon looked at the woman over his glass and said: *"Salud!"*

He wrapped the beads carefully in a scrap of newspaper and tucked it into his pocket.

"Do you mind if Consuelo guides me back from here?" he asked. "I don't want to get lost."

"Of course, we don't want that. And thank you for coming."

The night was the same, perhaps a little cooler, perhaps a little more muted in its secret sounds. The woman's heels tapped the same monotonous rhythm, perhaps a little slower. They walked quite a long way without speaking, as they had before; but now they kept silence as if to make sure that they were beyond the most fantastic range of a blind man's hearing before they spoke.

Simon Templar was glad that the silence lasted as long as it

did. He had a lot to think about, to weigh and balance and to look ahead from.

Finally she said, almost timidly: "I think you understand, *señor.*"

"I think so," he said; but he waited to hear more from her.

"When he began to be discontented, we went out in the boat and began looking for pearls. For a long time that made him happy. But presently, when we found nothing he was unhappy again. At last we found some oysters. Then again he had hope. But there were no pearls. So presently, after some more time, he was sad again. It hurt too much to see him despair. So at last I let him find some pearls. At first they were real, I think. I took them from some earrings that my mother gave me. And after that, they were beads."

"And when you said you sold them——"

"I did sell the real ones, for a few pesos. The rest was money I had saved for him, like the five hundred dollars."

"Did you mean what I heard you say—that if you could save enough, you meant to take him to a specialist somewhere who might be able to bring back his sight?"

There was a long pause before she answered.

"I would have done it when I had the courage," she said. "I will do it one day, when I am strong enough. But it will not be easy. Because I know when he sees me with his eyes, he will not love me any more."

He felt it all the way through him down to his toes, like the subsonic tremor of an earthquake, the tingling realization of what those few simple words meant.

She was not blind, and she used mirrors. If she had ever deluded herself, it had not been for long. She knew very well what they told her. Homely and aged and scarred as she was, no man such as she had dreamed of as a young girl would ever love her as a young girl dreams of love. Unless he was blind. Even before the aging had taken hold she had discovered that, and seen the infinite emptiness ahead. But one night, some miracle had brought her a blind man . . .

She had taken him in and cared for him in his sickness, finding him clean and grateful, and lavished on him all the frustrated richness of her heart. And out of his helplessness, and for her kindness and the tender beauty of her voice, he had loved her in return. She had used what money she could earn in any way to humor his obsession, to bring him back from despair, to encourage hope and keep alive his dream. And one day she believed she might be able to make

at least part of the hope come true, and have him made whole —and let him go.

Simon walked slowly through a night that no longer seemed dark and sordid.

"When he knows what you have done," he said, "he should think you the most beautiful woman in the world."

"He will not love me," she said without bitterness. "I know men."

"Now I can tell you something. He has been blind for nearly ten years. There will have been too many degenerative changes in his eyes by this time. There is hardly any chance at all that an operation could cure him now. And I never thought I could say any man was lucky to be blind, but I think Ned Yarn is that man."

"Nevertheless, I shall have to try, one day."

"It will be a long time still before you have enough money."

She looked up at him.

"But the beads you took away. You told him they were worth much. What shall *I* tell him now?"

It was all clear to Simon now, the strangest crime that he had to put on his bizarre record.

"He will never hear another word from me. I shall just disappear. And presently it will be clear to him that I was a crook after all, as he believes you suspected from the start; and I stole them."

"But the shock—what will it do to him?"

"He will get over it. He cannot blame you. He will think that your instinct was right all along, and he should have listened to you. You can help him to see that, without nagging him."

"Then he will want to start looking for pearls again."

"And you will find them. From time to time I will send you a few for you to put in the oysters. Real ones. You can make them last. You need not find them too often, to keep him hoping. And when you sell them, which you can do as a Mexican without getting in any trouble, you must do what your heart tells you with the money. I think you will be happy," said the Saint.

Mrs. Ormond, formerly Mrs. Yarn, lay back in her chair and laughed, deeply and vibrantly in her exquisitely rounded throat, so that the ice cubes clinked in the tall glass she held.

"So the dope finally found his level," she gurgled. "Living in some smelly slum hovel with a frowzy native slut. While she's whoring in a crummy saloon and dredging up pearl beads to kid him he's something better than a pimp. I might have known it!"

She looked more unreally

beautiful than ever in the dim light of the balcony, a sort of cross between a calendar picture and a lecherous trash-writer's imagining, in the diaphanous négligée that she had inevitably put on to await the Saint's return in. Her provocative breasts quivered visibly under the filmy nylon and crowded into its deep-slashed neckline as she laughed, and some of the beads rolled out of the unfolded paper in her lap and pattered on the bare floor.

Simon had told her only the skeletal facts, omitting the amplifications and additions which were his own, and waited for her reaction; and this was it.

"I hadn't realized it was quite so funny," he said stonily.

"You couldn't," she choked. "My dear man, you don't know the half of it. Here I come dragging myself down to this ghastly dump, just in case Yarn has really got on to something I couldn't afford to miss; and all he's got is a mulatto concubine and a few beads. And all the time, right here in my jewel case, I've got a string of pearls that were good enough for Catherine of Russia!"

Simon stood very still.

"You have?" he said.

"Just one of those baubles that Ormond used to pass out when he was indulging his sultan complex. Like I told you. I think he only paid about fifteen grand for them at an auction. And me wasting all this time and effort, not to mention yours, on Ned Yarn's imaginary oyster bed!"

At last the Saint began to laugh too, very quietly.

"It is rather delirious," he said. "Let me fix you another drink, and let's go on with some unfinished business."

JAMES BOND SEES "THUNDERBALL"

James Bond was invited to attend a preview of "Thunderball" at a British cinema some weeks ago, in a publicity stunt that appears to have backfired.

Mr. Bond, after watching the underwater adventures of his namesake, is said to have "started to come over queer". The 99 years old Mr. Bond had to be half-carried to the cinema's lobby and driven back to the nearby old people's hospital where he now lives.

The last movie he'd seen? He thought it'd been a Charlie Chaplin film—a long, long time ago . . .

black genii

by Terence Roberts

IN the Caribbean nobody ever really knows *why* anybody in particular is anywhere at any particular time, yet nearly everybody knows almost every detail of everybody else's movements, and just when they will be where. People wander about between the islands and mainland ports everlastingly and the majority of them neither carry passports nor can they state definitely what nationality they are, what country they belong to, nor even where they are officially resident. Many don't reside anywhere.

All of this made for complications in war time but it had its compensatory aspects, especially on a small island 'fortress' such as our communications (so-called) headquarters had become. Said headquarters I should explain was established on a lone island in the western Caribbean, just short of four miles long, lozenge-shaped, and about half a mile wide. It is a *real* island with genuine soil, not a coral reef.

Terence Roberts, whose true name still cannot be revealed, returns with his third story about the wartime "communications" centre in the Caribbean, a decidedly cosmopolitan counter-espionage outfit without official recognition but responsible, nevertheless, to the quiet man in — but this is for him to tell us about, in a later story. If he feels he can do so . . .

Thus it supported some real trees as well as the ubiquitous coconut palms and the equally typical sea-grape bushes.

It was often hard to realize that there was a war going on at all, or more especially that there were several dozen enemy subs wandering about our comparatively small pond. Our own boat, a large, 60-foot motor job, invariably brought an assorted and motley crowd of travellers every time she returned from a run, and previously unheard of 'bottoms' of all kinds, from very large schooners to minute sailing doreys, called from time to time. We had what we liked to think was pretty tight security aboard our cay, there being day and night patrols all around the shores, while the inhabitants were all finger-printed. The entire personnel of all craft calling were immediately listed and all were checked out as the vessel left. A cosmos as tiny as ours was easy to handle security-wise except for one ineradicable source of irritation. This was the Black Caribs; the stateless, incomprehensible, sea-gypsies of the western Caribbean. It didn't matter what we did, they seemed to slip in and out more or less at will, and although we kept "catching" new ones, or found "old friends" serenely meandering about the cay, we hardly ever did spot one actually coming ashore. It was uncanny.

Very fortunately for us, and the general war effort for that matter, I happened to have established what might be called "satisfactory relations" with these people at an early stage of my residence; if anything can ever be called satisfactory in Black-Carib — Non-Black-Carib relations. I even liked to kid myself that I had a personal friend among them, an enormous fellow named Raies but, looking back on it, I can't even be sure of that, except to say that he got me out of an endless string of difficulties. At the same time, I might add, he got me *into* an almost equal number.

I must explain that our outfit was a sort of international counter-espionage outfit but without any official recognition. Since the island we inhabited was claimed by no less than three nearby countries but actually belonged to nobody, there was nothing much anybody could do about us. What I mean is, said three countries did not have a single seaworthy ship between them capable of either evicting us or both capturing and then occupying the island. None of the indigenous residents had any fixed nationality never having had need of passports. The United States had once maintained a weather station 'aboard': or, rather, an American commercial

outfit had, but as communications got better, it was abandoned.

Our presence aboard was an outcome of this previous weather-station. Accommodations were available, there was a jetty, and the island was right in the middle of a rather large sea lacking any other listening and watching-post. Choice of it for such was made just before the war got started in Europe, a few people in several countries having been sensible enough to know that the Caribbean was virtually a Nazi pond, with Germans and ex-Germans, and ex-Germans with Spanish names living all about in thousands, owning airlines and radio stations and estates and half the smuggling operations. Time proved these people correct. More than half the stuff going to Bataan via the Canal went to the bottom in our *pond*. The tricky bit was that we were unofficial, on official duty, recognized by none, paid by many, and living on a no-mans-land. I contended that we should fly the "Jolly Roger" but, although nominally in command, I was vetoed by the locals. They were a splendid bunch.

Living on that cay we got to know each other and everybody aboard not just by name but by voice, so that we could spot an interloper in pitch darkness. Thus it was with considerable shock that, while taking a stroll just after dark one day, along a sand path behind the local fishermen's settlement—which consisted of a number of small frame houses set at random on stilts—I heard an unknown voice. I was barefoot, since the island sand was pristine and any form of footgear merely invited irritation from engulfed sand, so I was moving along absolutely silently.

The voice was feminine, high-pitched, and was jabbering away in the local mainland Spanish, which is appalling. It was emanating from a house occupied by two allegedly Honduran brothers who had three women and eight small children between them. Two of the women were English-speaking West Indians from Saint Croix; the other was a stately, very dark creature, and a Carib. This latter was extremely odd because these folk don't go for non-Caribs in any way, especially as mates, even temporarily, and particularly the women. We never sorted out just whose kids were whose of this menage, or by whom, if you follow me. As I approached, the voice let up, and there was silence.

I did not want to be caught eavesdropping on anybody and my built-in something-or-other had immediately warned me against making any direct investigations, so I just sort of strolled around within earshot. I was wont to wander about the cay at

any time of day or night so that my presence would not be considered unduly odd if anybody came along, and in due course somebody did.

It was one Corporal White—so help me—of the Jamaican Home Guard, a contingent of which we had on the cay for "defensive" purposes. Corporal White was black but luckily the night was not, so I recognized him in time, for he was a very conscientious chap and would have roared some salutation if I had not immediately given my famous imitation of the shadow of a palm tree. But Corporal White was really on the ball; and somehow sensed, rather than spotted, my presence. He came to an abrupt halt. This presented a real problem, for if I 'shssed' him it would be heard through the thin, leaky, wood walls of the nearby house, while if I let him find me he would undoubtedly roar "Sir" and come to a quivering salute. There was only one thing to do. I jumped him.

You know all about the best laid plans of certain small mammals. Well, the results can be even further off than fate or mere chance would seem to stipulate. I had fully expected to get royally clobbered, for our Jamaican contingent were very well trained, highly conscientious, and, frankly, trigger-happy; but instead, the most extraordinary thing happened. Even before I reached the gallant corporal he let out a sort of gurgling howl, rose from the ground as if by magic, reversed in mid air and then, as he rehit the sand, took off with the speed of a Jackrabbit for the dense buttonwood bushes that filled the center of the island, howling like a banshee. There was absolute silence, and notably around the area where I was. Then things began to happen.

Our headquarters building was about four hundred yards away and would be just visible through the coconut palm stems in the daytime. My staff at that time consisted of half a dozen foreign operatives—that is to say assorted allied security personnel who were not islanders — and twice that number of local non-coms, mostly full British citizens from the islands. My number two chap was a delightful fellow named Jimmy Lee, of pure Chinese parentage, from Singapore. He was a communications specialist and an electronics genius amongst several other more esoteric accomplishments. He was also a damned nuisance because he chatted away in an obscure dialect, indigenous only to one outlying part of the Province of Yunnan, China, over his radio with sundry compatriots hailing from the same obscure area, who happened to reside at various

points throughout Central and northern South America. It was a great device since their lingo constituted an unbreakable code, but the trouble was I had no real control over what he was doing. (And didn't he know it!) Jimmy, however, had a completely uncanny knack of being exactly where he was most needed *when* he was most needed. And so it was on this occasion.

Even before White had faded out, he popped up before me asking what the heck gave. Before I could answer him, people tumbled out of all the nearby houses carrying bush-lanterns and jabbering. Grabbing Jimmy by the arm, I made a dash for the nearest house, wading waist deep into the swarm of children that had tumbled out first. I started yelling at everybody to keep calm and then went into a long gespiel like a broken phonograph recording, trying to explain that it was only Corporal White who had thought I was a *Chumbie* and had hightailed it for the bush. Finally my story caught on and everybody began to roar with laughter.

Meantime, however, I had been busily counting heads. I didn't spot an unlisted Spanish-speaking female. This puzzled me, so I just charged into the house where the voice had been, waving my arms about and shouting. (It is very useful sometimes to have a reputation for being an hysteric in times of emergency. It gives one time both to think and to act.) The small one-roomed house was empty!

I must admit that, at that moment, I began to have a number of very serious doubts. There were three glassless windows with crude woven screen shutters that could be pushed upwards with hinged sticks. All were closed. There was no ceiling; just rafters. Then Sergeant Abercrombie arrived—at the double, as usual.

I really loved that stalwart. He was in command of the Jamaican contingent, and also my right hand for almost everything else. In addition to this, he policed everybody, having had 25 years experience in that force on his home island of Jamaica. He was extremely intelligent, deeply religious, a howling patriot, efficient, a disciplinarian of awesome stature, and yet had a fine quiet sense of humor. I always felt better when he was around. His salute made the island quiver.

"Sir!" he bawled, coming to attention before me, and in full uniform to boot.

"Sergeant", I replied flicking a salute, Navy-style, "It's OK. Just that Corporal White met me in the dark and seems to have mistaken me for a Chumbie."

Sergeant Abercrombie almost

smiled. "He very frighten mon," he observed.

"Quite so," I replied. "But the poor fellow is dithering, and that is absolutely no good at all on patrol. Was he on patrol, by the way?" I asked.

"No, Sir." The Sergeant replied instantly. He always knew exactly to the man who was on what.

"Oh!" I murmured, "Just takin a stroll on his own time. I see. No harm in that. Wonder if he sees chumbies when he *is* on patrol." I added.

"Yes, Sir." Sergeant Abercrombie answered, surprisingly.

I stared at him blankly, while the full impact of this statement sank in. Jimmy Lee giggled. I rounded on him, but he was patting a small, dark brown head and nodding wisely.

There are times when things come from so far out that one becomes confused. Coming from Sergeant Abercrombie this had me floored for a moment. But, a person in the position that I then occupied has to direct or command or something so that some sagacious comment was obviously called for. Besides, by this time half the population of the cay had assembled. The best I could conjure up was a flat "Oh!"; then I more or less pulled myself together. My approach was perhaps somewhat snide.

"*Do* we have Chumbies aboard this cay?" I asked.

And that stumped Sergeant Abercrombie. He knew that I had visited his homeland many times and somewhat extensively, and he knew that I was a 'funny fellow' and tended to respect the wildest beliefs of his people—even the country folk who have a whole pantheon of disembodied entities and other chumbies that may collectively be called pokamania. There have been genuine poltergeist manifestations in Jamaica that have buffaloed the local constabulary just as much as they have police forces in other parts of the world, so who is to deny the belief in just plain, ordinary, common or garden ghosts. But Sergeant Abercrombie was, as I have said, a deeply Christian man and a pillar of said constabulary, and he really and honestly did not believe in any such nonsense. It was now obvious from his tightly held expression that he thought I had finally taken leave of what little wit I might ever have had. Jimmy Lee was frankly shocked; and don't ever try to tell me that Orientals don't display emotion.

"Answer my question." I barked peremptorily.

Sergeant Abercrombie was caught on the horns of a dilemma, which is a sort of mental chumbie. He remained silent. His chiselled lips were totally sealed. "Commanding" can be a fright-

ful job sometimes, and in my opinion all Commanders should be either women or Near-Easterners—to wit, either illogical or devious. In view of everybody's continued silence what could I do but imply insubordination, and I pressed the point.

"You will report to HQ", I snapped, "And bring Corporal White with you".

Then I turned abruptly on the proverbial heel, though that is a gyration that I have never honestly been able to achieve, and pounded off to my office with what dignity an unshod Commander clad in pyjamas could command.

But half an hour later I was still sitting in my inner sanctum tapping the butt of a pencil on the desk—alone. Sergeant Abercrombie had not appeared, and Jimmy had excused himself after saying nothing for a full fifteen minutes. John Ballash, one of my junior operatives had wandered in but Jimmy had immediately called him to communications and closed the door. I am still convinced that this unthinking young man was then briefed by Jimmy as to what to do when a commanding officer is in urgent need of hospitalization. Jimmy's monotone droned on and on until I finally could stand it no longer and bawled for the guard.

This living entity was supposed to be awake at all times and to patrol round and round the office all night, carbine at the ready. Time off for a quick coconut milk-shake (which is not discolored by *white* rum) was permitted at two-hourly intervals, during which time a substitute was roused from his blissful slumbers in a small guard house by the kitchen and prodded into making four circuits. Talk about 'chumbies!' But be that as it may.

Absolutely nothing happened except that the crickets continued to "crick", the surf pounded in the distance, and a dog barked. It was quite eerie; something entirely novel to our little island universe in which there had always been a marked degree of harmony despite the disparity of the sexes and the uncontrollable comings and goings of the Black Caribs—and a fine war going on. I must admit to a considerable awareness at that moment and, right on cue, a feminine scream that would be worth about a grand on radio rent the night—and I mean 'rent', like a clean cut through sail cloth. I was out on the verandah before the surf had drowned the last echo. Jimmy and John Ballash were by my side, and in a matter of seconds the cook, a stately dark-skinned girl from Curacao, and our engineer, an impertinent but genuine Cockney, appeared. Somebody asked rather redundantly "What was that?"

Things were obviously getting somewhat out of hand so I started yelling again and giving orders right and left, cursing everybody in sight. It produced results but none that were immediately constructive. So, grabbing an automatic, I rushed off towards the settlement, as we called it, from which I assumed the scream had emanated.

You know, it's funny the way a situation builds up. Nothing out of the ordinary had really happened except the feminine voice, and Corporal White's dithers, and Sergeant Abercrombie's dereliction, and there being no guard on duty, and . . . oh, well! Perhaps it *was* a bit rum. But it was the general air of impending something that struck me most forcibly as I pounded over the soft sand. Something was very wrong in our little, tightly-knit cosmos. Then I ran smack into the advance guard of locals who were heading our way.

Now, our locals were really a splendid bunch of islanders. God knows what their national or racial origins were, but most of them had golden-brown skins and pale eyes, and they had magnificently healthy children. They spoke a chatty, singsong type of West Indian English but understood bad mainland Spanish, while some also spoke Creole French. There were about a hundred of them all told, and the thirty odd adult males were all fisherfolk who had done a bit of trading coast-wise before the war, and sometimes went off to labor in mahogany camps or on the banana plantations in Honduras, but who always came back—and usually with a new woman and a few new kids in tow. Everybody then shifted around a bit to make room for the newcomers but without ever a voice raised in scorn or anger. They were great people and very pragmatic. No chumbies for them and damned little war scare either. They accepted us as a necessary but temporary interjection but they looked to us for protection, and just as much against the old local authorities as the Germans, whom they knew about only as the primary, pre-war source of narcotics which they did not themselves use but could, it was alleged, make a handsome profit on if given the opportunity to smuggle same into the United States. Why should they worry with complicated white powders when they could buy pure marijuana cigarettes on the mainland for less than the price of a packet of Camels? Their only real plaint was that they couldn't grow the stuff on the cay—and this was true because we tried, in order to make it less necessary for them to go barging off at night in sailing dories to get the finished product. (We finally had to

take on a Mexican "steward" for our boat so that it could be smuggled decently, while we could control the price and get free service aboard. It worked out pretty well.) But I digress.

These splendid locals were in full cry and headed for HQ in a body—men, women, and children—and they were in one heck of a hurry. I grabbed a lean fellow by the name of Perez, distinguishable in the dark by his flashlight that alone among all 'flashes' on the cay had a red glass.

"What the devil's going on?" I demanded.

"There's a fight" he screamed right into my face.

"Where?" I screamed back.

"On the beach."

"Bring a light," I ordered. "In fact, turn on all the lights", I added. We had search lights all over the place run off an emergency power plant. Somebody ran off. I felt better. At least my commands were bringing results. Perez was really quite upset.

"Who's fighting?" I asked.

"The Sergeant. He's fighting the *tzombies*", he replied—and that is just how he pronounced it.

We'd had a mild invasion of our cay by a German raider some time before, and the community had become quite war-conscious. They had also learned from that experience that the best place to go if anything went wrong was HQ. Therefore I did not have to tell them to keep going; which they did, under direct orders from Willie Blakeley, our Cockney expert. Jimmy, John Hallash, a Dutchman named Peter van Deusen, and I headed for the beach. And, by Jove, there *was* a fight going on. The moon had conveniently risen a bit and there were a dozen chaps slugging it out with fists just like an old-time B-class movie. Somebody was wielding a machete, however. It flashed in the moonlight. We "poured down the slope", as the saying goes.

Jimmy was out in front giving his famous imitation of "The Artful Dodger", a manoeuvre he said he had learned in exiting bordellos in Singapore when the local Indian police were after his girl. It was very effective and immediately got the fighters confused. Jimmy barked a bit too, so that all the contestants started pointing outwards instead of inwards. I have a gammy leg so I arrived late. Sergeant Abercrombie saluted; I fancy he would do just that in the middle of a nuclear engagement.

Our arrival sort of added to the defense and the engagement immediately deteriorated into mopping up operations. With very little effort we rounded up a surprising bunch—six Caribs, three male and three female, and a little brown man. I did not

attempt identification on the beach but had them all marched back to HQ under escort drawn from the local section of the normal beach patrol (four in number) plus Sergeant Abercrombie and two of his chief aids wearing swimming trunks only.

Back at HQ, we plunged into a scene that was by then, after less than a year, becoming overly familiar. The whole cay was lit up; HQ literally blazed; about 150 assorted persons were crowded into the main messhall or on the verandah; children wailed; and some blazing idiot had turned on a radio from which the sound of somebody and his Royal Canadians issued oleaginously. It took about ten minutes to sort the mess into a kind of caste sysem — women and children first; household staff to one side; security forces to another; my staff, central; local male adults at another point; prisoners ranged before a large table.

Then I sat down on the other side of that table and got a considerable shock because the "brown" was running off the little brown man in disorganized streaks and streams. Jimmy was looking very uncomfortable.

"What have we here?" I demanded.

Sergeant Abercrombie stepped forward smartly and saluted.

"Prisoner, Sir," he announced.

"Yes indeed, Sergeant. But where from, why, and so on? Report please."

The Sergeant sort of pulled his body together, took a deep breath and began.

"Corporal White all done death," he began. And then before I could interfere, he went on.

"Recruit Absolam Burgess, missing. Two Carib canoe at north point. Four man (and he indicated four locals) drunk, Sir, on beach. Recruit White in guardhouse for dereliction of duty on patrol here. Cook's child sick almost to death, Sir, but lives. Friend of Lt. Lee here"—and he pointed to the little melting brown man—seriously injured. All other personnel accounted for, patrols reactivated, Sir," and he saluted again.

And at that point Jimmy Lee's alleged "friend" collapsed with a strangely occidental moan. Frank Bevan, our medico, jumped forward.

"My God," he breathed, "This poor guy's really had it. Here . . .".

The cook, who was a competent nurse, and one of the Security Force who had orderly experience moved in with commendable alacrity, heaved the barely breathing body onto a wickerwork *chaise-long* and toted him out of the room. It was all very correct but rather sudden.

"Now!" I demanded of all and

sundry, "I wish to know precisely what has been going on. You, for instance," I said, pointing to the man who owned the house from which the feminine, Spanish voice had emanated, "Where is she?"

Shock tactics are often the best in an emergency and, brother, did we have a full blown emergency by that time! The entire population had the dithers.

The man, a very decent sort, looked as if he had seen the ghost of his unlamanted grandfather. He burbled, but made no sense.

"Where is she?" I stormed, rising from my official and almost regal seat. "Where is that Spanish woman?" The company did not know whether to look at the man—named Strakey—or me. They were obviously bewildered. I approached him as menacingly as I could. I never had believed that a pale-brown skin could go chalk white but he did. Then in desperation he rounded on the tall black girl of his household.

"Ask her, the black bastard," he yelled. "She's a witch. They all the same. . . ."

I cut him short. "I suggest that you shut up." I stated. "That's your wife, isn't it?"

"My *wife!*" he yelled, and I could see by the wild stare in his eyes that the fellow was hysterical. "My *wife*, my *wife!* Hell, mon, that's not even my *woman.*"

"Well than, she's your brother's."

"She's *not*. She's a witch, Mon; I tell you, Mon, she's a black witch. She take me money, and take me brother. Don't even know when she comes. I no think, I no think, I no . . ." and he was off again.

"My goodness!" Jimmy Lee interjected, "Is it really that bad?"

"Is what, what bad?" I exploded. "Somebody will explain all this *at once.*" I really was mad by then.

Then a woman started screaming, and, just to add the final touch, she threw herself on the mat at my feet. It was the Strakey brothers' other woman. Her initial scream had a ring of familiarity about it. I put my bare foot politely and gently over her mouth, and she settled down. Linkia, the cook, came imperturbably forward with a bottle of light rum, and things simmered down so I started bawling again. If only somebody had taken a pot shot at somebody else it would have been a relief. Of all the silly wars!

Then Jimmy darted back into the room.

"Wong's going to die," he shouted at me, just as if it was my fault.

Now I must explain that all Jimmy's Chinese pals were named Wong. I don't think they

really were, but it fouled up anybody who might understand their particular brand of Yunnanese dialect and be "on the other side of the fence". It thus took me a few seconds to grasp the significance of his remark. Then it dawned on me: the little melting brown man was Chinese in, presumably, full war paint.

"Good Lord," I mumbled, and then I bolted back into the bedroom where the poor fellow was laid out groaning. He did look awful, I must admit, but neither of the medical personnel were in the least worried. He had a ghastly slash across the side of his body but his pulse was regular, his temperature only slightly above normal, and there was very little loss of blood, considering. It was Jimmy who needed treatment. The unemotional Oriental—my foot!

After this mild interruption we got down to business again. But not for long, because before I could open my mouth there was a further diversion. A panting Jamaican recruit arrived at the treble and in full battle regalia. He managed a sloppy salute in the general direction of Sergeant Abercrombie, and then rushed at me. I'd never believed the old bit about the whites of the eyes until then, most persons of equatorial African origin having fairly well pigmented eyeballs generally. "Chumbies", he gasped between labored pantings. Everybody began to wail; even my own contingent, so that I had to start yelling again.

The whole thing had become so utterly insane I sort of fell back upon The Book—by which I mean the Service Manual—and, it being Sunday, the order of the day sprang to mind.

"Let us pray", I intoned; and, by Jingo, they all did. Absolutely amazing!

What is more, I then learned for the first time the real power of prayer for it not only calmed everybody but somehow brought some semblance of order and sanity out of the shambles. Sergeant Abercrombie got through his silent incantations first, snapped to attention and delivered himself of what amounted to a sermon. I never did discover whether it was my stroke of genius in calling for prayers or his peroration that so endeared authority to everybody on the island from then on, but the change of attitude was unbelievable.

"Commander", Sergeant Abercrombie began—and this was unprecedented since I didn't even know that he knew my real rank, or even service.

Then he continued: "Company 15.OS., of the Jamaican Defense Force has sustained casualties in defense of this location, Sir. Corporal Alexander Clement Mac-

intosh White, Sir, gave his life in the line of duty but when off duty, Sir. Single-handed, and unarmed, Sir, he stopped organized approach by an armed band of Chumbies. I would recommend, Sir, that . . ."

I cut him short. It was tactless and brutal but even I can be pushed too far, and even Sergeant Abercrombie, it then seemed to me, could conjure up flights of fancy that exceeded all rules and regulations. Chumbies are ghosts and troops do not engage ghosts, especially in wartime.

"Everybody not in uniform is under arrest", I yelled. "All mothers with children are to go out on to the verandah. Sergeant, mount a guard. Nobody is to leave. HQ staff will station themselves at the doors of this room in pairs. Sergeant, take charge of these prisoners in my office. All personnel report for patrol duty immediately with full equipment. Blakely, get the jeep. Now Lieutenant," I snapped: then, turning on Jimmy Lee, "Explain immediately", I demanded.

Jimmy saluted smartly and looked completely blank. 'I know nothing Sir, except that two people screamed and these persons were detained on the beach." Then he dried up. There was silence.

"Sergeant", I bawled, "Detach personnel to guard the prisoners and come here."

He followed me into his inner sanctum.

"What's *your* story?"

"At 7:45 pm, Sir, I heard a disturbance in the village and, going immediately to investigate, I encountered yourself, the Lieutenant, and others in front of the house of the Strakey family. Being informed of the behaviour of Corporal White, I detached a security unit to make search for him and to extend same to the north end of the island. Hearing sounds of a fight and much shouting, they deployed and advanced. Just beyond the woods they espied Corporal White defending himself gallantly from attack by a number of chumbies, Sir. Moving forward at all speed with guns at the ready to assist him, we saw him fall forward, struck through the heart by some sharp weapon carried by one of the chumbies, Sir. They then vanished back into the woods. Later, on your orders, Sir, I went to apprehend Corporal White.

"Where are the chumbies?" I interjected.

Sergeant Abercrombie snapped to attention, pointed a rigid arm ninety degrees left precisely, and bawled *"There,* Sir." He was pointing at the six Caribs apprehended on the beach. There was a classic pause.

I couldn't resist a little drama, especially as I had a full house

and a captive audience.

"Very good, Sergeant", I intoned. "You will most certainly be commended for your performance—both in the line of duty and for your foresight in areas over and above your duties."

Then I too paused 'dramatically' before continuing in the mildest tones:

"And quite apart from that, the capture of chumbies will be a matter of the profoundest scientific interest."

But I fear me the full significance of this was lost on the gallant trooper. Then the elder Strakey came to life again.

"Chumbies, chumbies, chumbies!" he yelled, "Ask that *black bitch* (one noted the change of phrase). She chumbie too; she bring them here . . ."

Then he gave a sad sort of sigh and folded up like a rag doll. He made hardly any sound as he hit the floor. The crisis revived notably.

Everybody started jumping about like monkeys. I raised my voice to its highest permissible pitch but it did no good at all. Only Jimmy Lee was of any use. He rushed at the fallen man and pushed everybody else back so that the ceiling lights from the hall fell on his prone figure. There was a long, thin, shiny blade with a tiny ebony handle sticking out of his back. He was quite dead.

At the sight of this I erroneously conjectured that we might have a little peace and order, or at least that I might make myself heard. But no: oh, indeed no! Our prisoners went into action. They just pushed the two Jamaican guards over backwards, and converged upon their tall, stately congener—the gal who had inhabited the house of the so recently eliminated islander. They surrounded her, all six of them and I must admit that I have seldom seen a more awe-inspiring sight.

Whatever anybody may say about the Caribs, and almost everything everybody says about them is true, nobody can deny that they are one of, if not the most magnificent human types in existence today. There is a mongoloid slitness to their eyes, accentuated by their high cheek bones. Their bodies are all muscle, so that their salt-soaked, sun-bleached rags of clothing are an impertinence but in no way detract from those bodies which literally ripple like black leopards in prime condition. Even the biggest men—and they are big—have hands such as concert pianists are supposed to have; but, above all, it is their mouths that hit you. They're perfecly chiselled with a sort of raised line all around them as if cut and ground from some very hard stone. Although unarmed, this sextet had

us stone cold beat. Some "command" was obviously in order, but instead I blurted out:

"Why in the hell couldn't you have sent Raeis?"

One of the Caribs looked at me as if I were a slightly superior rat. None of them had spoken before. Now he said simply:

"This woman Raeis' sister".

So here we went again. Three times in a year and always this damned Raeis. And yet, it came almost as a relief. At least I knew that I had real trouble on my hands. It gave me a lot of false confidence and I almost regained my "command". But this was not to be, for at that moment "Take four" was interjected, and it was just as though we *were* on a movie lot.

A terrific light suddenly swept into the room via the main verandah entrance, and coincident with this, yet another banshee gave tongue. It was our own patrol boat arriving, unannounced. *No*body could miss *that* siren.

Now, the *M.V. Bainbridge Jr.* was supposed to be five hundred miles away. Everybody knew this. So there we all were, with two fatal war casualties, wounded, and a civilian murder on our hands; as well as six belligerent Black Caribs in our midst; a wounded Chinese in spotty warpaint in my bedroom; about forty wailing infants, and over a hundred dithering islanders—and this happens. Then, right in the middle of all the confusion, our Cockney expert must needs roar up to the steps in the jeep.

Action! Ah, yes; *action!* That was manifestly the required keynote, and now or never at that, so I banged on the table with the butt of my automatic and gave out in as calm a voice as possible.

"Ladies and gentlemen; all of you with the exception of staff and the Guard will sit down where you are. The last person to do so *will be shot,* by me. I will count three . . ."

And, by George, I really couldn't find anybody to shoot. Then I howled for Blakely, our Cockney chap, and the little fellow really did justice to his pocket-picking race. He was facing me, at attention, almost before I stopped making noise.

"Report to the jetty immediately", I ordered. "My compliments to Captain Grey and ask him to report in person as soon as possible. Also request him to turn over command to you. Have you full defensive issue and ammo?" He nodded.

"Good. As soon as he is made fast, ask him to assign First Officer Mendez to bridge duty with you. See to it that nobody and nothing else comes ashore—*or drops anything overboard.* Or'right? O.K., 'oppit, me'lad."

I added, dropping into the vernacular.

Corporal Blakely stared at me in thunderstruck amazement at this lapse, snapped a salute, about-faced, and marched out—but fast.

I felt better. There was nothing wrong with my staff, nit-picking pests that they were between crises. Besides, even the Caribs had now sat down as ordered. I told my staff to go one at a time and get full arms because, somehow, the return of the *M.V. Bainbridge Jr.* seemed to me to be extremely ominous.

I knew that she could quite well have been waylaid by a German sub; commandeered; restaffed; and put into reverse, navigationalwise. We'd be in a pretty pickle if 20-odd grey-eyed, blond-haired, regimented Nordic German slobs had come bouncing ashore in the midst of our current folderol. I wanted to see Captain Grey desperately. He was an oldtime commercial fishing skipper out of Tampa, Florida—a man with a wealth of wisdom as well as enterprise. Not that my gang weren't OK, but just too much had happened for a green crew who had only once seen a shot fired in anger. We waited, frozen like puppets after a show, in the glaring searchlight from the boat.

The jeep's roar stopped dead and seemingly appropriate nautical hollerings were heard. I began to relax, but then a staccato burst of gunfire followed.

Everybody made as if to say goodnight, but my Jamaicans were really on their toes by this time, so everybody just sank back to the floor, and even the kids stopped whimpering. I limped over to the verandah while Jimmy, at a nod from me, jumped to a control and threw all the light switches in the house.

"Get them under cover", I ordered as I slipped off the verandah.

Van Deusen was with me, and I sent him to cut the floods but to divert as many as possible to point towards the landing beach and the *Bainbridge*. Then I stepped into the shadows of the bushes and wove my way towards the jetty. While I was still under the palms, the lights centered on the boat.

These revealed a very odd sight indeed. Corporal Blakeley stood splay-legged at the land-end of the little jetty, burp-gun at the ready. There were four human bundles sprawled across the jetty itself and two more bobbing in the adjacent placid, clear, water. The *Bainbridge* was blacked-out but for her terrific spot, which held HQ steadily in its concentrated beam. Nothing else showed or moved.

"Blakeley" I called, "I'm coming. What's the matter?"

The little Cockney didn't move a muscle but he called out over his shoulder in quite unauthorized but explicit terms:

"Mucking Bosch! Ain't even got the bleedin' guts to shoot." Then he yelled out, "Oright, you muckers. Get outta there! On the 'op!"

But nothing happened. So, calling for coverage by the HQ contingent, Corporal Blakeley and I mounted a boarding party. We pushed open the blacked-out deckhouse door, flipped on a light, and surveyed the scene.

You know something? The Germans must be the stupidest people ever bred. Not only do they start wars and lose them all, they can't even indulge in a little mild piracy without muffing it. Believe it or not, they'd taken the *Bainbridge,* but not killed or taken off anybody; simply tied them up and dumped them in a cabin under a guard—a gibbering Venezuelan narcotic-addict to boot—then put four seamen and two rather high ranking officers aboard to run the ship. These idiots had not only steamed right up to our jetty and tied up, but had actually run ashore in a body like a bunch of deluded boy scouts—to be mowed down by one small, fully - illuminated Cockney. All were positively bristling with Lugers and other natty bang-bangs—as we subsequently found in the clear shallow water off the jetty. Not one had fired a shot. All were dead!

Captain Grey was in a rather bad way having been — again schoolboy-fashion — conked on the noggin rather badly, but everybody else was allright, especially the Chief, a dour, two-bottle, absolutely traditional Glascow Scot with a Jivaro Indian wife, who had been at the time of capture, and still was, blind drunk. Still, it was he who gave us the clearest account. They'd been jumped the night after sailing; clobbered, tied up, and watered, though not fed, for two days; and then brought unceremoniously home. The Sub. the Chief mentioned, seemed to be very "understaffed". The Bosche were playing merry hell with Allied shipping in that pond at that time.

So here we had reinforcements and things seemed to be working out allright. Nobody was running about any more . . . *What did I say?* The very next thing I saw in the glaring floodlights was just about everybody running about, and every which way.

Throwing dignity, "command", and everything else to the trade winds, which were blowing softly and agreeably as always, I actually started running up the beach to HQ. Corporal Blakeley started up the jeep and swept me up, and we came screeching to a stop at the foot of the verandah—

just as the Carib contingent erupted, followed by Jimmy, Ballash, and most of the household staff. In a flash they had all disappeared, and I was left knee-deep in wailing kids and mothers, and confronted by Linkia who, as always, being in part Hollander I suppose, at least looked complacent.

"May I ask, and for the last time" I almost crooned, "what *is* going *on?"*

She smiled and gave a little curtsy; something that annoyed me but which was indubitably bred into the gal and thus ineradicable.

"The *'Choomey'* throw knife again; kill black girl". She smiled just like waitresses do in Amsterdam.

"Not the Carib girl?" I asked.

"Yes, Sir, Meester" she said. and that was *it.*

I forgot everything else, for I knew that if we had a Carib "war" on our hands, we might just as well quit, then and there. Apart from that, I actually liked the Caribs, and I had a sort of "life pact" with this damned man, Raeis—and this was his sister! I raced up the steps.

Said sister was lying flat out on the verandah on her face. A long straight knife lolled out of her back. Our medico was already on hand but the poor boy had been yanked out of internship to serve the cause, and, although a real stalwart, he was now plain scared stiff. But Linkia was calm and confident.

"No touch the spiggery" she said.

I looked at her. Really, I would have to "go into" this girl's past, I remember thinking. Training as a nurse was on her card, but still . . .

"Is any Carib man here?" I shouted at the top of my lungs. There was no answer so I took a deep breath, ripped the cotton dress off the girl, and yelled for lights.

The terrible blade sort of swayed. It was, I estimated, about six inches into her right lung between two ribs. I looked young Bevan, our medico, in the eye.

"Don't!" he said.

"Then get me a Carib-man, now" I commanded. And suddenly, there before me stood one of them, with one of his tall, lithe women behind him. They did not speak.

"Medicine" I said, "Quick, Man. Medicine! If you don't have medicine, I'm going to pull the knife. You know what to do then, yes? . . . Look-you! This Raeis' sister. Raeis save me two time with your medicine. If this stay" I pointed to the knife, "she die. If I pull it, she die. What do I make?"

Then the other girl spoke.

"You pull 'em!" she said. I

looked at her.

"But the blood . . ." I asked, "Can she get blood?"

"Yes," she answered.

Just then the house lights came on. I seized the little dark handle of the knife and pulled.

The blood gushed and the girl gave a great sigh. I thought it was all over and did not really notice that the knife was taken from my hand and that my chest was slashed—adroitly and right down to the bone.

The other girl then ripped off *her* sack-like upper garment and tossed it away. She dropped to her knees, seized me in a grip like a scrap-iron clamp, drew me to her and started sucking at the wound like a vast leech. Next, she spun to her wounded sister and, while pumping her arms as we would a near-drowned person, she spurted my blood into her wound. Boy! Talk about a slaughterhouse—the damned stuff was everywhere. Poor Bevan just backed off and gaped. It was painful, but I have to admit that I waited for those chiselled lips to get back again to my chest. And when they did, it did *not* hurt. Strange!

I don't know how long this went on but I think I 'took the fifth' in about ten minutes. When I came-to- all six outside Caribs were standing around and one had a coca cola bottle, the contents of which he was dashing into the wounded girl's mouth. She was partly on her back now, and so was I. I looked down. I had a neat slice right across my chest, with the little white ribs showing at the bottom; but again, no blood! Jimmy was kneeling in front of me and looking very "oriental". Linkia brought a hand stapler from my desk and in a very matter-of-fact way joined up the two sides of my slice. It hurt like hell. She was about to souse it with iodine when one of the Carib girls hit the bottle out of her hand.

"White man fire" she said.

Girl number one—the wounded one—was sitting up by this time. Even in my misery I remember thinking how absolutely magnificent she was—calm, serene, and utterly beautiful. And she spoke to me.

"Raeis, he thank you" she said. Then she calmly went to sleep.

All of this had taken but fifteen minutes. When I staggered into my office, it dawned upon me that nothing had really been solved. We were really right back where we started. Linkia appeared with a glass of something milky-looking. I drank it. Then Sergeant Abercrombie arrived and saluted, which made me feel much better. Things were returning to normal.

"I have prisoner for you, Sir" he announced.

"Bring it in", I mumbled. And he did.

The next thing I knew, one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen was led into the room by two of the stalwart Jamaican recruits. She was somewhat battered but, gathering her ruffled clothing together and slicking back her hair, she stood erect at her five foot five and glared at me with eyes that would put any Rumanian Gypsy to shame. Then she launched into a tirade in mainland Spanish—in *that* voice. I let her run her course, not trying to understand but looking interested. Finally she dried up.

I'd read about "those fiery latin dames" and all that malarky, but here, for pity's sake, on our tiny little atoll was the real thing—and no Hollywood promoter in sight. Wow! What a piece of flesh? I had to get down to facts.

"Señorita" I began, with what delicacy I could muster, "Would you please give me, personally, your other *picadores, por favor?"*.

The dame looked horrified; I once lived in Mexico.

"Señorita!" I pleaded, *"Por favor y sin beguensa . . ."* I pleaded.

She made a sudden move and another of those long-bladed knives swayed upright on my desk.

"Usted!" she screamed.

I hit her real hard. She began to talk English. Her flame was gone.

She admitted killing the man, Strakey, and throwing the knife at the Carib Girl. She stated further that she'd kill his brother and any other Carib she could get at—though she remarked rather petulantly that I probably would not give her the opportunity to do so.

"Why?" I finally asked.

It was a strange story. At first she was furious, and she pulled out every stop, but then she got tired. We had coffee and a long drink. She began to giggle.

"No es borracho?" I asked rather casually.

And she burst. The tears came gushing. She also 'rent her raiment', something I never really knew happened outside the Bible. But, strangely, even she did not have the whole answer.

She was a Strakey and she had left the island before we had come, to visit her mother on the mainland. Then, she had heard that a Carib girl was installed in her husband's house (and she *was* legally married to the younger brother, we found out). Neither he nor his brother had answered her letters nor communicated with her in any way, so she had gone to the Caribs to smuggle her back to the island. There had been two canoes and they had come ashore on the

north point. A "black girl" had met them and they had all gone to her husband's house. But he insisted that he did not know her. She had become desperate and started to yell at him but the "Black Girl" had suddenly opened a door in the floor and thrown her down on to the sand below. Then she had run back to the canoes. Some Caribs were there but soldiers came with guns. They had separated and a man had come at her. He seemed crazy, she said, and she had defended herself with a knife. That was fair enough, but I asked who was with her.

"The Caribs" she replied—and honestly, I felt.

"And what about the Indian?" I asked.

She looked blank.

"Wasn't there a little brown man with you?" I asked.

"No, Señor".

"In the other canoe? . . ."

She thought a while and took a big slug of rum.

"Es possible," she murmured; and I could see that she was pondering something.

"Did you see a little Indian?" I persisted.

"No" she answered. And then, dropping back into English, said:

"But . . . That very strange. . . . We come two Carib man, two girl, one me, one canoe; two Carib man one Carib girl other canoe; but when we get here, other canoe have four men."

"You mean four people, don't you?" I asked.

"That right", she answered. "Two Carib man, Carib girl, and other man".

"Where'd he come from?" I snapped. She thought a moment.

"Must be from boat".

"What boat?"

"How you call sub-marin, I teenk". And she frowned. A clock stopped.

You know what a vacuum a clock leaves when it stops. Even the nightly crickets and things did nothing to fill the space so that I swear I could hear my own mind ticking. It was like watching a linotype machine in operation. One slug after another dropped into place with a gay click. Then I yelled for Jimmy Lee. He appeared as if by magic.

"Since you have been listening to our conversation" I began, "I will cut the preliminaries and ask you to conclude my thoughts," and I threw him a broad wink.

Splendid chap, Jimmy. No darned-fool occidental prompting needed to adjust his oriental mind. Besides he was the soul of discretion as the saying goes, and had a fiendish sense of humor.

"Velly solly" he began in mock pidgin-English, "This most humble one unfortunately suffering. . . ."

"Oh, cut it out, Jimmy, will

you please?" I admonished. He sat down and lit a revolting stogie.

"You'd better talk to Wong" he said; adding "He's not dead yet".

So, getting the clue, I had the doe-eyed dame marched off to bed by the largest constable I spotted on guard, and headed for the bedroom.

The Wong was propped up in my bed!

"Good evening, Sir" I said, "I hope you are feeling better".

"Thank you, yes" he replied. "It is nothing".

There was then dead air. I considered bringing up the sure-fire matter of ancestors and looked at Jimmy—firmly. He burst into his Yunnanese dialect of the Chinese family of sub-languages. Wong brightened. The tirade went on, back and forth, for a long time. Then Jimmy sat down and turned to me.

"Frankly, Chief" (familiarity I abhorred) "I've only just got it myself", he began. "It's like this." (And I paraphase).

Jimmy and his Wongs had gotten onto the fact, through my beloved Caribs, that the Bosche had decided to eliminate us as a minute, silly, unimportant but bloody annoying "nest" of what they grandiosely called "spies"—a fine name for a more or less passive counter-espionage and communications unit isolated on a sea-girt isle in (allegedly) friendly territory. To this end, a Wong—the one presently in my bed—was opted to (a) warn us (through Jimmy *via* radio if possible) and (b) take countermeasures on his own. The Wongs and their compatriots were really fighting that war but they had the aggravating habit of trying to go it all alone.

Thus, the radio failing—as it usually did — this Wong had sought passage to our cay *via* Carib canoe, knowing they slipped in and out at will despite all our defense and security. But a rather bright yellow Chinese boating in the Caribbean at that time would have aroused not a little speculation, so he had painted himself 'Indian'. Arrived at departure point on the coast of Nicaragua, he had found two instead of one canoe waiting and a talkative island girl as a fellow passenger—my doe-eyed virago. So he just ducked into the cargo and laid low.

All went well until a day out the Caribs had downed sail and started fishing. About an hour later there was a thrumming noise and a submarine had surfaced almost alongside. The head Carib and the German commander had talked in Spanish and Wong was horrified to learn that said Carib was giving the course of our *Bainbridge, Jr.* out of our cay that morning.

When the sub sank, Wong went to work and, after a brief interchange, took charge with a competent and fully loaded .45 and ordered the Carib fleet to our cay at full sail. Under his watchful eye, they made it just after dark and landed on the north point but, once ashore, poor Mr. Wong lost control. The Caribs just disappeared into the dense darkness of the button-woods. Actually, he did not care much as the island was small, he could see our lights, and he was well pleased to be rid of the Caribs. He started out. But then the unexpected began to happen.

Doe-eyes, being a native islander, made it home long before anybody else got much of anywhere, and just about the time I must have stepped out for a stroll. The moment she set foot in her husband's house she encountered an unpleasant situation. Her husband would not recognize her and she soon realized he was doped or hypnotized or otherwise under an abnormal influence of the installed Carib girl. She had screamed and poor Corporal White had come running to investigate. Then I sprang out! White, being a good, simple country boy from the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, where chumbies and other things that go 'bump' in the night are rife, panicked and 'went to bush', as the saying goes. He had apparently run head-on into the advancing Caribs who were simply bent upon spending a night in the fishing settlement as was their wont . . . AND Mr. Wong. The latter, adjudging this to be an attack, let the poor innocent have it.

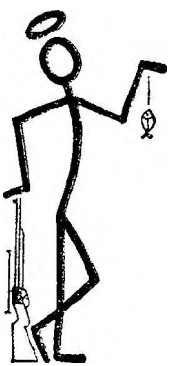
This caused some noise which brought on the Beach Guard both on and off duty, and a fight started out of sheer reaction. Then we had arrived. Unfortunately, poor Mr. Wong was bleeding to death and so had not been up to warning us or straightening us out before he straightened out himself. Then, what with the Caribs, doe-eyes' family problem, and general mass-hysteria, things had dragged on until the *Bainbridge* showed up with a view to eliminating us.

Reasons for (1) deaths of Corporal Clement Mackintosh White—killed while repulsing an invasion; (2) murder of Strakey the Elder—by his Carib woman to keep his mouth shut; (3) attempted murder of said Carib girl—by "Doe-eyes" in revenge. Case solved? Oh, dear me, NO.

How did the Caribs know just when the *Bainbridge* sailed from our cay, where she was heading, and what speed Captain Grey had elected to make—when they were two hundred miles away on the mainland and even our new-fangled radio was on the

blink? (Obviously brother and sister Raies, but how? E.S.P.?) How had they so precisely rendezvoued with the German sub? Above all, why did they do it? They weren't on 'Their' side, any more than they were on ours, for they were later instrumental in sinking more than one enemy sub, and they played havoc with several of our enemies' other enterprises. They loathe all white men and despise anybody else who is not a Carib; and they have nothing to lose and nothing much to win, as they take a very 'sensible' view of money. Don't ask me; I'm not even an Islander. But, as I said at the outset, nobody in the Caribbean ever really knows why anybody in particular is anywhere at any particular time, yet everybody seems to know just when they will be there. The Black Caribs are experts.

"Spies", forsooth! We were just a bunch of innocents caught in a web of extrasensory perception between an illiterate bunch of black genii and a submersible mob of over-literate idiots. And that's supposed to be a War?



pride goes-

by Robert Bloch

ALICE AIKEN decided to marry Ralph Gregory the moment she met him. Only one obstacle stood in her way.

His name was Fred, and he was her husband.

Actually he didn't really *stand* in her way — usually he just lurched or wobbled. If he wasn't in an alcoholic stupor at their penthouse apartment, he was out on the town. Then he lived it up at the Athletic Club, while Alice and young Ralph kept a furtive assignation at the penthouse.

But there came a time when Alice realized this wasn't right. She was a woman of high principle, and she abhorred all this cheap deception. There was obviously only one honest and decent way out—she would have to kill her husband.

There was no question of divorce in her mind; obtaining a decree was almost impossible in this state, except on grounds of adultery. And Fred wasn't the adulterer—she was. For a time she considered just running away, but this meant she would have

Robert Bloch, as we've said more than once, is undoubtedly best known to most for his stories about those among us — possibly about that woman you saw last week in the supermarket and who you thought acted so strangely — whose dreams are not our dreams. But, come to think of it, are *they?*

to leave all of that lovely money Fred had inherited. The money would come in very handy for Ralph and herself.

Alice had always prided herself on her ability to think clearly. Once she came to her decision, it was merely a matter of applying the logical approach to this matter of murder.

Of course she couldn't tell Ralph what she had in mind; he was inclined to be the least bit squeamish and stuffy about these things. So the poor darling had to suffer for a while—instead of quickly phoning him whenever Fred left the apartment, Alice used those evenings to carefully study treatises on criminology and toxicology.

She quickly decided that poison was out, and so was any crime of violence. When a young girl is married to a wealthy old man, the use of such methods is bound to arouse suspicion.

For a while she contemplated more elaborate devices. There was always the possibility of hiring some accomplice to stage a fake robbery—then doublecrossing him. He'd pose as a burglar, shoot her husband, and then she'd shoot him. It seemed like a commonplace gambit. But that was just the trouble; it was too commonplace, and she'd read of too many instances where such schemes had backfired.

No, what she needed was something simple. Simple and characteristic. A pity Fred couldn't hurry up with the business of drinking himself to death.

But why *couldn't* he? The moment the thought occurred to her she knew she had found the solution. Everybody was aware of his habits; they realized he drank heavily at home, too. What would be more natural than for him to take on a load, stagger over to the penthouse window, and fall twenty-seven storeys to the street below?

Oh, there might be some awkward questions asked, but nobody could ever *prove* anything.

The more Alice thought about it, the more she liked the idea. She wished desperately that she could talk it over with Ralph first, but there was no point in shocking the poor boy. He was upset enough already, what with her refusing to see him or invite him up during the past few weeks. Even when he sneaked up on surprise visits Alice had refused to admit him. She needed time to plan. Ralph Gregory must wait.

But now her plans were complete and there was no need to wait. The very first evening Fred stayed home, she put her scheme into operation.

There was no trouble about opening the French windows, because it was a hot night. And there was certainly no trouble

in encouraging Fred to drink. Within an hour he was babbling and reeling. When she coaxed him over to the open window to look at the sunset, he came readily enough. All she had to do then was slip behind him, brace herself firmly, and push.

He fell like a rock.

Then she ran out into the hall, screaming.

The assistant manager came up at last, and she sobbed out her story incoherently. She was proud of her convincing display of hysteria and clung to the man, moaning, as he attempted to calm her. She could tell from his reaction that there'd never be any trouble; the police would believe her story, too. It was all she could do to keep from laughing as he patted her shoulder.

"Terrible, terrible," he kept saying. "A double tragedy like this."

Alice looked up. "Double tragedy?" she echoed.

The manager nodded. "Yes. Your husband, when he—came down—he hit this man in the street. The blow killed him instantly. I don't know if he was coming here to the hotel or not; maybe the police can tell you more when they get here. They found his wallet. Some chap named Gregory . . ."

JOSEPH'S RETURN

For three long weeks, Joseph had wanted to go back to the old neighborhood—to the familiar smells, to the old friends, to everything that had spelled home for so long.

And finally the seven year old chestnut had his chance.

Slipping away after he'd been tied outside the Arsenal Station in Central Park presented no problem, and soon he was standing there at the entrance to the armory at 94th Street and Madison Avenue, waiting for someone to open the gate. But they'd taken all the horses away from there three weeks earlier, clear across town to 55th Street and 10th Avenue, so nobody came to open the gate. But some of the men tearing down the armory came out to give him a pat, and the children in the neighborhood—and some of the older folk too—were fussing over him when hoofbeats were heard down the street.

They had found him.

He'd have to go back.

But it'd been worth it . . .

the vandals

by Miriam Allen deFord

WHEN Detective Sergeant Thomas Clark reached the address on Forest Crescent with his partner, they found a man—presumably the one who had phoned—standing on the steps before the closed front door. The garage door at the side was up, and they could see a woman sitting in a car, staring out at them as they parked.

"You remember this neighborhood from last year, don't you, Tom?" Joe Brady muttered.

"Only too well. But I thought it had all died down by now—hoped so, anyway. Where did that family move in?"

"Right next door to here—that house with the green roof you can see across the two gardens."

Clark whistled. There was no time to say more; the man on the steps was walking toward them down the driveway.

"You from headquarters?" he inquired. He was a rather short man in his forties, lean rather than thin, with brown hair turning grey and worried blue eyes

There will be some who will consider this a controversial story. It isn't. It is a story which reflects some of the tensions of our urban life, as these are known to law enforcement officers. Californian Miriam Allen deFord, author of numerous works including STONE WALLS, a study of the prison reform movement, will be remembered for her ARTUR'S STORY (SMM, Febr. 1963) and THE SILVER SPOONS (SMM, May 1963), and other stories.

behind horn-rimmed glasses.

"Yes," said Clark. "You Mr. Derwent?"

"Yes. I couldn't explain much over the phone. Listen, this sounds funny, but here's a key, and you go inside and take a look. I can't make myself go in there again. And when you get through, come out here to the garage and talk to my wife and me. She's waiting in the car; she can't go in again, either. We'll wait for you, and then we'll go downtown to a hotel till we decide what to do next."

"We'd rather you'd go in with us, Mister," Brady began.

"No need, right now," Clark interrupted him. "Give us the key and we'll make a quick inspection. Have you had time to look around and see how they got in?"

"Not for sure, but there's a broken window in the kitchen."

"That's most likely, then. We won't keep you long, but we'd better get a first look before we ask you for details."

Derwent retreated to the garage and climbed into the driver's seat beside his wife. The two detectives watched till he shut the car door, then they went up to the house and Clark unlocked and let them in.

This time it was Brady who whistled.

"Jumping Jerusalem!" he breathed. "I've seen some bad ones, but this beats them all."

Clark just stared.

It had been a pretty, well-kept ranch house—that was apparent fom the outside, and from what was left of the inside. The front door opened immediately on the living room.

The wall-to-wall carpet was almost invisible under broken chairs, torn fragments of curtains, smashed lamps and bric-a-brac, slashed pictures, and splintered frames. Then on top of the mess somebody had emptied a sack of flour, and poured jarsful of syrup and jam on top of that. The only things left intact, at first sight, were the Venetian blinds, drawn as the Derwents had left them when they went on their vacation.

"Don't touch anything," Clark said. "Come on, let's see the rest."

They stepped gingerly on tiptoe to the door leading to the dining room. Not so much had been done there, though there were plenty of broken dishes, and silverware had been scattered—thrown, apparently—all over the floor. The doors of a sideboard stood open, and tablecloths and napkins had been dragged out, slit into rags, and then doused with what looked like ketchup. But the adjoining kitchen looked like a junkyard. Evidently the cupboards had just been opened and everything in

them swept to the floor. Everything breakable was broken. The refrigerator door was open and its contents too had been swept out. The stove had dents in its enamel, as if from a heavy hammer. A path had been left empty leading to the broken window, so that was how they had come and gone. There were trees outside that hid the windows from the sight of neighbors.

The detectives crossed the hall. There were a master bedroom, a guest room, one and a half bathrooms. Sheets, pillow slips, draperies, bedspreads were a pile of tatters, slit by shears or a sharp knife. The dressing table in the master bedroom was covered with shards of bottles and jars — everything, it appeared, that Mrs. Derwent had not taken with her. The drawers of the chiffonier were open and their contents lay on the floor with the rest—all smeared, not with flour this time, but with coffee, sugar, and more preserves, with a trimming of mayonnaise.

Clark opened the door of the big closet.

"Hey!" he exclaimed. "Look here!"

The clothing left behind by the Derwents hung decorously on its hangers. Men's and women's hats stood ranged on the shelf. Shoes in their trees stood demurely on the floor. The invaders seemed not even to have opened the closet door.

But they had been in both bathrooms. There wasn't much they could do in the small one, except rip towels and wrench out the fixtures for soap and toilet paper. It was probably an afterthought. But in the other bathroom the medicine cabinet had been pulled free and all its contents dumped in the bathtub, together with shreds of towels. Then the shower had been turned on to soak the mixture. A big mirror had been smashed with a hammer.

"They turned the water off again," Clark pointed out, "so it wouldn't flood and seep under the doors and alert outsiders." He touched a twisted rag that had been a bath towel. "We'll find out how long it takes these to dry—it may give us an idea how long ago all this happened."

"All they missed was setting the place on fire—I guess that *would* have attracted attention," Brady commented.

"No paper for fuel," Clark replied dryly. "Didn't you notice? There wasn't a book in the house.

"Well, that's the works. Let's go out and chat with the Derwents."

Mrs. Derwent was a small synthetic blonde, about her husband's age. She might have been pretty once, but not now, with

that sharp nose and too heavy chin. Besides, she had been crying, and her eye shadow had run.

"Here's the police officers, Flo," Derwent said, opening the door. "What did you say your names were?" They told him again. "Well, did you ever see anything like it?"

"Just horrible!" Mrs. Derwent burst out in a choked voice. "I knew it! I knew something awful would happen! I begged and begged him not to go away and leave our home unprotected. You know I did!" she accused her husband.

"I never dreamt—" he began miserably.

"No, you never even *think!*" she shrilled viciously. "Here we have been for a year, just sitting ducks for those hoodlums and their brats, and this man too mean to pay for someone to come in and keep the place safe, if he *had* to make me go with him. Oh, no, all he thinks about is moving—selling out and going somewhere else, and letting those creatures glory in having got rid of us. *They* knew we were away, all right.

"And now see what's happened. And not even insurance, for this sort of damage. Well, you've won, damn you." She turned on her husband, who seemed visibly to shrink in size. "I won't ever live here again!" she shouted. "You've got your way: put the house on the market, and buy one in a place that hasn't caved in. I never want to see it again. And believe me, it's going to cost you plenty, Henry. New furniture from the ground up, and just as good as I had. All my lovely things that I took such care of—"

"Please, madam—" Clark tried to interrupt the flow. But she wasn't through yet; she had been waiting for an audience.

"Oh, no, that's you all over—white-livered like all the Derwents. 'Live and let live. They're not so bad—they're being good neighbors.' Oh, sure—and look at what they've done to us now!"

"Honey, we don't *know* it was them."

"Who else *could* it have been? Have we another enemy in the world? Them or their Commie friends from downtown who helped get them in here. Don't you think they know who it was that tried to keep them out—who passed around the petitions and talked people into signing and led the fight against them? Those first weeks, when they had guards posted all around here and I never got a wink of sleep for fear of what they might do to us—and then *you* gave in, like you always do, and let those weak-kneed idiots in City Hall bully you into promising I'd let up on them—*I* never promised

anything, did I?"

Suddenly she seemed to realize that this wasn't helping her with the law, and shut up. Clark jumped into the breach.

"If you and Mr. Derwent will answer a few questions," he said, "we can get started on this and leave you free to go to a hotel. Just call us when you're there and we'll keep in touch with you." He turned to Derwent. "When did you leave on your trip?"

"Three weeks ago today. About three in the afternoon."

"And you got back today right before you called us?"

"I had to go all the way over to the shopping center to phone," he said in an aggrieved voice. "They even cut our phone wire. But allowing for that, yes, just before then."

"I went up and unlocked the door while Henry got our bags out of the trunk," Mrs. Derwent interrupted. "I almost fainted. I just managed to call out to him and he came running. He had to help me back into the car. Then I had to sit here alone, where any of them might have seen us drive in and sneaked up to attack me, till he got back. It's a wonder he didn't find me a bloody corpse!"

"Now, Flo," said her harassed husband. "Have some sense. You know they wouldn't—"

"I take it," Clark interposed smoothly, "that you suspect one of your neighbors."

"*One* of our neighbors! I suspect *them*. No, I don't suspect them—I *know* they did it—them or their brats."

"I'll have to explain, officer," Derwent murmured apologetically. "A year ago we had a little trouble around here. You may remember it—a colored family bought the house next door to us—that one over there."

"I remember," Clark said. "Dr. Hill."

"Doctor!" repeated Mrs. Derwent bitterly.

"He's a professor of pharmacology, and he's a doctor," the detective replied calmly.

"Well, there was quite a bit of fuss, you'll recall, and as it happens, my wife led the opposition. Naturally, they haven't exactly been friendly. But they've been quiet and clean, and it all died down months ago. I can scarcely believe—"

"Huh!" ejaculated Mrs. Derwent. She turned her back on them.

"Of course you locked everything up well before you left?"

"Certainly. And stopped the papers and the milk, as we always do when we go away. And we have—anyway, we had—a light that goes on automatically in the living room from dark to daylight, so burglars won't know the house is empty.

"In fact, because Mrs. Derwent was so nervous about our leaving this time, I made one trip back myself, a week ago. Everything was all right then. We weren't very far away—just at Seaview, up the Coast a ways, and I came down in the morning early and got back there the same night. So what happened must have been during this past week—that ought to help you a bit."

"I *made* him drive down," said Mrs. Derwent, her back still turned. "He didn't want to—oh, no. I spoiled a whole day of his precious deep-sea fishing." She laughed unpleasantly. "I had a hunch. The only trouble was, it was too early."

"Thank you," Clark said politely. "I won't keep you folks any longer. Be sure to phone in where you go. We'll do everything we can to straighten this thing out."

He and Brady walked to their car. They were still within hearing distance when Mrs. Derwent said loudly: "Henry—that red-headed one's all right, but the other—the one that did all the talking. Do you think he could possibly be — his skin's awful dark."

"He's only tanned, honey." Derwent sounded tired and patient. "His hair is straighter than yours is."

Joe Brady looked at Clark and started to laugh. In a minute Clark joined in.

They went back to the station and Clark wrote up his report. Then he talked to Lieutenant Schultz.

"You've got plenty to do besides, Tom," the lieutenant said. "But handle it your own way if it doesn't take too much of your time. This Derwent is a pain in the neck—I remember him from last year. Assistant manager of Staripe Canneries here, and he throws his weight around."

"Not him—his wife," Clark contradicted. "He's a mouse—too scared of her not to fight when she tells him to. She's dead set on its being the Hills—without one speck of evidence."

"Well, what do you plan on doing?"

"I've got the extra key. I thought I'd take Joe again tomorrow morning, before they've had a chance to have anything cleaned up, and go over the mess with a fine-tooth comb. Then talk around the neighborhood—and not just to the Hills, either."

"Go ahead."

Derwent phoned an hour later that they were at the Majestic. Clark told him to lay off doing anything till they had had a chance to do some investigating. He could hear Mrs. Derwent needling her husband in the background. Well, it was natural

she should be sore. He was sorry for Derwent.

"Here's what gets me, Joe," he said the next morning as they waded through the jumble. "Only this itty-bitty hole in the kitchen window, big enough for a kid to get through but not even a big kid. And yet what kid would be strong enough to do some of this damage—the stove, say, or the way the TV set was gouged?"

"I know." Brady started to measure the hole in the window. "Tom, I found something," he called. He pulled something delicately from the crack between the broken glass and the frame, and held it out. It was a strand of bright red wool.

"O.K., somebody's got a sweater or something that matches this." Clark put it in an envelope. "Another funny thing—did you notice? Everything else smashed up, but that closet door in the bedroom not even opened, and not a thing done to the clothes in it. And another thing—see that cabinet in the living room? Full of records—and not one of them touched."

"Look for a kid with a red sweater, not interested in grown people's clothing and a bug on music so he wouldn't break records, huh? Maybe he meant to come back later and swipe them."

"Maybe. I guess that's all we need do around here, Joe. I'll go around interviewing the neighbors—start with the Hills, since the Derwent's won't be happy till we do."

"What about fingerprints?"

"Where? In that flour and jam and ketchup and stuff? Not a stain on any of the walls—that's another funny thing. When all this junk's been cleared off, I'll have Miller go over the place for prints, but I miss my guess if we'll find any except the Derwents' and their callers' and whoever cleans the house for them."

A tall, thin, coffee-colored man dressed in khakis and a blue shirt, a trowel in his hand, rose to his feet in the front garden as Clark approached. Beside him squatted a very little boy, two or three years old, solemnly holding a seed packet for his father.

"Dr. Hill?" Clark asked.

"Yes." He smiled. "Busman's holiday. Summer vacation, so I'm planting some medicinal herbs to use dried next term at the university. What can I do for you?"

"Detective Sergeant Thomas Clark." He pulled out his badge. Hill raised his eyebrows.

"We had plenty of police around here a year ago, but we haven't needed any since," he said mildly. "What's wrong now?"

"Do you know about what

happened next door?"

"Derwent's? No. We're not on speaking terms. They've been away, I think. My older boy said he saw their car drive in yesterday. Something the matter?"

Clark told him.

"So I suppose we're being blamed for it. You came straight to us, eh?"

"I'm going to every house around here. You're the nearest, so you're the first."

"Can't you just picture me breaking in there and vandalizing the place?"

"Not you, Dr. Hill. It may have been kids."

"Oh, I see. Well, it wasn't Eddie here—he won't be three till next week. Laurie's downtown shopping with her mother. She's eight years old and weighs 50 pounds. So I suppose you're after Bruce."

"I'm not after anybody. I just want to talk to the kids around here who are big enough to make it possible."

"Well, it wasn't Bruce, I can tell you that. He's tall like me, and he's husky for 13, but he's the studious type—like me again. Besides, he hasn't been out of the house at night except with one of us since school ended, and I imagine this kind of thing doesn't get done in broad daylight. When did it happen?"

"Some time this past week, evidently. Mr. Derwent came back for a day a week ago to see if everything was all right, and it was. So it must have been after he went to Seaview again for their last week out of town."

"It wasn't my boy," said Hill stubbornly.

"Can I talk to him, please?"

"Sure. Why not? Skedaddle in, Eddie, and tell Bruce to come down—he's up in his room working on his stamp collection. Come in the house, sergeant."

Bruce was a nice-looking boy, darker skinned than his father.

"This is Detective Sergeant Clark, Bruce. He wants to ask you some questions about something that's happened next door."

"At the Derwents'?" For a second Clark could have sworn he saw fright in the boy's eyes, but it vanished instantly. "Those crumbs?" Bruce scowled. "How would I know anything about those Mr. Charlies?"

Clark smiled.

"Mr. Charlies, huh?" he said. "Is that what you call them? My people used to call them pale-faces."

The man and the boy both stared.

"Are you an *Indian?*" Bruce breathed with awe.

"Iroquois."

"They were the civilized tribes, weren't they? I was reading an article about them. It said now they're all high iron workers, because they have such a wonder-

ful sense of balance."

"Not all, though I have a brother who's in the construction game. I joined the police instead."

"Gee!" said Bruce. "I never saw a real live Indian before. How come you have a name like Clark?"

"That's my white name. My Indian name is Grey Eagle."

"Gee!"

The atmosphere had changed. Clark could sense that even Dr. Hill felt more at ease with him, now that he knew he wasn't a white man.

"Now let *me* ask some questions, kid. Do you have a red sweater?"

"What?"

"You heard me. Have you a red sweater?"

"Why—I don't know—"

He was right; the boy *was* frightened.

"What's the matter with you, Bruce?" his father said sharply. "You know darned well you have—you got it last Christmas."

"May I see it, please?"

"Why—"

"What kind of nonsense is this?" Dr. Hill snapped. "Eddie, chase up to Bruce's room and bring his red sweater down, will you?"

Eddie clumped up the stairs on hands and knees and down again backward, dragging the sweater after him. Clark got the envelope from his pocket and drew out the woolen thread.

"It matches," he said.

"I wish his mother was here," Dr. Hill said worriedly. "What's all this about?"

"The thread was caught in the kitchen window that was broken to get into the house," the detective explained.

"I didn't do it! I wasn't even there!" the boy blurted.

"Do what?" asked Clark.

"Tear their place up." Bruce dropped suddenly silent.

"Nobody told you what had happened," his father said grimly.

Bruce began to cry. Dr. Hill went to him and put his arm around his son's shoulders.

"Listen, boy," he said earnestly. "If you know anything at all about this bad business, get it off your chest. We want to help you, not hurt you. Isn't that true?" He turned to Clark.

"It certainly is, as far as I'm concerned."

"Your mother and I moved out here, and went through all those horrors last year, for your sake and Laurie's and Eddie's. We wanted you to grow up in nice surroundings, go to a good school, know good people, black or white. The other kids in school have treated you decently, haven't they?"

"Some of them," Bruce said, his fists in his eyes. "But that

doesn't make up for the rest of it, does it? Or for the way those people next door have acted?"

"I don't ask that you *like* people like those Derwents, Bruce. Your mother and I don't like them, either, any more than we like any of the other bigoted, prejudiced ignoramuses who base their opinion of a man on the color of his skin. But that's not the way to fight them.

"Bruce, *did* you have anyhing to do with that act of vandalism next door?"

"No, I didn't!" the boy yelled. "I don't lie—you know that, dad."

"But you do know something about it, don't you?" the detective put in. "Bruce, if you know who did it, you ought to tell us."

"I don't squeal, either."

"Was it somebody you know —some of our friends from the old home who helped us defend ourselves last year?" his father asked. Bruce merely shook his head.

Thomas Clark—Grey Eagle to his friends — went and knelt down by the boy and took his hands in his own hardly lighter-colored ones.

"Bruce," he said, "it isn't squealing to tell whatever you know about a crime. No matter how much you hate those people next door—and I'd hate them too, or her anyway, in your place —you know it *is* a crime to destroy their property that way, don't you?"

The boy nodded.

"Do you realize what might happen if you won't talk to your father and me about this? I'd have to report that you seemed to have some sort of connection with it. Then my superiors might have to have you brought before a judge, and there is nothing I could do to prevent it. I don't want to see a boy like you, with all the makings of a good, useful citizen, perhaps sent away to some reform school. It would be the ruin of you, and disgrace your family. If you'll tell us what you know, and it exonerates you, then the worst that could happen to you would be to be a witness in a court trial, and that would be the end of it. Won't you give us a chance to help you?"

There is just so much thirteen can take. Bruce looked imploringly at his father and then broke down in a tumult of speech.

"I hate them—her worst of all. They were mean to my mom and dad; they're mean to us all. Once Eddie crawled under the hedge into their garden, and that Mrs. Derwent acted like a tiger was after her. 'Shoo, shoo, you dirty little—' that word you don't say—and 'Get out of here, quick!' Scared Eddie most to death. And once when mom went to a P.T.A. meeting and sat down next to her, she got up and

walked across the room to another seat. I haven't forgotten last year, either, when we had to have policemen watch the house at night for fear somebody might throw a bomb at us or set us on fire.

"I hate them and I'm *glad* they got their house torn up. I wish it had been worse. I wish they'd get out of here altogether. We'd get along all right if she wasn't always egging people on against us.

"So I'm not going to tell anything that might hurt the ones that did it. Even if I knew," he added hastily.

"You did see them, then, didn't you?"

"Not any person," Bruce said reluctantly. "I saw it being done. But I couldn't see who."

"How did you happen to be there?"

"Well, I heard something. My room's on the side nearest them. So's Laurie's, but once that kid's asleep nothing would wake her. I sleep light. I heard a kind of pounding, and I went to the window and looked out."

"When was this?"

"Last Thursday night, pretty late."

"The night of the day Derwent came down to see if everything was O.K.," Clark commented. "So then what did you do?"

"Well, I couldn't see anything, but I could hear something going on, so I made up my mind to take a look. I put on my pants and that sweater and a pair of sneakers, and I went downstairs and out our back door, to the hedge between our gardens. I could see a light on at the Derwents'—that little light they have that goes on at dark when they're away—and I hopped the hedge and went around by their kitchen, on the grass. Then I saw the broken window and I leaned in where the pane was out, to look closer. That must have been when I caught my sweater in the frame."

Clark looked puzzled. "Why didn't you tell us all this in the first place, Bruce?" he asked.

"I told you why. Anything happens to those bums, it's all right by me. I wasn't going to do anything to catch whoever did it. And I'm not yet."

"That's childish, Bruce." His father's voice was sharp. Clark raised a restraining hand; he didn't want the stream to dry up again.

"Well, you can tell us this much," he suggested. "Did you see anyone at all? Was it one person or more? Was it a kid or a grown person?"

"If I say anything," Bruce countered stiffly, "it will be the truth. And I didn't see a soul. I could see what they'd done in the kitchen—and it suited me fine. I wish I'd been smart

enough to think of it myself. Well, maybe not, dad; I know you and mom haven't raised us to be hoodlums—but I couldn't be sorry."

"Could you see beyond the kitchen?" Clark went on imperturbably.

"Only a corner of the dining room. Whoever it was was working in there—I could see shadows moving. Then I thought I heard them coming back to the kitchen, and I didn't want to be seen, so I dropped down from the sill and went on back home. I got in without waking anybody and undressed and went back to bed. I couldn't sleep, though, and a lot later I heard a car moving away. Then I fell asleep."

A car, Clark thought; so it wasn't a child. Aloud he said only, "Well, that wasn't so hard to tell, was it? You've helped the law, and you haven't hurt anybody."

"But it might help you find them. And I'm not going to any court and be a witness," Bruce said hotly.

"If you have to—" Dr. Hill began.

"We'll talk about that when and if we get to it," the detective interposed. "Bruce," he said suddenly, "are you fond of music?"

"Not specially. Why?"

"The sergeant doubtless believes all Negroes are natural musicians, the way the whites do," his father said wryly.

"That wasn't what I had in mind," said Clark.

"I don't think I need bother you any more right now, Dr. Hill. Thanks for your patience. And thank you too, Bruce—though I imagine you're not thanking *me.*"

He shook hands with both of them, patted Eddie on the head, and left. He was glad he hadn't had to face a defensive, protective mother, or a scared little girl.

Back at the station, Clark called Mrs. Derwent at the Majestic, and was pleased to find that she was out. Then he drove to the Staripe Canneries office and asked for Henry Derwent.

The mousy little man looked lost behind his big desk, but he rated a carpet on the floor, and two secretaries before Clark got through to him. He was no physical weakling, though; his handshake revealed muscles.

"Well, Sergeant, have you pinned that outrage down yet?" he asked eagerly.

"All but the confession, Mr. Derwent," Clark said cheerfully.

"Quick work. Well, if you've got him, I must say I'm not too sorry it happened. I've been wanting to move out of there and sell the house and buy into a decent suburb for a year now, and it took this to make Mrs.

Derwent realize that it's time to go. Most of that furniture and stuff needed replacing anyway, and my agent tells me some of the loss is covered under our burglary policy.

"The Hill kid, huh, just like she said? Give his kind a touch of reform school and they won't be so ready to bust into people's houses next time. Have you got him in custody yet?"

"He's where I want him," said Clark. "Tell me something, Mr. Derwent. Are you fond of music?"

Derwent looked surprised at the change of subject.

"Good music, sure—not this jazz and stuff. Why? That's my hobby—got a collection of records would put your eye out. Irreplaceable, some of them. That is—oh, Lord, he didn't break my records, did he?"

"Not a single one. They're all still in your cabinet."

"Well, that's a relief. Miracles do happen."

"Your clothes are all right too —yours and your wife's both."

"Good. I'd hate to have to buy her a whole new wardrobe, with all the other expenses I have coming. I suppose you'll need me to testify against him?"

"I'll let you know if we do."

Then Clark leaned across the desk and said in a low, confidential tone:

"Mr. Derwent, why did you do it?"

"Do — what are you talking about?"

"You know."

Derwent's face went white, then red. His right hand seized a paperweight. Clark opened the hand, with effort, and put the paperweight out of reach.

"You didn't actually think you were going to get away with it, did you?" he said calmly. "A kid-size hole in the window, and damage too heavy for any kid to do. The things you valued—your records and the clothing—carefully left untouched. Anybody really vandalizing a place breaks up everything he can get his paws on."

'I—I—that's—I'll have your badge for that!" Derwent sputtered.

"I don't think so. No fingerprints except those that belonged there. And besides," he added quietly, "the Hill kid saw you."

Well, he *could* have seen, if he'd waited for Derwent to return to the kitchen for more ammunition.

"He—he's lying!"

"No, he heard some noise and sneaked out and looked through the broken window."

"He couldn't! I kept an eye on it and there was no one there!" said Derwent.

Then he collapsed. He dropped his head into his clenched hands and sobbed.

"You—you don't understand, Sergeant. I can't—my wife's a nervous type. She's got strong ideas and she never changes her mind. I've had a year of her nagging and fussing—I just couldn't take any more. I was desperate.

"I couldn't get *them* out—I had to do something drastic to make her willing to leave."

He looked up, tears on his grimacing face.

"I haven't committed any crime," he blustered. "It's no crime for a man to do anything he likes with his own property."

Better put an end to this, Clark thought, before some secretary or somebody comes in and makes things even worse.

"But," he said coldly, "you were willing to try to railroad a fine kid into reform school to keep your wife from finding out, weren't you?"

"I wouldn't have—I'd have used my influence, once the thing was over—'"

"That's nonsense and you know it. Fortunately, Dr. Hill's a better man than you are. I've got to tell him, but I'm pretty sure he'll keep his mouth shut if you get out of Forest Crescent fast and stay out. And don't try to collect any insurance on that stuff, either."

"I won't," said Derwent humbly, the fight gone out of him. "That wasn't true. I never asked my insurance agent; I knew I had no coverage."

"I'll have to report to my superior officers, and I'll have to tell Dr. Hill, and by rights I ought to tell your wife. And I would, if I weren't afraid it might make her change her mind about selling out and moving. But if I find she's spreading any lies about the Hill kid's being responsible for this—"

"She won't. I'll see to that. I'll put the fear of God into her—tell her if she talks their friends will find where we go and do it all over again."

"You make me sick," said Grey Eagle bluntly.

He stood up and gazed disgustedly at the miserable worm across the desk.

"It might interest you to know," he said as he turned to go, "that I'm not a white man, either. I'm an Iroquois—one of the people your kind despoiled and lied to and did their best to destroy. If I didn't know that all white people aren't like you and that wife of yours, I'd despair of the human race."

Then he walked out. He had one more job to do before he closed the case. He had to tell Dr. Hill the whole story, and then tell Bruce they couldn't get any leads and the Derwents had agreed not to make any charges, so Bruce wouldn't have to testify in court against anybody.

shadow of the noose

by John Creasey

MARTIN went up the narrow stairs to Brewer's office. Every creak of the rotten boards made him flinch. He was trembling with the fear of telling Brewer that he had failed. But he had to do it: Brewer might yet find a way of evading the detectives who were waiting in the street outside.

Brewer glared up from the chair in which he was sprawling.

"Did you get the letter?" he demanded.

Martin shook his head. "It wasn't there," he muttered. "And I was followed all the way back. There's a policeman outside, waiting."

Brewer's face went a deep red.

"You little runt!" he cried. "I ought to squeeze the life out of you. Losing a thing that's enough to get me ten years."

Martin said nothing. He felt full of hate for Brewer. If only—

Two years before, Martin had been at the end of his tether, Brewer had seen him one day

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John Creasey, author of more than 400 published novels (as Kyle Hunt, J.J. Marric, etc. etc.) has of course, over the years, become one of the best known British writers in this country. Here is another early short-short, this time about Detective Inspector Charlesworth, New Scotland Yard.

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wandering along the Embankment and had given him a shilling for taking a message. Other small jobs followed.

Presently Martin was installed in the small room at the top of the Aldgate building, where he now was, keeping records of the business which Brewer owned in partnership with a man named Reece.

Martin saw little of Reece, who rarely visited the office by day. He knew Reece for a tall, harsh-voiced man whose face was scarred from mouth to eye with a knife wound.

Brewer was a thief — worse than a thief. The records which Martin kept so carefully told the story of burglaries, forgery, blackmail. Martin had become the unwitting accomplice of two criminals. A dozen crimes could be tied on him; a whisper to the police, and he would be done for.

Martin obeyed Brewer's instructions to the letter. He was completely in the other's grasp.

Sometimes when Reece was away, Martin drove Brewer on a burglary expedition. He waited at the wheel of a high-speed car while Brewer broke into a house or a block of buildings.

Then the Sparklitz burglary was planned. Sir Benjamin Sparklitz had a collection of diamonds at his house in Barnes. Brewer planned to get the collection, or part of it; and Reece was to drive the car.

At the last minute a boy brought a note scrawled in Reece's uneducated hand, addressed to Brewer. Reece had been drunk again. He would never have sent the latter if he had been sober. It read: "Can't get to the Sparklitz job. Take Martin."

Brewer screwed the note up and flung it on the floor, abusing Reece. Martin picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"Go round for the car," Brewer had growled at last. "I'll settle with that drunken swab afterwards."

The job had been a success. Brewer got the jewels. He was examining them in the office, when he remembered the note.

Martin went through his pockets. He remembered taking his coat off while he had looked at the engine of the car to lull any suspicion concerning the car's nearness to the house. The note was missing.

Brewer had raged and stormed. Martin said the note must have fallen in the road outside Sparklitz's house, and Brewer had sent him off to look for it.

He drove the car at a breakneck pace through the deserted London streets: but when he reached the Sparklitz house there were lights in every window. The robbery had been discovered, and the police were there.

Sick with fear, Martin had gone back to Aldgate to tell Brewer. Brewer raged at him, then suddenly broke off and went to the window. He stared out, then said: "Come here, you fool. Look at that."

Reaching the window, Martin saw what Brewer saw, a lounging figure in the courtyard of the building, face covered beneath a slouch hat. The man was apparently waiting for Brewer and Martin to try to leave.

Brewer swore, then swung towards Martin.

Det.-Inspector Charlesworth had been waiting to get Brewer and Brewer's associates for some time. That letter, found just outside the Sparklitz house, was nearly enough to tie the job on Brewer.

Charlesworth went with a sergeant and three men to the Aldgate building where Brewer lived. He might get others as well as Brewer if he waited.

Just before dawn a man had come out of the building and had driven off in Brewer's car. The sergeant had followed him in a police car, to and from the Sparklitz house.

Charlesworth looked at his watch when the man came back. It was 3.30 a.m. Half a dozen men were surrounding the building.

At 10 minutes to four the man whom the sergeant had shadowed came out again.

Charlesworth ordered him to be followed. Then he led the police up the stairs.

On the landing outside Brewer's office Charlesworth rapped on the door. There was no answer. He repeated his knock, with the same result.

A policeman put his shoulder to the door and heaved. The lock splintered. The door swung open. The office was in chaos. Tables and chairs were strewn about broken to pieces. Whisky swam in a pool near a broken bottle. In the middle of the wreckage lay Brewer. There was a knife wound in his throat.

Martin crouched back from the desk at which Charlesworth sat. On the desk lay the knife which had killed Brewer.

"I didn't kill him!" said Martin. "I swear I didn't I didn't kill him!"

"You were seen coming out of Brewer's at 3.20 a.m.," said Charlesworth. "On your arrest, you immediately protested your innocence. If you didn't kill Brewer, what were you talking about?"

Martin could see the gallows in front of him. "I didn't kill him," he muttered. "I didn't kill him."

"You admit," Charlesworth went on, "that you had been with

Brewer all night. You were the last man to see him alive. What had you been doing that evening? What happened in the office before you left for a second time?"

Martin remembered Brewer coming towards him, eyes ablaze with murderous fury. He remembered beating Brewer off, getting through the door somehow—anyhow.

"I was out with Brewer on the Sparklitz robbery," he admitted. "I drove the car, while Brewer went in the house. I took off my coat for a minute, and a letter from Reece, an associate of Brewer's, fell out of my pocket.

"It incriminated Brewer and myself so I went back to look for it. When I told Brewer that I couldn't find it, I thought he would kill me."

"What happened then?" demanded Charlesworth.

"Not—much. Brewer showed me the policeman in the courtyard, waiting for us. We were caught, back and front. Then he came for me."

"You saw a man in the courtyard?" said Charlesworth.

"Yes. Watching our window."

Charlesworth stretched out for a telephone, spoke into it and listened. Then he turned back to Martin.

"I believe you're telling the truth," he said. "And if you are, you're clear of Brewer's murder. I didn't have a man in the courtyard. I had two in the alley outside, and they're still there.

"If there was a man in the courtyard itself, he wasn't one of my men."

"We found the man still hiding in the courtyard," said Charlesworth to an assistant commissioner later. "He was waiting for a chance to get away. It was Reece. He quarrelled with Brewer about the loot. I reckon Brewer went for him, but Reece got in first with the knife."

TRUMAN CAPOTE IN RUSSIA

A Russian magazine has, it seems, pirated Truman Capote's IN COLD BLOOD. Since Russia has signed no international copyright agreement, they've simply started to run it as a serial, without permission. And without paying.

But the title has been changed.

Russian propaganda always insists, after all, that murder is a very common thing in this country. So they've changed the title to — AN ORDINARY MURDER.

No comment.

set a thief

by Lawrence Treat

He was tall and dark-haired and well built, and he was used to being pointed out. "Ralph Dublin, the tennis player."

But not here, not at an affair like this, of bankers and philanthropists and the socially elite. He was lucky to get an invitation. The Barringers, who were giving the party, had barely recognized him when he'd presented himself earlier this evening. He was just sombody on their guest list.

The party was big and lavish, and the caterers had erected a tent on the great lawn, with room for a few hundred people. Now that dinner was over and the dancing had started, there were comings and goings to the house itself. To the powder room. To see the latest paintings in the Barringer collection. For a private, big-wig conference in one of the drawing rooms. For any of a dozen reasons.

In the confusion it was easy for Ralph to enter the house and then, when no one was in sight, to slip upstairs. Locating the

Lawrence Treat, author of more than twenty novels in this field and recognized as one of the foremost writers in the procedural school of detective fiction, again departs from this, as he did in BLUEBEARD'S SEVENTH WIFE (SMM, March 1966). Here we meet a man whose profession it is to be charming — particularly charming to those who, without knowing it, help him . . .

master bedroom was always simple. It was bound to be at the end of the hall, in a corner, with a double exposure.

This was, Ralph told himself, probably the last time. In the fall he'd be married to Edie. He had no worries on that score. She was head over heels in love with him, her trip to Europe, dictated by her parents in the hope of breaking up the match, was having the opposite effect. Her daily letters were pledges of undying love, written in childish sentences and with almost anything misspelt except the word *love*. But if she wasn't too bright, she made up for it amply. She had money.

Her father, Wallace van Horn, had tried to buy Ralph off with a straight hundred thousand. It was a tempting offer, but he had bigger stakes in view. Security, status. And a share of the van Horn millions.

Van Horn's grilling of Ralph had been sharp and bitter, but it had gotten nowhere. To questions about his finances, Ralph had answered vaguely. "People help me," he said. Which was true. They helped him by being careless with jewelry. They left it in bureau drawers and in small, portable jewelry boxes.

Over the years he'd perfected his method, and it was foolproof. A quick trip upstairs. Take nothing that wouldn't bring at least four or five grand from a fence. Drop it or throw it away if the theft was noticed before he left. If not, come back later and force a window, break a screen, so that the police could reconstruct the robbery.

Almost invariably, however, the loss was not discovered until the following day. Hostesses were always tired after a big party, from the strain, the drinks. They slept late the next morning and were vague about the night before. When the police investigated, they blamed it on a prowler. No guest list would ever trap Ralph Dublin.

In a way, as he stepped soundlessly down the hall, he was sorry he'd have to give up this sort of business. There were only two things he was really good at —tennis, and burglary. And at his age, over thirty, big-time tennis was about over. He'd keep on playing, of course. At the club, at the international spas, and people would still point him out. But it was time to settle down.

He walked swiftly to the end of the corridor, put his hand on the knob, listened for a moment and then opened the door.

The girl in the bright green dress was standing in front of the bureau, and she was holding up a necklace to her throat and admiring herself in the mirror. A couple of drawers were flung

open, and he watched in fascination. She was slim, gray-eyed, and the wide slash of her mouth was crimson. Her body, bent back, was supple and graceful, and she carried her high, full breasts with pride.

He closed the door quietly before he spoke. "If I were you," he said, "I'd put that down."

She swung around abruptly. She was startled, shocked, but after a second or two she reacted in a blaze of anger. "Why?" she demanded sharply.

"Because," he said suavely, "it isn't nice to steal."

She put the necklace down and faced him. "Who are you?" she asked.

He shrugged. Then, with a sudden inspiration, he said, "Security detective. They hired me to watch out for people like you." He smiled comfortably. "That's why I followed you."

"Oh." Her hand, touching the necklace that lay on the bureau, caressed it as if she hated to lose it. "I suppose you think I'm not very clever, getting caught like this." He shrugged, and she said, "What are you going to do?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"You mean you'll let me go?"

"That's up to you," he said. "I'd hate to arrest you."

"Thanks," she said. She picked up the necklace again and held it to her throat. "How does it look?"

"Nice. But anything would, on you."

"I'd better put it back," she said. "Then I'll go."

He shook his head slightly and moved towards her. He stopped about a foot away from her and glanced at the box. He saw some rings, an emerald lavaliere, a watch.

"Quite a haul," he said. "And somehow, I don't think it's safe to leave it."

"What else?" she asked.

He shrugged, picked up the jewelry and dropped it in his pocket. Her eyes hardened, the greed or anger in them was obvious. For a moment, he wondered whether he shouldn't leave the stuff here and forget about it. She'd guess, eventually, that he was no detective. She'd want her cut, she'd be able to blackmail him, the risks were great. Van Horn was out to get him, and the van Horn friends knew it. But on the other hand, Ralph needed money.

"Suppose," he said, "we discuss this somewhere else. It's not a good idea to stay here so long."

She nodded. "Good," she said. "Will you please put the box back? It belongs in the second drawer, which was locked. I found the key on a nail behind the mirror. Here."

"That's where people usually hide keys," he said.

"Do they?" she drawled.

She knew it as well as he did, and he gave her a questioning glance. He wondered why she was giving up so easily, renouncing her haul.

She watched him attentively, and he knew precisely what she was thinking. She didn't quite trust him. She wanted to see everything replaced, exactly as it had been. Then, if he accused her, she'd deny the whole episode and point to the lack of evidence.

"I think we understand each other," he remarked, and he leaned forward and kissed her. For a fraction of a second she appeared to resist. Then all of her tension, her fear and strain and anger concentrated in a single emotion. Her lips clung to his and her body seemed to surround him. They were both shaky when she drew away, turned and went out.

He stood there, breathing deeply and wondering if this was all worth it. Replace the jewels, lock up the drawer again and forget the entire incident. But he'd be throwing away a few thousand dollars.

If he split with her? Then for the rest of his life she'd have a hold on him. If she told van Horn? Hardly that, since she'd be incriminating herself. Still—

He laughed suddenly, opened the top drawer and saw a dark green bandanna. He wrapped the jewels in it, stepped over to the window and unfastened the screen. He tossed the package outside, in the shrubbery. He'd make her pick it up, later. Then *he* could blackmail *her*. He'd have no part in the actual theft.

He was pleased with himself as he went downstairs. No one saw him come down, and he headed back to the tent. He had a leisurely drink at the bar, and then he surveyed the dance floor. She was dancing with a tall, blond man with curly hair. Ralph stepped out and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Do you mind?" Ralph said.

The blond man released her, and she seemed to float into Ralph's arms. "I knew you'd come," she said.

He held her close. "Partners," he said, "but I don't know with whom. I forgot to ask your name."

"Sybil," she said. "But tell me —is a detective allowed to dance with the guests?"

"On business," he said. "And I can combine business with pleasure, can't I?"

She smiled. "Let's finish the business, first," she said. "Can we slip outside?"

He whirled her through the open flap of the tent, and she seemed to melt weightlessly. Then the two cops stepped forward, and she broke away.

"You can arrest him now," she

said. "He's Ralph Dublin, and he took my sister's jewels. He has them in his pocket."

Ralph stiffened. "Your sister?"

"My sister, Mrs. Barringer," she said. "I went upstairs to powder my nose, and I stopped off in her room. She's careless, and with so many people in the house I wanted to make sure her things were safe. I was trying on her necklace when you came in."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Ralph said.

"Yeah," one of the cops remarked. "They never do." He grabbed Ralph roughly and searched him. But the cop seemed upset when he finally turned to Sybil. "Nothing on him."

"You put them back?" she said to Ralph in surprise, and he thought she was almost glad.

He shrugged. "Put what back? Please explain yourself."

She frowned and spoke to one of the officers. "Will you go upstairs and look?" And she explained how and where to search.

It was a long, silent and uncomfortable wait. Ralph lit a cigarette, wondered whether she'd dare go to van Horn. Ralph almost hoped so, for she'd be playing into his hands. Her word against his, and no evidence to support her accusation. Not only could she pin nothing on him, but he had a perfect suit for false arrest. And if she mentioned the matter to van Horn, Ralph would have a slander case, besides.

She'd settle, of course. She'd have to. He'd insist on an amount equal to the value of the jewelry, which was certainly enough to support him until the wedding.

The cop came back and reported. "The stuff is gone," he said. "All of it."

Ralph flung away his cigarette and faced the girl. He spoke stiffly. "Would you be good enough to tell me what this is all about? You claim something was taken. All right, maybe it was. But what has that got to do with me?"

"I'm sorry," Sybil said. "I don't know what you did with it, but you took the necklace and I don't know what else from her jewelry box. And I'm sure it will be found. Because I saw you take it."

"Me?" Ralph said, looking perplexed. "How? When?"

"I'm sorry," Sybil said again, "but my sister was always afraid one of the servants would steal. She coated her jewelry box with fluorescent powder, it's on your hands now, it's easy to bring it out. And you might even have left fingerprints on the box."

Ralph lifted his hands and stared at them. They were strong, finely made. Nowhere in the world was there another pair exactly like them. And they began to itch, slightly, from the powder.

as others see us—IV

I once received a letter from the Mother Superior of a convent, asking if I would be so generous as to donate to them a set of my Saint books. I must admit that I found the request somewhat remarkable, but my generosity was not seriously strained in acceding to it, and a collection of books was duly dispatched. I never received any thanks or other acknowledgement; and I eventually came to the conclusion that the good sisters who, in their cloistered innocence, had thought that these volumes would be an asset to their devotional library, had suffered such a shock when they sampled them that they had hastily consigned them to a furnace and decided that even to communicate with the author again might put them in peril of a similar fate.

In World War II, there was a chaplain with the British armies in North Africa who painted the haloed Saint figure on the jeep in which he jolted around his ambulant parish, and who told me about it after the "peace" when he had returned to London and was starting a Youth Center in the East End as part of his civilian commission to cope with juvenile delinquency: he wanted permission to make it a "Saint Club", which of course he got, and it is still there and achieving some results which are rather nice to reflect on.

Aside from these memorable episodes, my contacts with the Church and its more intense adherents have, I must admit, been rather on the superficial and incidental side for a writer whose prosperity, if he ever enjoys any, will be mainly attributable to a fictional personage whom he had the effrontery to call "The Saint".

In combing through some items of correspondence which have fluttered in to this Magazine during the last year or two, which have been hoarded for possible future use under this heading when we could be looking for some different kind of padding to flesh out our image, I recently came upon some stray letters which I thought might be valuable to future generations of commentators who may concern themselves with analyzing my peculiar hagiology.

The first was the following, from Toronto, Canada:

December 21, 1964.

My dear Mr. Charteris,

While I have no idea whether you are able to answer 'fan' letters sent to you (nor, indeed, whether you are able to read them), I nevertheless feel a distinct urge to write to you at this time. This is partly due to the fact that I have been an avid follower of Our Hero's exploits 'from the beginning' (in a sense to be explained in the next paragraph) and have been intending to write you for some time, now, and partly to some statements of yours in the current (January '65) edition of SMM.

My interest in Simon Templar dates from circa 1946 when, being of the tender age of twelve, I took to reading my older brother's more or less complete collection of your works published (if my memory serves me well) by Hodder & Stoughton. His interest, in turn, began when he was fourteen (about 1938) at which time my family was acquainted with the Hayworth-Boothe's of Blackdown, Hampshire, in England. I mention this because the Hayworth-Boothe's must have been friends of yours since you stayed with them for a short while at that time, and it was in fact your visit which sparked my brother's interest and through him, later, my own.

It is therefore with a great deal of pleasure that I now read the current set of re-releases in paperback. At long last I may be able to make my own complete collection and in this connection would like to know if it is at all possible to obtain "Meet the Tiger" and/or even those first short stories from "The Thriller" which W. O. G. Lofts mentions in the current magazine.

I need hardly go into my own version of the Saint's unique virtues—suffice to say that he is and always has been my favourite personality of the world of fiction and that, even in recent years, I have been instrumental in converting at least two other people to the following of your chronicles. Praise you must get plenty of—and well-deserved it is too—what I have mainly in mind for the remainder of this epistle is a little criticism, presumptuous though that may be on my part.

But how, without causing offence, does a non-professional tell a professional writer who is undoubtedly first-class that you think be unwittingly causes offence to others? Perhaps the most uncomplicated way is simply to cite one or two examples and leave it to the professional's own judgment as to whether he is guilty or not.

For the sake of brevity I shall confine myself to the aforementioned January '65 SMM, and shall begin by quoting your own

words from the regular one-page editorial viz: "Not smoking is a negation which affects nobody but the non-smoker. But smoking in public places is an aggressive act, in that it inflicts itself on everyone in its vicinity, by forcing them to inhale its fumes whether they like them or not . . .

"I freely admit that in my smoking days I was as oblivious as any typical smoker of the many discomforts I must have caused my non-smoking friends, of whom I did have a few."

Now, may I point out that what is true of smoking and non-smoking is no less true of other things as well. For instance, a man who is trying, perhaps unsuccessfully at present, to become a short-story writer cannot help but consider his efforts to fall within the classification you compliment in your page three article with the name of "slush." A witticism no doubt, and one which you would not use to intentionally hurt anyone. But then, as a smoker, you admit to having been oblivious to the many discomforts you must have caused your friends.

Item two is much more subtle and, in my opinion, more invidious than item one. I refer to your remarks on page ten re hats. Again I quote,

"Even Gods have taken sides on the hat question. A man is not allowed into a Christian church with his hat on, or into a Jewish temple without it. It seems to me that God and Jehovah should at least have made a deal on this by now; but apparently salvation still depends on whether your favorite deity likes you hatted or unhatted."

Again, a witty remark. And again, being yourself neither a devout Jew nor a serious Christian, you may well be totally unaware of the offense such a statement would give to those who are one or the other. Further, entirely apart from the flippant reference to two great faiths, it seems to me that your remarks contain undertones of a more far-reaching nature. For, unless I am mistaken, you are suggesting that 'Jehovah' and 'God' are mere figments of men's imaginations and hence reflect the ordinary prejudices of men.

If that is in fact what you believe you are, of course, entitled to do so. But unless your own mind contains a great deal more prejudice than that of the average Jew or Christian, you should (I believe) at least make the allowance that the claims of Judaism and/or of Christianity may be right and true. Otherwise, wouldn't it be wiser (at least in the interests of non-offensiveness) to leave the subject out of your material?

You can counter all this by adopting the time-worn position taken by some writers which, stated bluntly, amounts to the idea that simply by virtue of the fact that he is a writer, he has the right, if not the duty, to tread on as many toes as he likes and never mind the feelings of others. Or, as it is sometimes more diplomatically worded, "if I were to try to write without offending anyone I would have to lay down my pen and forget the whole thing." But surely the correct answer to this is that, although it would be impossible to write anything without offending *someone,* a writer ought to feel enough responsibility toward his readers to guard himself against becoming callous to what may be their deepest and highest feelings. Remember how you were as a smoker, and how you feel now as a non-smoker? I am quite convinced that were you ever to become, shall we say, a convinced and committed Christian (which doubtless you consider one of the remoter possibilities of your life) you would feel exactly the same about your former remarks re God as you now feel about your former habits re the cigaret.

Are my remarks nullified by the fact that I am myself both an at-present-unpublished writer and a convinced and committed Christian? I think not. On the contrary, at the time you were a smoker none but a non-smoker could have told you of the offense your habit caused non-smokers.

Trusting none of this will be taken in a wrong light and looking forward to yet more of the Saint's adventures past and future I remain, as I have always been,

Your respectful admirer,
Stan Thomas

A little later, from the Minister of the First Baptist Church of Friendship, New York, USA, came this:

Dear Mr. Charteris,

As long as there are those prophetic individuals who refuse to conform to rather bland, insipid stereotypes, freshness and creativity *still* have a chance. As a long and deep lover of the mystery story, I thank you for the golden age of the "secular Saint . . .", but perhaps not so "secular" after all . . .

May you continue, for many years to come, to give us much insightful pleasure . . .

Very cordially and respectfully,
Robert E. Washer

To which I replied:

6 February '65

Dear Mr. Washer:

I'm not used to getting letters from members of your calling, and in fact I should never expect one. So I was especially happy to receive yours.

I'm sure you know that mystery stories are a favorite target in the shooting gallery of self-appointed censors, and it is really cheering to hear from someone with your authority who realizes that they are not all completely iniquitous.

I should like very much to publish your letter in some future issue of the Magazine, if you don't feel that this might jeopardize you in the esteem of your congregation; and I shall probably do so unless you expressly ask me not to.

In any case, thank you for discerning that my Saint is also on the side of the angels.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,
Leslie Charteris.

And he answered:

My dear Mr. Charteris:

Your gracious reply to my too hasty note was deeply appreciated; I am indeed highly honored. I have spent a few moments this past year thanking a select few of your profession for providing insight as well as pleasure, because I feel so strongly that you have so much to offer. As one who majored in Literature in college, and as one who wrote his major theological paper in seminary on "The Doctrine of Man In American Literature," I don't know how much "authority" I can presume to speak from, but I thank you for your kind words. I wrote a "defense" not too long ago to "Ellery Queen," with reference to their *And On The Eighth Day*: for both of you to write thanking me for my inadequate words of appreciation means a great deal.

It is a sad comment on our times when we find an appreciation of Jesus as a "dangerous radical" understood, for the most part, from the non-theological as well as non-clerical sources. We are so concerned with domesticating Christ and becoming involved in some superficial aspect of what has been called "manicured morals," that many of us despair. For your understanding, I thank you . . .

As one who has had your field my avocational bread and wine

for years, I salute the careful craftsmen and intelligent verbal framers with all my heart. You may have the "iniquitous" in your midst, but there are other vocations faced with the same problems.

You may use my letter in any way you see fit; whether there is a baptism in print or not, I am deeply touched by the consideration.

My very best wishes to you and those connected to your Magazine; I've written before to Mr. Santesson.

Very cordially and gratefully,
Robert E. Washer.

Unfortunately, not all the Godly are quite so positive and pellucid. Within another few days, I received this manifesto from another source and another geographical area which I seem to have regrettably mislaid:

Dear Madam:

Will you please consider this World Government Democracy Plan and Resolution? Resolved: Pope Paul VI is guilty of murder because he permits Trials in Absentia by a Legislature of 13. Thus some man somewhere hasn't got all his natural rights so say men anywhere can be murdered anytime. The 13 Man Legislature can sign a contract behind locked doors to murder a man. Then an outside murderer can sign an identical contract with one of the dissolved 13 at the same time another tears up his contract. Thus contract murder is brought into the open. This situation can be expressed by saying that 13 is bad because only the number 1 is divisible into it and he becomes a victim. In this country we have a sixty man Legislature which is the perfect number for the final determination of natural rights. Two thirds of it proposes amendments, three fourths ratifies amendments. Two, Three and Four go into sixty and are amendment. There is room for people to function in it. The New Law would read: Every State must have a 1080 man Legislature in a Single, World, Treaty of 3 or more States, in 360 man shifts for 5 days, Saturday, Sunday and Reserve, in 3 split 8 hour 120 man daily shifts, 60 on duty, 60 reserve. The Executive or Executives would then order the non U.N., non 60 man Rule Pope Paul VI's Castel Gandolfo State to subject itself to Italian Government 60, Congressional 1080 Man Rule and abandon its boundaries. Will you please vote for my Resolution? Please use the inclosed return stamped Envelope and Ballot for such purpose.

On second thoughts, I don't really regret anything. Having mislaid the address absolves me from having to answer it. And I still have a lot of thinking to do before I can declare myself in . . . or out?

Well, that's the life of an Editor. I asked for it.

L C

SAFER TO BE MAD

Valeri Tarsis, the sixty year old Russian author of *WARD 7,* had been confined in a lunatic asylum for publishing works abroad which were considered hostile to the regime. Deprived of his Soviet citizenship after after his arrival in England, early this year, Tarsis has repeatedly stressed the importance placed by the authorities on the necessity for silencing the opposition writers.

Writing in the London Sunday Telegraph for February 27, 1966, Valeri Tarsis says that, "the only writers who live well and prosper in the Soviet Union are those whom the ordinary people call 'paid hacks'."

"I doubt", he continues, "whether more than 10 percent of Soviet writers have enough money to keep them in food every day. Until a few weeks ago I was living in a block of flats belonging to the Writers' Union, in which there are 130 flats occupied by writers. Seventy of them have run themselves into enormous debts with the co-operative which owns the flats so that they are threatened with eviction."

It takes three or four years—in one case, mentioned by Konstantin Simonov, six years—before a decision is arrived at on your manuscript; three years—four years—or longer, during which you earn nothing. One woman had to do twenty-six revisions on a scenario, finishing up in a hospital. Tarsis himself was confined in the "Kaschenko" mental hospital, in Moscow, in line with the new policy of confining independent thinkers in these psychiatric hospitals. The argument is simple. How *can* these men and women call themselves sane, if they don't like life in the Soviet Union?

Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, who were sentenced earlier this year to seven years and five years, respectively, in a labour camp, are only two of the hundreds of the poets, painters and creative artists whom Tarsis describes as "ready to give their lives for Russia's "freedom". Some are in prison. Still others are in hospitals. Nevertheless, to again quote Mr. Tarsis, "God is on the side of the freedom fighters and helps them."

murder by routine

by Robert Wayne

"IF I WANTED to kill someone, I'd use an automobile," Charles Stine said. "Somebody gets knifed or shot, there's a big investigation. But traffic deaths happen every day. We expect them. We assume they're accidents."

Mike Sperling, Stine's commanding officer in the traffic bureau, swung around in his chair.

"You got any reason to feel your sister's death wasn't an accident?"

"Enid was afraid of her husband. Now she's been killed."

"Accidentally."

"Maybe. I'm asking permission to check it out."

"We've made our normal investigation, Charlie." He studied the younger man's lean, intense face. He shrugged. "Okay. But unless you give me something more than suspicion to go on, you're on your own."

The bank of filing cabinets in the adjoining office was filled with records of fatal accidents. Enid's report was like the others. He studied the diagram of the car's path. It had gone part way

This is a police procedure story — and still not quite that... A policeman in the traffic bureau, investigating his sister's death — he is certain it had been no accident — probes carefully for evidence confirming his suspicions. And, using the tools at his disposal, he solves the case...

around a curve in the mountains on Route 81, through a guard rail, down a sloping bank toward a drop-off. There was an X to indicate the place where Horton, her husband, had fallen clear; then the dotted line that indicated the car's plunge over the cliff to the rocks below. Patrolman Ray Gilligan had signed the report. A good man, able to summarize tragedy in a paragraph:

"*Car driven by* Selwyn C. Horton, age 43, of 1848 Buena Vista; occupation, salesman; treated Memorial Hospital for shock, contusions of right shoulder. *Passenger*: Enid Stine Horton, age 28, same address; occupation, housewife; D.O.A. Memorial Hospital; multiple head injuries. Driver reported he fell asleep, awoke to feel car out of control. Skid marks measured 22.8 feet. As car started down slope, door opened, driver fell out, vehicle continuing 21.8 feet to drop-off, then falling approximately 75 feet to dry river bed."

The patrolman was off duty. Stine called him at home. Gilligan said he'd been sorry to learn the girl in the car was Charlie's sister. Tough luck, but accidents happened. Too damn' many accidents happened. That'd been the second one on that same curve this week.

"No witnesses, Ray?"

"Not at 3 in the morning. Horton says he woke up too late to avoid leaving the road. The bank slopes down gradual for maybe 30 feet, then drops off almost straight down."

"Those skid marks—you sure they were made by Horton's car?"

"Yeah. They were near the ones from the other accident."

"How could you tell which was which?"

"I checked out the other one, too. Couple of kids, going too fast. They skidded over a hundred feet, knocked down the guard rail, flipped over twice, wound up against a tree at the edge of the cliff. Somehow, they lived through it. That guard rail —that's the sad part of the whole deal."

"How's that?"

"Judging by the skid marks, Horton wasn't going too fast. If the rail'd still been there, it might of stopped him. If he hadn't missed the curve at exactly the same spot as the other car—."

"One more thing, Ray. Did you notice anything that made you wonder if this was really an accident?"

"It looked like just another fatal to me. I see 'em every day. Aside from the fact it was your sister, it was all routine."

Stine hung up. He leaned back wearily in his chair. It was true. To the traffic bureau, death was routine. It came in a variety of

ways — a pedestrian walking along a country road, a kid pressing an accelerator too hard, a man leaving a party full of confidence and martinis. The point was, it came every day and if you were paid to pick up the pieces and write the reports you had to become philosophical about it. And so his kid sister was dead. By accident or otherwise, Horton had killed her. And there was nothing anyone was going to do about it.

"Except me," he told himself.

He walked back to the records division and pulled out the card with Horton's name on it. Almost every driver, sooner or later, got his name typed on one of the small cards. Horton's was not much worse than the average. Three overtime parkings. One stipulation to a speeding charge—38 m.p.h. in a 25 mile zone. An exchange slip from the Ohio Motor Vehicle Department showing that, a little over two years ago, Selwyn Horton had been fined $100 for reckless driving by a judge at Bonaparte, Ohio. The name of the town reminded Stine of a talk he'd had with Enid before her marriage ten months ago.

"You feel you know enough about him, Sis?"

"I know I'm crazy about the guy."

"Where's he come from? He's new around here."

"Some place in Ohio." Then, laughing at him: "You're talking just like a cop, old buddy." Serious again, squeezing his arm. "He's a wonderful guy. I'd trust him with my life."

And the other conversation, the one two weeks ago.

"Can you love someone, Charlie, but not really know him?"

"Horton's giving you trouble, kid?"

"Nothing I do is right. And he won't talk to me about things. It isn't working out and I don't know why."

"There are always adjustments, I guess. When Mae and I were first married, we—."

"It isn't like that. We don't argue, exactly." She looked ten years older. She was still an attractive girl, but she was thinner and there were circles under her brown eyes. "I'm afraid of him, Charlie."

"Listen, if that character's abusing you, I'll—."

But she drew away from him. "There's nothing you can do. I'll work it out."

He had intended to have a talk with Horton, after that conversation, but things had come up. Now it was too late to do Enid any good, but he still intended to have that talk. But first, there was more routine. That was what being a policeman had taught him, routine. He

dialed the medical examiner's office.

"What's the cause of death in the Enid Horton accident?"

"Multiple cranial fractures. There were other injuries, but those did it."

"She been drinking?"

"Six or eight shots of liquor, I'd say."

"That enough so she would have passed out?"

"If she was tired and not used to handling the stuff."

"Any evidence of drugs? Sleeping pills, maybe?"

"Negative."

"Those head injuries—could they have been caused by a blunt instrument?"

The voice at the other end of the wire sounded surprised.

"No indication of anything like that, Stine. It looked like her head struck the dashboard. Maybe more than once, as the car flipped over. With a club or anything like that, the injuries would be confined to a narrower area. These are massive. Typical auto accident case."

"Did Horton take a urinalysis?"

"Yeah. It showed .08 of 1% —enough to be a little happy, but not legally drunk. Two or three drinks, maybe."

He left the station and drove across the city. Buena Vista was in a neighborhood with row upon row of ranch houses on winding streets, each pleasant enough but given an air of anonymity by their sameness. He parked in the driveway and walked past the line of rose bushes Enid had planted. Horton opened the door and invited him in.

"I feel terrible, Charlie. Haven't slept since the—since it happened. If only I'd stayed awake then—."

Stine looked sharply at him. It was necessary to be fair about this. The man looked haggard. So maybe it had been an accident. Accidents did happen, one after another, day in and day out. As Sperling had said, just because Enid was his sister didn't make this one any different. He followed his brother-in-law into the kitchen. Horton offered him a drink.

"No, thanks. Tell me about the accident."

"We'd been out to dinner. I was going straight home, but Enid suggested a ride. She was in a funny mood. You're married. You know how women get. We rode over toward Selbyville and then turned back. We stopped for a drink."

"The two of you arguing?"

"Why do you ask that? Enid was the finest, sweetest—."

"People argue sometimes."

"All right. Why should I deny it? It was nothing serious. I suggested we have a highball and make up."

"Where'd you stop?"

"I don't remember the name of the place. We got to talking. One drink led to another. You know how it is."

"Enid didn't usually drink much."

"Like I told you, she was in a funny mood. I was driving, so I only had a few, but she kept ordering and—." He stopped. He walked over to the sink and poured himself a glass of water. His voice was elaborately casual. "How'd you know she had more drinks than usual?"

"I checked the reports. You left about 2:30 a.m.?"

"Something like that, I guess. She went to sleep in her corner of the seat."

"Passed out?"

"Went to sleep. It'd been a long day. I was worn out, too. The next place we came to, I told myself, I'd stop and get coffee. Then I was part way around that curve, I'd been asleep, and I could see the guard rail."

"The guard rail was knocked down, the way I heard it."

"Part of it was still up. I saw it in my headlights. I hit the brake. Then we were flying through the air and then I was on the ground, my shoulder was hurting, and the car and Enid were gone. Disappeared. I didn't realize until later where they were. I lay there, trying to figure it out." He got another drink of water and sat at the table, sipping it. "I don't like to talk about it, Charlie."

Stine tilted back in his chair. "How much was the insurance—fifty thousand, wasn't it?"

Horton jumped up. "What gave you that idea? The insurance doesn't matter. Sure, we each had twenty-five thousand—not fifty, twenty-five. But everybody carries insurance, it's only natural, and besides—." Stine was regarding him, his face alert. Horton got a grip on himself. "I don't think I like the implication," he said. "What are you driving at? Why all the questions? Are you here as Enid's brother or as a—."

"I've got one more question. I want a straight answer."

"I've told you what happened."

Stine looked at the other man, letting the silence build up. He kept his voice soft.

"Was it an accident?"

He had expected Horton to show anger, real or feigned, or indignation. Instead, the older man's attitude became bland, as though he had expected the question and was ready for it.

"What makes you ask that, Charlie?"

"How come you hurt your right shoulder? Usually, a guy falls from the driver's seat, he lands on his left side."

"I suppose I flipped over while I was falling—it all happened so fast."

"How come you happened to pick the one spot where the guard rail had been knocked down? Maybe you read about the other accident and figured here was the spot where you could —."

For a big man, Horton moved fast. He had Stine by the shoulders, pinning him back against his chair. His face was flushed and he was breathing hard. But even while Stine was shoving Horton's hands away, he noted that the other man's eyes were neither angry nor afraid, but full of an almost cheerful confidence.

"I don't like what you're implying," Horton said. He moved back, letting his arms fall to his side. "I understand how you feel. Enid was so full of life. You can't accept the fact that, all of a sudden, she's gone. Don't you think I feel the same way, that I haven't spent the hours searching for some meaning to what's happened, some reason for it? That's what you're doing. And of course you blame me. I blame myself, for falling asleep at the wheel."

"You haven't given me an answer, Horton."

"It was an accident. Like thousands of others every year. Pick up the newspaper. Every day, a half dozen people killed in traffic, just around here. It's a terrible thing, but it's a possibility we all face every time we drive."

Horton looked tired. He sat at the table again and put his head in his hands.

"If only we hadn't stopped at Benny's, she'd still be—."

"You said you didn't remember the name of the place."

Horton's face flushed. If there was no way to convince him that it had been an accident, there was no use talking, he said. Stine stood up. No, he said, there was no use talking. He left, walking quickly to his car, and flipped the radio switch. He told the police operator the car was temporarily out of service and drove north out of the city.

In the daylight, Benny's was a tawdry looking place. The proprietor studied Enid's picture. Yes, he said, he remembered her. She'd been here the night before last with a guy. She hadn't ordered anything at first, but then she'd started matching the guy, drink for drink.

"Then he had as much as she did?"

"So you'd think. Only when I was cleaning up the joint, I found he'd spilled most of his drinks under the table. I couldn't quite figure it. I might have guessed he was on the make and wanted to stay sober while she was tying one on, but that don't

make sense."

"How come?"

"The way they argued, I was sure they was married."

It was not enough for a court, but it was something, he told himself as he headed for the curve with the broken guard rail. He stopped the car and walked down the embankment, but aside from a few broken saplings there was nothing to tell what had happened here. He peered cautiously over the cliff. The rocks that had killed his sister gleamed below in the dying sunlight. He drove fast on his way back to the city. In the station again, he put in a call for Bonaparte, Ohio. When he had hung up, his lips were grim. He walked into Sperling's office.

"It was no accident, Mike. Now I've got proof."

"Like what?"

"Like a bruise on the right shoulder instead of the left. Like a guy pretending to get drunk, goading his wife into drinking with him, but staying sober enough to do what he had in mind. Like establishing the pattern of the murder."

"The pattern?"

"I called Ohio, checking on why Horton got fined for reckless driving. Two years ago, he was married to a girl named Louise. Enid never knew about her—at least, she never told me. Anyway, Louise and Horton go for a drive in the country, stop at a place, have a few drinks, then head for home. On the way, the car leaves the road, Horton falls out, the car rolls into the Scioto River."

"Louise drowned?"

"She drowned. Horton pays $100 for reckless driving, moves here, marries my sister—meanwhile, I suppose, collecting Louise's insurance. Then the other night, it all happens again. The same pattern. The same result."

Sperling jumped up and began to pace back and forth across the tiny office. It could be a coincidence, he said. It could be Horton was simply a man with a fast reaction time, able to get out from behind the wheel in the split second before disaster. Stine studied him, frowning.

"You don't really think it's a coincidence, Mike?"

Sperling planted himself before him, arms folded across his massive chest.

"No. I don't. I say it could be, that's all."

"What do we do about it?"

"Nothing."

Stine leaped to his feet. "Nothing! You as much as admitted that—."

"What do we charge him with? The Ohio thing was declared an accident. Horton was found guilty of nothing more than driving recklessly. Maybe we could make the same charge

stick here, although when a man falls asleep at the wheel—. Unless you can get him to admit it was murder, we're out of luck."

"Why should he admit anything? But if we told a judge about both deaths, and then added the testimony about Horton pretending to drink but pouring the stuff on the floor—."

"There's no law against driving after drinking too little."

"And then bruising his right shoulder, not his left the way he would if he'd fallen instead of jumped."

Sperling shook his head. It wouldn't help, he said. A man gets flipped out of a couple of tons of moving metal, almost anything can happen. No, the only thing they really had to go on was the coincidence of the two deaths under similar circumstances, and it simply was not enough, with no witnesses, nothing but conjecture.

"And so he goes free," Stine said, bitterly. "He walks away from the funeral tomorrow and collects the twenty-five thousand and in a year or so he drives down the highway with wife number three, on his way to pick up some more spending money. Is that it, Mike?"

Sperling put a big hand on his shoulder. "You think I like it any better than you do? You tell me what we can do, and I'll do it." He waited. Stine was silent. "Without better proof, Charlie, the law has to give him the benefit of the doubt."

"I don't."

"What's that?"

"I just said I don't have to." He moved to the door. "I get tomorrow off, right?"

"For the funeral? Sure. Only one thing—."

"I know what you're going to say. Don't do anything I'll be sorry for. Don't worry, Mike. I won't be sorry for a thing."

In the church, Stine sat two rows behind his brother-in-law during the service. At the cemetery, when it was all over, he brushed aside the little knot of Enid's friends who wanted to tell him how sorry they were and left quickly, climbing into his car. He turned down the radio receiver, shutting off the police calls, and waited. Horton came through the gates, walking slowly up the street. Stine motioned him over.

"I figured you didn't have a car now and might need a ride."

"Thanks, but I—."

"Come on, hop in."

Horton peered at him, hesitating, then walked around the car and climbed in beside him. Stine headed the automobile north instead of west, picking up speed quickly. Horton looked at him in surprise.

"I thought you were taking

me home. What's the idea?"

"Sit tight. I want to talk with you."

Horton put his hand on the door latch, but the car was moving fast now and he thought better of it, settling back nervously against the seat. At the outskirts of the city, Stine swung the car onto Route 81 and pressed down the accelerator, making it leap forward. He flicked a switch on the dashboard.

"This little gadget is quite useful in my line of work. It locks the door on your side."

"Now look here. I don't know what you have in mind, but—."

"I have in mind a little conversation." Charlie glanced at him, then back to the road. "Let's start by talking about Louise."

"Louise! How did you find out about her?"

"Too bad you have such bad luck with wives, Horton. But then, you always manage to get out of the car in time."

"I don't think that's very funny. Especially at a time like this."

"I don't think it's funny, either. Are you interested in what I do think?" Horton was silent, hunched over in his corner of the seat. "I think you've found yourself a foolproof little method of murder. So good, I'm going to try it myself."

"They were accidents. Nothing but accidents."

"Of course they were. And so will this be. Unfortunately, I have no insurance on you. But money isn't everything. Revenge is a motive, too."

The car was traveling rapidly. The road cut sharply around the side of a mountain. Stine turned his full attention to the driving. The tires squealed. He twisted the wheel abruply, touching the brakes, then picked up speed again as the road straightened out.

"We have two miles left before we get to the curve where Enid died. It's too bad I have to use the same one. There may be some questions."

"They won't believe it's an accident — not two at the same spot."

"But they'll have to, Horton. I can explain it was a coincidence. The law, I am told, does not convict on coincidence. I will simply say that we drove out here to view the scene of the accident and that something happened—perhaps the strain was too much for me and I fell asleep momentarily. Isn't that how the story goes? Anyway, I will tell them, the car went out of control. How can they prove oherwise? You won't be able to testify. Any more than Enid could."

"You're trying to scare me."

Stine glanced at him. "And

doing a pretty good job of it, judging from your face. Have you ever seen someone who's fallen over a cliff, down to the rocks below? Do you know why her coffin lid was kept closed?"

Horton shivered convulsively. His right hand reached out, stealthily. He tried the door latch, but without success. He gripped the edge of the seat.

"What do you want of me? This won't help Enid. It won't bring her back."

"I want you to know what it's like to ride with a man you know is going to kill you." Stine's throat was dry. He could feel the sweat on his forehead and he brushed it away. The excitement was building in him, and the triumph, and with them a feeling of disgust at himself for feeling the triumph. He glanced at the speedometer. "We're almost there, Horton. I'll give you one last chance. Talk."

"What good will that do? Even if I would admit it wasn't an accident, that'd give you all the more reason to—."

"Hearing you say it might be revenge enough. I don't know. I won't say for sure. But it's the only chance you have left. Talk." He half turned toward the other man. "You killed Enid. Not by accident. Deliberately. Planning it ahead of time. The way you killed Louise."

"Not Louise." Horton's hands were trembling. He clasped them together, the knuckles showing white. "With her, it was an accident."

"But not with my sister?"

"After the accident in Ohio, I collected the insurance. It was only five thousand, but it was the first time I'd had that much at one time. I spent it fast. I enjoyed spending it." He glanced toward Stine, then away. "The last of it, I spent on Enid's honeymoon."

"And so you got to thinking how easy it had been, how few questions had been asked, because it was just one more traffic death among so many. And, after a few months, when things weren't going so well between you and Enid anyway—."

"It was more complicated than that. It was just a wild impulse at first, but I was tired of living on commissions. I fought against the idea. I never really intended to go through with it. But the other night, I was sick of arguing with her, I was sick of eating spaghetti dinners when I wanted to order steak, and I remembered reading about that accident and seeing the lay of the land as we drove by it up into the mountains and—." He stopped, glancing at Stine out of the corner of his eyes. "So now I've admitted it. It wasn't an accident. You can turn me in. Isn't that what you had in mind all

along?"

But the car's speed did not slacken. It was climbing steeply now, the sound of the engine loud in their ears. Stine shook his head.

"Once you're out of this car, you'll deny the whole thing, naturally. With no one but me knowing you're guilty, there'd still be nothing but the word of a dead girl's brother against yours. It wouldn't be enough, would it?"

"Then you're going through with it?" Horton's voice was almost a whisper. "I've told you what you asked me to tell you, and you're still going to kill me?"

Stine looked at him, hating him. He had never hated anyone before; not like this.

"I haven't decided," he said. "When I get to the curve where you murdered my sister, than I'll decide."

Horton threw himself across the seat, wrestling for the wheel. Stine turned the car sharply toward the edge of the road. The swerve pushed Horton back momentarily. The policeman's hand came out from under his coat, holding a revolver. Horton tensed himself.

"That won't stop me. I might as well get shot as smashed on the rocks."

"Make your choice fast," Stine told him and sent the car around the curve. "We're there."

But suddenly the fight went out of Horton. He crumpled down in the seat and buried his face in his hands. Stine hit the brakes, skidding to a stop inches short of the patrol car parked beside the road. Ray Gilligan ran toward them, his gun ready, and thrust his head through the window. He nodded at the switch that controlled the two-way radio transmitter.

"One of the oldest tricks in the book, but still good, Charlie. You can turn it off now. We got your message, loud and clear."

"I had the speaker turned off but the mike turned up. You heard his confession? You can testify to it?"

"Every cop within ten miles heard it. One thing had me worried, though. What if you'd got here and he still hadn't admitted it? What would you have done then?"

Stine leaned back and considered the question judiciously.

"Well, you know how it is, Ray," he said. "Accidents happen. I might have braked too late and only had time to jump free. Every driver's liable to make a mistake. It would've been quite a coincidence, though; two fatals on the same curve in one week."

pirates —II

by W. O. G. Lofts

WAPPING, which lies in the East End of the dockside of London, is probably one of the most dismal and most gloomy places I have ever visited. Its grimy, narrow streets, numerous wharves—which are surrounded mainly by damp grey warehouses overlooking the River Thames—seem to have changed very little over the last two hundred years.

It must have looked equally dismal to the many hundreds of pirates in the 17th and 18th centuries who, after being found guilty of the various crimes of which they were accused, were eventually led through the streets of Wapping to execution. The procession was, curiously, headed by someone carrying a silver oar (an ancient emblem from the earliest days of pirate execution, the significance of which has never been quite established) and a large and curious crowd followed all the way to the gallows at nearby Execution Dock.

On arrival at the gibbet the doomed pirates, who were usually dressed in their best clothes, would doff their hats and, if

Last month, W.O.G. Lofts (whose definitive article on THE REAL ROBIN HOOD appeared in our July 1965 issue) began his fascinating study, based on more than ten years of research, of the whys and wherefores of piracy in the 16th and 17th centuries. What was the code of these men? What happened to them? And what is the truth about them — including about Captain Kidd?

brave enough, would make a witty speech before departing this life. One such man was led through the streets on May 23rd, 1701 to the jerry-built scaffolding which loomed against the sky. A huge and expectant crowd had gathered for the occasion, when probably the greatest pirate in history was to be hanged. His name was Captain William Kidd.

It should be mentioned that death from hanging, in those days, was not instantaneous. The drop was not long enough to break the neck of the condemned man, so that for some time after he had been hanged he would greatly entertain the crowd by performing a convulsive dance in mid-air. Fortunate prisoners had relatives wealthy enough to bribe the hangman, who allowed them to pull the unhappy man's legs to hasten his release from agony. Whether the hangman in this instance was nervous at the task of executing such an important prisoner is not known—but in the middle of making his last speech, the trap beneath Captain Kidd was sprung and his falling weight broke the rope! Landing in a heap, Kidd rose groggily to his feet and was helped back to the scaffold by a minister. The second time the rope did not break, and Captain Kidd's body was left tied to the scaffold until the traditional three tides had washed and sucked the Thames mud over it. Later, the rope was cut and the body taken to Tilbury Point, on the other side of the Thames, where it was hung in chains as a warning to other would-be pirates.

Of all the literature on piracy, probably more words have been written about Captain William Kidd than any other. He is credited with plundering more ships, killing more men, amassing more loot, and making more victims walk the plank than any other pirate. Far from being a swashbuckling buccaneer, however, Kidd was really a meek, inoffensive, mild man from New York City, who in my estimation was not a pirate at all, but a privateer.

My researches into history have been fairly extensive over the last ten years, but I have never encountered such a grave act of injustice as in the case of Captain Kidd. A perusal of the Court records shows only too well the mockery of so-called "justice" and how it was administered in the early 18th century. Briefly, the facts were that the Earl of Bellemont, who was Governor of New York and New England, together with five other high King's Ministers, granted Captain Kidd legal authority to plunder what shipping would benefit their syndicate. Later, political enemies in England took

much greater power, and a grave political scandal was threatening, which even involved the Crown. Someone, as always, had to be the scapegoat for the aristocratic privateers, and the lot fell to the luckless Captain Kidd.

Arrested and held for two years before being tried, he was allowed no counsel. He was first tried on a trumped-up charge of having killed a rebellious seaman with a bucket, despite the fact that naval and merchant ships' captains regularly beat their mutinous crew to death without the slighest notice being taken by the authorities. Kidd was secondly charged with raiding and seizing two ships which belonged to the Great Mogul of India. In actual fact he had been given legal authority to do this, and this permission was outlined in two documents called "French Passes". These passes were exhibited before the House of Commons a short time prior to the trial, but conveniently disappeared at the actual trial, when the judge suggested they had never existed!

Two hundred years later, an American historian with the same zeal for research as myself, while searching through small wooden boxes in the Public Record Office in London — boxes which contained unknown legal documents—found these French Passes, which proved Kidd innocent.

Would-be treasure seekers have been searching now for over two hundred and fifty years for Captain William Kidd's supposed hidden loot, and who can really discredit their belief? When Kidd was executed his total effects of £6,471 went to the Crown, and Queen Anne used this amount towards the cost of the Marine Hospital at Greenwich — surely an ironical touch!

Nothing could have been more in contrast, or proof of how justice was administered in those days, than in the case of the greatest Buccaneer of them all—Captain Sir Henry Morgan. Easily his greatest feat was the capture and sacking of Panama in 1670, though this is still condemned by many historians for his butchering of the population and the raping of nuns and young girls.

Eventually brought to London for his trial, his brilliant ability in acquiring Spanish loot from the hated Spaniards, aroused even the admiration of those who may have condemned him. Like Sir Francis Drake a century earlier, he was not only pardoned, but given a knighthood, plus the appointment of Deputy Governor of Jamaica for his services to the country.

Far from being a popular man, Morgan was greatly disliked by all those who served

under him, for not only did he severely ill-treat his prisoners, but cheated his crew out of their proper share of the loot they had plundered. Spending his remaining years in the ease and luxury of Jamaica, he did not improve his reputation by mixing with low company in pot-houses, drinking excessively, and cohabiting with women of ill repute. The character of the man can be best exemplified by the obvious delight he showed in the hanging of his former pirate shipmates.

Suffering from dropsy, gout, a liver complaint and other internal disorders caused by his riotous living, Morgan seemed to spend most of his leisure moments lying in his hammock. It has been recorded that if he spied a native girl working in the fields who took his fancy he would "hie her to his bed" without delay and the large number of people in that sunny Carribean isle who bear the name of Morgan would seem to bear out this fact. Captain Sir Henry Morgan eventually died, aged 53, on August 25th, 1688.

But what of other pirates? Complete full - length novels could be written about many of them—and in fact, novels *have* been written about the most famous pirates in history. So I will confine my writing in this instance to those who, although perhaps less well-known, were in many cases more interesting. Easily the greatest feat of seamanship can be claimed by the very first Buccaneer, Pierre-Le-Grand, a native of Dieppe, who was a cattle hunter from Hispaniola. In a canoe, and with a small crew, he captured in 1665 a large Spanish galleon, which was commanded by a Vice-Admiral. He actually took the officers prisoners whilst they were playing cards in their cabin —a case of being "caught napping" in more than one sense. For this daring feat he was also known as Peter the Great. He was able to sell this ship for a vast sum in France, and he lived comfortably for the rest of his life on the proceeds, in his home-town of Dieppe.

Another Frenchman of a totally different disposition was Francis Lolonnios — known as The Cruel. Probably he could be called the most bloodthirsty buccaneer of them all. A ruthless brute, he had a mania for torturing his prisoners and his name became dreaded by the Spaniards and Indians, in case they were captured alive by him. An early engraving I have seen of him shows him tearing out the heart of a Spanish prisoner and then gnawing it, to the horror of even his own men.

Lolonnios came to a horrible and well-deserved end, being captured by the Indians at Dar-

ien and having his body torn limb from limb and thrown into a fire. His ashes were then cast into the air so that nothing should remain of such an infamous and inhuman monster.

When I saw the late Robert Newton play the part of Blackbeard the Pirate, in a film of the same name, I had the impression that he somewhat over-acted the part. Far from this being the case, however, I have since discovered that, if anything, he probably under-played the role —for Blackbeard was undoubtedly one of the most colourful and flamboyant characters who ever lived.

His real name was Edward Teach, and he was an illegitimate ruffian from the slums of Bristol. He acquired his nickname from the long black beard he wore, which grew right up to his eyes, and he was as dirty as he was hairy. He used to plait his greasy, jet-black beard with coloured ribbons and with this, his mutilated ears, his bulging red-rimmed eyes, his broken twisted nose and his lips which blubbered when he was drunk, Blackbeard could quite truthfully be classed as the perfect slob.

That Blackbeard was eccentric —to say the least—there is not the slightest doubt. When boarding an enemy ship at night he used to stick slowly-burning matches in his hair. Sailors were highly superstitious in those days and the sight of his fearful countenance thus additionally embellished probably convinced them that they were being attacked by the Devil himself.

He was fond of practical jokes and he once locked himself and his men in the hold whilst pots of brimstone were lighted, to see who could hold out the longest. Coughing, spluttering and cursing, the crew were soon out of the hold, leaving Blackbeard triumphant. On another occasion, and for no reason at all, Blackbeard whilst drinking with some of his crew in his cabin, suddenly cocked and fired two pistols under the table. One bullet smashed the kneecap of his first mate, Israel Hands, and Blackbeard roared with laughter at the protests his crew made at such a stupid "joke."

A strange twist to this incident, however, was that Israel Hands—forced to give up seamanship because of his crippled leg—became a well-known beggar in London and years later said that he was grateful to Blackbeard for having shot him, as it had saved him from sharing the fate which later befell Blackbeard and his crew.

Probably the reader will wonder why Blackbeard was still tolerated as a captain, taking into account these eccentricities, but the fact that he was a highly suc-

cessful leader, accumulating plenty of plunder, made the men reluctant to have him deposed.

Another strange twist to Blackbeard's character is that he took all his love affairs with deadly seriousness and certainly did not care about the laws of bigamy! On practically every port of call he used to bring a young girl back to the ship and go through a marriage ceremony with her. This was a big joke amongst the crew, for as soon as the ship left port the girl was forgotten, and the number of "wives" that Blackbeard had goes well into two figures.

One thing cannot be denied and that was the fact that Blackbeard was a brave fighting man. Caught at last by a naval sloop which was commanded by a Lieutenant Maynard, Blackbeard fought literally until the death, with the whole of the sloop's crew attacking him. His head was cut off and hung on the bowsprit of the sloop and his body — with twenty-six wounds on it — was thrown over the ship's side like garbage. One cannot help feeling that ruffian and buffoon that he was, Blackbeard deserved a better fate.

Major Stede Bonnet came from the cream of society in England, and was educated at the best public schools. After distinguished service in the Army, he retired as the owner of a rich plantation in the Barbadoes. A pillar of respectability in the eyes of the Island society and in the Church, he led a life of luxury and ease. Yet, despite all this, he suffered as countless men have suffered in the past, by being cursed with a nagging wife. Being a small, mild-mannered man, he could finally stand it no longer. He bought a sloop, engaged eighty men for a crew, and thus created history by being the first and only pirate to have set out on a career of piracy in a ship especially purchased with his own money for that purpose!

Nicknamed "The Gentleman Pirate" and suffering with seasickness most of the time, Bonnet was as unlike a pirate as anyone could imagine. He dressed in a bright red waistcoat, trim breeches and a curled wig, and when early in his career he was captured by Blackbeard, the latter roared with laughter at the first sight of Bonnet strutting about on deck. "Borrowing" his ship for a time and then deserting it when he had no further use for it, Major Stede Bonnet seemed a most unlucky pirate as well, for he was soon caught and hanged. It is still a mystery to many historians why such a man should have thrown up a life of ease and plenty to mix with what were in many cases the "scum of the earth" in order to acquire riches that he did not want or

need. Perhaps those historians were lucky enough never to have known the misfortune of a nagging wife!

Another public schoolboy who became a pirate, and was the direct opposite in character to Bonnet, was Captain Edward Lowe. He was, according to some, as cruel as Lolonnios, and one of his less endearing qualities was to cut off the hands, nose, and ears of prisoners who refused to disclose the whereabouts of loot and broil them for good measure in front of the unhappy victim. No pirate could have started on a career of piracy earlier than Lowe, for at school he used to steal his classmates' farthings. When he grew bigger he would gamble with the footmen who waited in the lobby of the nearby House of Commons in Westminster. Whilst still quite small one of his elder brothers would carry young Edward hidden in a basket on his back and when in a crowd this pirate of the future would, from above, snatch off the hats and wigs of the passing citizens. These he would later sell for a nice profit; and this form of robbery later became so popular that people were compelled to tie on their hats and wigs.

William Coward, another short-lived pirate, certainly lived up to his name. In November 1689 he rowed out to a ship and captured it. As he had with him only three men and a boy this would seem, at first glance, to have been a courageous and daring escapade — until I explain that the crew of the captured ship had been stricken with small-pox and Coward knew that they were in no position to offer even the slightest resistance. (It is worth recording, incidentally, that the name of Coward did not originate from any particularly cowardly deed, but can be traced right back to the 12th century as being a corruption of "cowherd.")

Another curious pun-name was in the case of Thomas Child, who was found to be only 15 years old when captured with other pirates in 1723. He was freed in view of his tender age—one example, at least, of mercy being shown to a pirate. A direct contrast (and it is debatable whether it is true or not) concerns John Gomez, alias Panther Key John, a well-known pirate in the 19th century. He died at the great age of 120 years at Panther Key, Florida, in 1900; but as in the case of England's oldest man (Old Man Parr, 158) this being before the days of birth certificates, I am inclined to take these great ages with a pinch of salt.

Throughout the years The Saint has been described most aptly as a "swashbuckling buc-

caneer.". If only he had had the good fortune to have been born say 300 years ago, his talents could have benefited him enormously in the golden days of piracy. I don't think that any real life pirate had all the characteristics of Simon Templar, though two certainly came very near to it. The first, Captain William Fly, was a very clever prize-fighter and exceedingly popular with all his crew; unfortunately, he was captured after a very brief career as a pirate. Seeing that it was impossible to escape, Fly thought he might as well go out of this world with a smile on his face, so on the day of his execution he dressed himself up in gaily-coloured ribbons and on his way to the gallows he waved and smiled to the cheering crowds. He made a witty speech then threw the bouquet he carried to the onlookers and died as brave a death as anyone in history.

The second most romantic pirate I have come across is undoubtedly Captain Hayes, who was arrested by the English Consul of Samoa as late as 1870. There being no prison on that delightful South Sea island, Hayes was placed under open arrest until a warship came from Australia to pick him up. Good-looking, and a man of great charm, Hayes spent most of his time attending native picnic parties, where he was not only the idol of all the ladies and the beautiful native girls, but was the life and soul of the island during his brief stay.

Readers will no doubt be glad to know that Captain Hayes was eventually able to make a most daring escape from the island, with the aid of another pirate, who happened to be casting anchor off-shore, quite by chance; and I expect that everyone on the island was glad that Hayes departed in this way and not at the end of a rope.

The fund of pirate stories seems endless, and no period of history has ever produced such colourful characters. There were, amongst others, Captain Daniel, the religious pirate who captured a priest and asked him to lead the crew in Mass; then shot dead one of his men because he sniggered during the service and threatened to do the same to anyone else who dared show disrespect to the Holy Sacrifice. Also, there was The Archbishop Pirate, Lancelot Blackburne, who sailed to join the buccaneers after his ordination as a clergyman — and eventually became Archbishop of York; One-Arm Captain Henry Johnson, who was a crack shot with the pistol, which he aimed by resting it on the stump; Captain Dennis McCarthey, who on the scaffold told his admiring audience that his friends had often joked that

he would die with his boots on and, to prove them liars, kicked his shoes off into the crowd; and Dr. Quicksilver, alias Thomas Dover, M.D., the father of all our medicine—but a brilliant controversial sea-surgeon in his day—who became a pirate-adventurer on the Spanish Main. His rescue of Alexander Selkirk from a desert island was the fact upon which Daniel Defoe based his character and story of Robinson Crusoe.

There was also John Avery, nicknamed the Arch-pirate, and the uncrowned King of Madagascar. Plays were written about him in London, but he eventually starved in Bristol, because merchants cheated him out of what was justly due to him.

Last but not least was the great Captain Bartholomew Roberts, who captured more than 400 ships, drank only tea on board and went into battle with a big red feather in his cap. Roberts summed up most accurately the reason why he wanted to be a pirate when he said, simply:

"In an honest service there are commonly low wages, and hard labour. In piracy, pleasure and ease, liberty and power, and who would not balance creditor on this side? when all the hazard that is run for it at worst is only a sour look or to be at a choking? No, a merry life, and a short one, shall be my motto."

* * *

(In the concluding installment of this study of the facts of Piracy, W. O. G. Lofts discovers the elements of truth in the many legends which have grown up about the distaff side of the Profession —the females of the species who are reputed to have been deadlier than the male.)

THE OTHER JAMES BOND

In the autumn of 1960 an American ornithologist called James Bond, author of BIRDS OF THE WEST INDIES, received a clipping from a British newspaper, dealing with his book, which referred not only to hummingbirds—but also to masochism and to brandy. As the weeks passed, Mr. and Mrs. James Bond eventually solved the mystery of these strange allusions, as Ian Fleming admitted to having named his hero after reading BIRDS OF THE WEST INDIES.

In February of 1964, Mr. and Mrs. Bond visited Fleming at his home in Jamaica, a matter of months before his death. She writes in HOW 007 GOT HIS NAME (Collins, London) about "those short hours together" and about the feeling of mutual respect "and even intimacy" between Ian Fleming, the original James Bond, and—the fictitious James Bond.

THE saint CROSSWORD

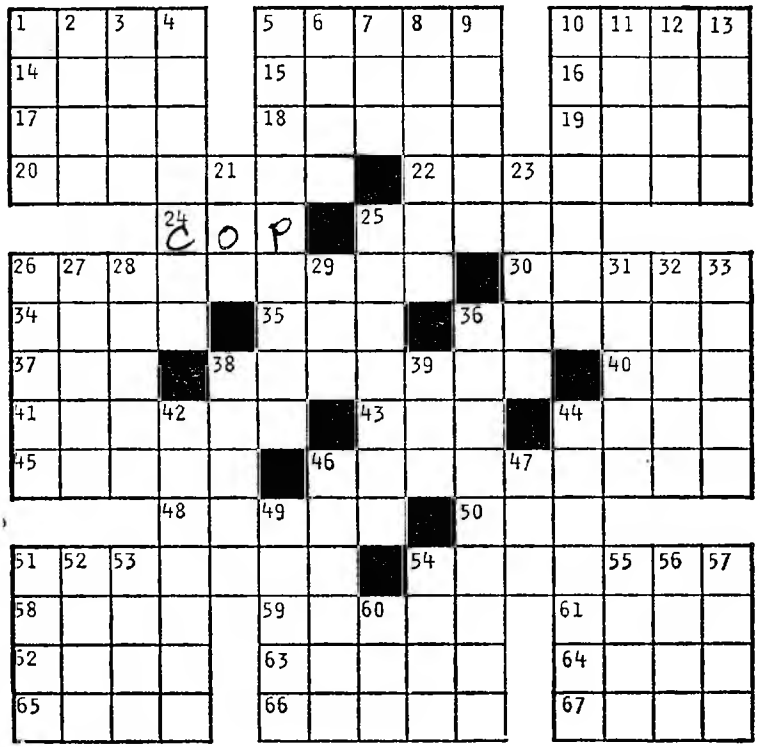
ACROSS

1. Happy tail
5. Long-nosed South American
10. Tops of small egos
14. Down wind
15. Chosen few
16. Backward fruit
17. Grand for bridge
18. Long without turning
19. Mate of dam
20. Iron bisulphide
22. Deservedly made Ted happy
24. Fuzz
25. Poetic rhythm
26. Took apart
30. Pretended attack
34. Supervisor's see
35. Chinese won
36. Farm machine
37. Restful ax
38. Unwelcome player
40. Beheaded 19
41. Thrice
43. Wolframite
44. Player's turn
45. Pillar
46. Reveres
48. Freed with 37
50. Goes with 24 turned over
51. Sidetracks
54. Less dear
58. Fouled-up foray
59. I fight bulls in anagram
61. Low joint
62. Singing Stevens
63. Old-time transport
64. Five make five
65. Nicholas was last
66. Chopped up Slavs
67. Tear

DOWN

1. Hymenopter
2. On same side
3. Transmits power
4. Course
5. Would knock 36 down
6. Sombrero brims
7. Figurative head of 31
8. Listed in detail
9. Jewels are often
10. Wanted
11. Fail
12. Weary
13. Winter 63
21. Somersaulting rodent
23. Submit
25. Threatened
26. Species
27. Turn inside out
28. Erupted 1902
29. Ballet dance
31. Dope
32. Gall
33. Keep shoes in shape
36. Call
38. Nice weather
39. Thrash
42. Hemophiliac
44. Licensed killer
46. Ancient virgins
47. Unlaid eggs
49. Packs
51. Play projectile
52. Seen around pupil

53. Travel permit
54. Cut back a French pig
55. Kind of 33
56. Roulette pair
57. Musical silence
60. Boasters have plenty



(*Pleast turn to page 109 for the solution.*)

NOTE:

The above clues have been compiled without consideration, compunction, or any kindly desire to be helpful. All complaints, protests, or requests for explanations must be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. They will not be answered, but we can use the stamps. L.C.

miss clarissa and the raincoat

by John Stephens

MR. COFFIN was ill, so Miss Thorpe, Miss Clarissa Thornton-Thorpe, had volunteered to take Mr. Coffin's classes. One would be the Egyptian gallery tour, so Miss Thorpe had thereupon gone over to the library to look through some of "dear Mr. Budge's books" . . . and to sit and think of the old days. It was almost forty years now since she had met Mr. Petrie, and had the (brief) burning desire to devote herself to Egyptian work, but he had dissuaded her for it was not proper for a young woman to want to go into such places and do such things in the year 1910. So she had come to the museum some ten years later, first as an assistant-lecturer, then as a regular lecturer. For the last eighteen years they'd had her lecturing on Near Eastern and Indian art, and OH it was dull! Nothing was ever happening! Month after month she had to talk about these naked Buddhist statues and those awful looking Indian gods; month after month, year after year, she'd been telling how the Arab invaders destroyed the old Persian cul-

The tendency in these days to streamline Museum services, possibly in line with directives laid down by some Madison Avenue computers, has close to done away with Museum lecturers such as Miss Thornton-Thorpe, whom we done away with Museum lecturers such as Miss Thornton-Thorpe, last met in ST. PETERSBURG (SMM, March '63). Perhaps this is to be regretted . . .

ture. O Lord — she did wish something — anything — would happen. Miss Clarissa Thornton-Thorpe was bored.

If you walk through the Egyptian gallery in this museum you are struck with two things—the sprawling enormity of the collection, and its essential lack of unity. The collection is enormous, and, like most museum collections, the result of pot luck acquisitions more than anything else. The last ten years have brought new methods of showing exhibits, but the exhibits themselves are mostly the same, with the same fly-specked labels that were there ten years ago. For that matter, a label mistake made in 1914 is still not corrected as I write this.

Halfway down the Egyptian wing there is a staircase going down to the basement and some offices and the auditorium. In the room facing the staircase there are two huge sarcophagi, great obese things of granite or something of the sort. Some important mummies had been in them once. Now they, their covers, and some assorted funeral chamber sculptures, fill up an exhibit room very nicely. You have to stand on tiptoe if you want to look down into the open sarcophagus; having done that, you're allowed to say "gee."

The 10 a.m. group turned out to be a Music and Art School class, destined for the modern sculpture. Poor Miss Thorpe had a very bad time of it; modern sculpture is so—so . . .

The 11.30 class was from a High School, and they were the ones who were going to the Egyptian gallery. They were really a very nice group, considering that they were young. They listened very politely when she told them about Akhnaton and the City of the Sun, and about Cleopatra. One boy did ask something about Cleopatra but she didn't catch just what he said and he sat down almost right away.

It was 12.15 as they were passing the room with the sarcophagi, and she was anxious to be finished. Miss Lovett was coming to lunch at 12.30, and would be waiting for her in the lobby. But one of the boys was very fascinated by the great masses of granite, so she had to stop and explain. And she did. She told them about the burial customs of the ancient Egyptians, and as she was talking she seemed to see before her Mr. Petrie as he had looked that spring morning forty years ago when she had first heard him lecture on the subject. She talked on. It was 12.25 and she realized vaguely that Miss Lovett would probably be in the lobby by now, but she didn't want to stop talking. The class really was nice, even the three boys who were standing on tiptoe to look into the sarcophagus. She'd never

been able to do it herself; she wasn't tall enough.

Miss Thorpe paused—realizing that one of the boys was trying to get her attention. He seemed to have some difficulty in speaking, but finally he did say, "'Miss Thorpe, it looks like there is something in that there coffin. . . ."

It was. It was Mr. Coffin.

The museum had recently had a new director, but it still has a few old-fashioned characteristics. There are people in the museum who've been working there for more than forty years, and they're apt to be a little set in their ways. Therefore none of them liked the way things were that day, with policemen and detectives running in and out of their offices all day, the Egyptian wing roped off to visitors while flashlight bulbs crackled and broke. The wing was crowded with men—the museum secretary was invaded by gum-chewing reporters — oh it was all very upsetting and very unfortunate that Mr. Coffin should have gotten himself murdered.

For murder it was. Twenty minutes after Miss Thorpe's very natural faint, the police doctor had said so. Mr. Coffin had been strangled. He'd been dead almost twenty-four hours, so he must have been killed the preceding evening. His clothes were dusty —so the body had apparently been kept somewheres in the cellars at least for some hours . . .

The Detective Lieutenant (a museum rated that much) had first thought Miss Thorpe might know something; after all, she'd been taking the guy's classes. But after two hours of questioning, and learning what an admirable and polite young man Mr. Coffin had been, he'd given up.

As a matter of fact, no one knew anything and no one had heard anything. The watchman swore he'd seen nobody in the basement that night—but Lord knew a hundred men could easily hide in those corners down there without being seen. They'd found the place where the body had been kept—a broken coffin in one of the main basement corridors—the dust in it had been stirred and a heavy object had obviously been lying there. But whoever had carried the body had used gloves—damn him!

Somebody had telephoned the lecturers' office that morning and said that Mr. Coffin was too ill to come to work; his throat was hurting him. And that he had wondered if Miss Thorpe could take his morning classes? No one had taken the trouble to ask for a name that wasn't given; the girl who took the message took for granted it was some friend of Coffin's. But it couldn't have been, because Mr. Coffin had

already been dead for at least sixteen hours when that phone call was made. Fascinating, wasn't it? The papers were calling it, "Mystery of the Dead Man's Phone Call"; the *News* called it "The Egyptian Coffin Murder" and reprinted an old article about the curse of the Egyptian High Priests that'd killed Lord Carnarvon.

Fascinating?

Miss Clarissa woke up at 11 o'clock that night. Adelaide had given her a sedative at 3 o'clock when they brought her home, but sedatives never did have much effect when she was nervous. Sedatives weren't good for you anyway.

Miss Thorpe looked around her in her room, and then at the clock. It was 11.05. It had started drizzling a little outside.

Something was bothering Miss Thorpe. It had something to do with the preceding afternoon—and it was something she hadn't told the police because she'd forgotten it. She'd come into the lecturers' room at 4 that day, and had found no one there except Mr. Coffin, who was sitting with his head in his hands. Mr. Coffin was always so polite—but he hadn't even raised his head when she came in; he'd just murmured something and continued to sit there—looking at the floor. Obviously Mr. Coffin hadn't been very cheerful, and she remembered now that there'd been a long envelope on his desk, a long blue envelope. . . .

Was it still there?

Was it there? Miss Thorpe was dressed by 11.30 and she was at the museum just after midnight. The taxi driver looked at her a little queerly when she told him where to go, but he didn't say anything; a fare was a fare. When she got there she rang the nightman's bell; she could hear it pealing—but there was no answer.

It was still drizzling. The avenue was almost empty, except for the two dark parked cars across the street, and a bus several blocks away. It was very cold and wet and Miss Thorpe rather wished she'd taken time to put on more clothing anyway. Perhaps she *had* been foolish to come . . .

It struck 12.15 by some clock when she realized the gate wasn't closed. It was very careless of the watchman; she'd most certainly report him in the morning. And Miss Thorpe pushed the gate and walked in. The policeman hiding in the dark watchman's office was almost shocked. "Jesus! Who'd have thought it'd be the old dame!"

Miss Thorpe walked resolutely through the dark basement corridors. It was pretty dark, but

she knew the way—she'd been walking this way for eighteen years now.

The basement was very damp and very quiet. Little ice chills seemed to bother Miss Thorpe in the back. It was very quiet and very dark and she suddenly remembered how in every mystery story the criminal always returns to the scene of his crime. What if——?

The policeman was wondering that too. Two minutes after the old woman had come in, the gate had moved again, and a dark shadow had melted into the other shadows; it looked like a man in a raincoat. . . . The man had gone the same way the old woman had; the policeman decided to follow the man. He was afraid his shoes would make a noise so he put his rubbers on again. And took his gun.

Miss Thorpe found the light switch in the lecturers' room and turned it on — and walked straight to poor Mr. Coffin's desk. It was clean.

This was so disappointing.

She walked over next to it to her own place and sat down in her chair to think. Come to think of it, she'd done a very foolish thing going off like this without waking Adelaide, and going here in the middle of the night. She was sitting there feeling very silly when she heard a noise in the hall; Miss Thorpe may have been elderly but she was very fast on her feet. It took her less than a minute to switch off the light and then stand over behind the door like they all did in the mystery stories.

The raincoat came into the room. It was a tall man, and reminded her vaguely of someone she knew. The man had a flashlight and he too went straight to Mr. Coffin's desk. He went to the side of it rather and crouched down and seemed to be hammering at one of the sides. She heard a grunt, a tearing noise, then silence. The man was sitting there on his haunches, reading something by flashlight. Was it poor Mr. Coffin's letter?

Miss Clarissa knew she was in a mess. If this man was innocent —why he might even be a policeman though why he'd have to be muffled up like that she couldn't guess—if he was a policeman she could safely ask him to show her the letter. But how should she explain being there herself? If he wasn't a policeman, well, perhaps she'd better stay quiet! It was a problem and a very difficult one; to move or not to move . . .

The flashlight suddenly went out. Somebody else was standing by the door and saying very loudly, "Come along, you there! I've got you covered!" He made such a beautiful silhouette—

solid and black—and the man with the flashlight must have realized this for suddenly there was a curious noise like a cork popping and the shadow in the doorway fell. He fell very noisily.

Miss Clarissa was vaguely aware of someone running, but she didn't care much. She didn't care much about anything; she felt very sick all of a sudden and wished she was home in bed where she belonged. She ought never to have gone out and treated Adelaide so badly. And to see Mr. Parks do things like that—yes, that was who it was! That was Mr. Parks' raincoat that had just fired that shot. Mr. Parks was the Medieval Glass man. She knew about silencers. Mr. Connery sometimes used one in his films.

Mr. Parks' raincoat had been gone several minutes when Miss Clarissa was finally able to move. The dark mass at the door was very silent and took up a lot of space, but Miss Thorpe managed to get around it.

And then she began to run. Miss Thorpe wasn't afraid—but she did want to get out—and she did want to get out into the air—the air. She would run a little while, then stop, then run again, and after a while she came to the back gate.

The gate was open. It was very much open. There were several flashlights there and they were all turned on Mr. Parks' raincoat. Mr. Parks' raincoat was lying just inside the door and there was some red mark on it.

A uniformed man was saying, "Too bad you shoot so damn good, Kelly. We wanted him alive!"

Miss Thorpe slid gently to the floor in a faint.

Oh—who'd killed Mr. Coffin? Mr. Parks, of course!

THE SOLUTION
to the
PUZZLE
on page 103

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

Michael V. DiSalle, a former Governor of Ohio, served under President Truman as Administrator of Economic Stability and under President Kennedy as one of the four Governor-members of the President's Advisory Committee on Inter-governmental affairs. Active for years on the local, state and national level in politics and in public service, Mr. DiSalle has long been recognized as an independent and courageous mind, in a field in which this is signally rare. . . . Lawrence G. Blochman, a former National President of the Mystery Writers of America and a frequent contributor to this magazine, is one of the best known writers in this field.

The two men, Michael V. DiSalle with Lawrence G. Blochman, are jointly responsible for an extremely effective book—against the death penalty and for the reform of the penal code—in THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH (Random House, $4.95). Whatever your views on this subject, and in the main these views are apt to be aca-

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The writer, editor of THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, an anthology of spy stories just published by Award Books, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the 1963 Critic's Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.

demic—because how many of us do come that close to the other side of life—you will be impressed by the sincerity (I prefer that word to passion) of Mr. DiSalle's arguments. During his term as Governor of Ohio, "the Executive Mansion at Columbus was staffed by convicted killers, all of whom were under life sentence." His wife and he, their children and their grandchildren, "lived under the same roof with these men twenty-four hours a day . . ." As Governor DiSalle puts it, "I shared their joys and sorrows, their strengths and weaknesses, their hopes and fears." The book is based on these experiences and on his familiarity with the cases of more than a hundred and fifty lifers or men (and one woman) who had been sentenced to death.

What results is a documented argument for Governor DiSalle's contention that the state has a responsibility before a man commits his first offense—"a responsibility to remove those sociological factors which breed crime." Mr. DiSalle calls for a new approach to penology. I have a feeling that whether or not you agree with his views, you will respect—it is impossible to do otherwise—the sincerity of the long-time public servant who speaks his mind in this book.

Paul Kruger's WEEP FOR WILLOW GREEN (Simon and Schuster, $3.50) is an example of the reality, forgotten by many, that there can still be another way to tell what is essentially a familiar story.

I say this because Willow Green, in her various incarnations, follows a predictable pattern. But nevertheless Paul Kruger tells a fast moving and effective story which holds you through the end.

Dick Francis' FOR KICKS was in my opinion one of the best novels in this field, published in '65. His ODDS AGAINST (Harper & Row, $4.95), deals with the adventures of Sid Halley, one of England's best known jockeys until a racing fall, who has joined the Radnor Agency and finds himself involved in the investigation — almost fatal to himself—of what is happening to the Seabury Racing Company. Do read this.

James Hall Roberts' THE Q DOCUMENT (Morrow, 1964), was the story of the document, purportedly nearly two thousand years old, that appeared to cast new light on the story of Jesus. In his new novel, THE BURNING SKY (Morrow, $4.95), he again takes a group of the doubting and the disillusioned and the serene, this time against the background of the burning

wastes of the Growler Mountains in Arizona, and tells a haunting story of their search for a lost culture. And for status. Recommended.

Margaret Erskine's THE FAMILY AT TAMMERTON (Doubleday, $3.95), her new Detective Inspector Septimus Finch novel, introduces us to an interesting family ("They've been in Somerset since the flood.") and to the attractive nurse for one of them who is, without at first knowing why, the catalyst for much of the hate and violence which sweeps over lonely Tammerton Hall. Very pleasant. Do read this.

Stephen Marlowe's THE SEARCH FOR BRUNO HEIDLER (Macmillan, $4.95), poses the possibility of the survival, in Europe and not in South America, of a high-ranking Nazi still wanted by both Counter Intelligence and by the Sûreté, each for a variety of reasons. Ted Dunbar, a civilian working for the United States Army in France, is drawn into the hunt because his estranged wife is one of the few people known to have actually met the elusive Heidler. What follows is a dramatic enough story, told against an unusual and interesting background.

Thomas Walsh's THE RESURRECTION MAN (Simon & Schuster, $3.50), is a close-to-classic story of the apparent resurrection from the dead of Judge James Francis Mulvanny, apparenly very much the product of his times, who had disappeared eighteen years earlier. His son, who had been eight years old when the father had disappeared, and the others, those who still lived, whose lives had been affected by what happened, have to face the problem of whether this is truly James Mulvanny—or an impostor. Mr. Walsh will be remembered for his NIGHTMARE IN MANHATTAN, the winner of the Mystery Writers of America Award in 1950, and for THE NIGHT WATCH, THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE, THIEF IN THE NIGHT, and other novels. THE RESURRECTION MAN, will I think, be recognized as one of the best novels in the field to be published this year.

Colonel James E. Bassett, Deputy Commissioner and Director, Kentucky State Police, is quoted as calling Robert McDowell's THE HOUND'S TOOTH (Mill-Morrow, $3.50), "a suspenseful and authentic detective novel, with a sharp blend of action and adventure interwoven with intelligent investigative techniques."

I'd agree. The locale of the

story is Edmondson County in Kentucky, famous for its feuding families — and its limestone caves. This is a part of the country where—as elsewhere, at least to my knowledge—when there is talk of "the War", it's "the War between the States" which is meant. This is the War which broke some families and which started the fortunes of still others; the legacy of bitterness is ever present. This is the background against which Deputy Sheriff Floyd Bowman investigates a murder, and walks headlong into excitement.

Since I wrote the above, I have spent several weeks at Presbyterian Hospital in New York and am, at the moment, convalescing at home—surrounded by my books—and proofs . . . I was supposed to speak at the American Oriental Society's annual meeting in Philadelphia, some days from now, on Lala Lajpat Rai's relations with the members of the Ghadr Party, but have just had to write that it would be unwise for me to come down to Philadelphia this soon. It's less than two weeks since I was discharged from the Hospital. As *SM* author Dan Ross and others have been warning me, I had better take it easy these next months . . .

It was the first time in my life that I had been in a hospital, and the first time, in more than forty years, that I had been this ill. It was therefore perhaps high time that I should at long last see something of this world-within-a-world which was so alien to me, not as a visitor but as a patient.

I came away with considerable respect for the competence, to put it mildly, of the doctors in whose hands I found myself. You could feel absolute confidence in these men (in my case it was in Dr. Stephen Roberts, who performed the operations on me, and in Dr. Conrado Tojino, my ward doctor); it was easy to understand why Presbyterian has the reputation everyone had told me it did . . .

I won't deny that the weeks could have been pleasanter. This goes without saying. I had some books with me—this helped. Friends came to see me—still others wrote—and I was particularly grateful for the flowers from Idris and Annie Chowdhury, of Montclair, New Jersey, friends since the late '30's, and from S. K. Singh, First Secretary, Indian Delegation to the United Nations.

The ward was of course a cross section of New York. My neighbors, during most of the time I was there, were Eddie Gillian, a blind news-dealer on 72nd Street and First Avenue (who of course carried this mag-

azine), and veteran show-business personality, Victor Lloyd —while we'd never met, we had mutual friends — whom I was particularly glad to meet.

Though I would have preferred to do so under less strenuous conditions . . .

Those who prefer for their Orientals to be appropriately sinister, in the tradition of the British thrillers of the Thirties and of the imitators of the late Sax Rohmer, will undoubtedly be distressed by Gavin Black's excellent novel, YOU WANT TO DIE, JOHNNY? (Harper & Row, $4.95).

It emphatically does not conform to this pattern.

The Sultanate of Bintan had stayed out of the Federation of Malaysia and was still a British protectorate. Sir John Harpen, K.C.M.G., Resident and advisor to the singularly unpleasant Sultan Abdul el Badas, had the thankless task of trying, ever so gently, through any means at his disposal, to bring a modern note into an administrative setup the feudal nature of which represented, in these times, a daily if not hourly invitation to trouble.

Twelve years earlier, when Harpen had first come to Bintan, it had just been a little blob on the map of Borneo. But by now, in oil-rich Bintan, the local freedom party talked of Independence—and even freer access to the oil company revenues, and the Sultan, whose family had been the hereditary rulers for the past generations, walked warily between the scylla and charybdis of pressures from within and abroad, interested only in continuing the even flow of the oil revenues into the coffers and bank accounts of the El Badas family. Which meant mostly the Sultan.

Paul Harris, an English businessman with a somewhat unorthodox approach to some problems, had become a Malaysian subject. He didn't renounce his British citizenship for the economic and social advantages that might result from this step, but as an act of faith—and hope—and belief in the future of the country in which he lived. If Malaysia as at present constituted should fall, he would fall with it. If it should survive—he would survive. In the meantime he had thrown in his lot with the new country, making him a valuable ally of Sir John Harpen when the Resident has family problems and, inevitably, the guardian and trustee of the Resident's restless daughter, under a will apparently drawn up only days before Harpen's death.

His murder, to be exact. The death of John Harpen triggers a series of developments, eminently logical and plausible—if viewed

against the background of present-day realities — which make for, to quote F. van Wyck Mason, "a most satisfactory adventure story." Don't miss this book!

I think we've all begun to look forward to Nicholas Freeling's newest Inspector van der Valk novel, and not just because of the resemblance to an admittedly more famous—and likewise European—series . . . The Netherlands of Inspector van der Valk of the Amsterdam Police is unquestionably not the Netherlands known to the tourists, or even to many of its citizens. (How much do many of us, for that matter, really know about our own country?) As is often the case, the author, who has lived in various parts of Europe, including in the Netherlands, and now lives near Strasbourg, has succeeded in causing to come to life those things which are both the strength and the weakness of the country in which van der Valk lives and works. I have repeatedly, no doubt too much and too often, talked of the social documentary trend in this field. These novels are an illustration of what I have been talking about . . .

CRIMINAL CONVERSATION (Harper & Row, $4.50), represents a departure for the author in that it is, in essence, a conversation between the hunter and the hunted, between the detective and the man who, cooly and deliberately, has killed—and is now torn by the need for explaining, as much to himself as to the detective, the pressures upon him which, almost incidentally, prompted the murder.

Do not miss this.

Robert S. Elegant's A KIND OF TREASON (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95), will disturb those for whom there is no such color as grey—things are only black and white. This strange color blindness is of course what contributed to the developments in the China we knew—this inability to understand that there was a potential Third Force in Chinese politics, neither pro-Chiang nor pro-Communist, which merited our support. Neither Mendéres nor Duvaliér nor others whom we can all think of have taught us this lesson that the fact that a regime is our ally on specific issues is not necessarily a certificate of political morality. We have to learn it, each and every time, the hard way, and A KIND OF TREASON raises the possibility that we have yet to learn it in Viet-Nam.

To say this is emphatically not to deny the heroism of the many who have given their lives in order that the Vietcong should not triumph.

Of course not.

To do so would be an insult to their memory and to ourselves.

But the facts do have to be faced, and this evening's or tomorrow evening's headlines would seem to underline this reality that some of our friends do have strange ways. Robert S. Elegant, whose often grim and fast paced story of the Saigon known to the foreign correspondents will without a doubt disturb many of you, was in India and Hong Kong from 1956 to 1962 for *Newsweek* and now heads the news bureau of the Los Angeles *Times* in Hong Kong. There seems reason to believe that he knows whereof he speaks, which is one reason why this story of treason and sudden death in wartime Saigon is so interesting . . .

I neglected to say one thing about Joan Anderson, whose story, THE FALL OF CHARLES GORHAM, appeared in last month's *SM* . . .

In 1949, I inscribed a copy of the current Unicorn Mystery Book Club volume to her—"to a future contributor".

She was fourteen then.

But I seem to have been right.

. . .

Dell Shannon's latest novel, COFFIN CORNER (Morrow, $3.95), is another first rate police procedure novel featuring Lt. Luis Mendoza of the Los Angeles Police Department and the men who together with him make up a team, an effective team, coping with hour-by-hour problems of law enforcement officers in a metropolitan city.

Mildred Davis' THE SOUND OF INSECTS (Doubleday, $3.50), underlines how ruthless nice people can be once rumor, as is so often the case, is accepted as an incontrovertible fact, human nature being what it is . . .

This can happen in any community—it has happened in the past and it will happen again tomorrow—but even more readily in a quiet suburb where everybody knows everybody else, or is certain that they do, and where there is an instinctive haste to deny yesterday's friendship if this friendship can be embarassing today . . .

Who of us haven't seen this happen?

We meet Chief Detective Inspector Henry Tibbett once more in Patricia Moyes' JOHNNY UNDER GROUND (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95), a Chief Inspector Tibbett who, in the course of an unusually long and perhaps overly complex novel, has repeated reason to regret his wife's not so much naivete as faith in her fellow man. The two

things are not necessarily the same . . .

I have admitted before to being a Minority of One on some occasions, and I am afraid I must do so again. Robert L. Fish's THE INCREDIBLE SCHLOCK HOLMES (Simon & Schuster, $3.95), "12 stories from Bagel Street", with an introduction by our good friend Anthony Boucher, are definitely "in" stories, and I frankly admit that I may be wrong in not appreciating the full extent to which Schlock Holmes can and undoubtedly does "contribute to the confusion of logical reasoning". I say this with obvious regret, since I have from the outset been enthusiastic about Capt José Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liason officer between the Brazilian Police and Interpol. I don't deny, to quote from Tony's introduction, that "a gentle mockery is an assured sign of affection" . . . so I shall reread the stories in six months or so.

A. A. Fair's WIDOWS WEAR WEEDS (Morrow, $3.50), Erle Stanley Gardner's newest Donald Lam and Bertha Cool mystery, has the familiar pace which we have grown to expect. Mr. Lam is as predictably unpredictable as ever, and Bertha Cool continues to not live up to her name. Fast moving, and enjoyable.

Elizabeth Ferrars' NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED (Harper & Row, $4.50), is one of the mysteries I read while I was in hospital. It is always pleasant to read a new novel by Elizabeth X. Ferrars, long one of my favorite writers. In the present novel, Antonia Winfield finds herself in an extremely unpleasant situation, not knowing whom to either trust or to believe. Do read this.

The background of much of Simon Troy's CEASE UPON THE MIDNIGHT (Macmillan, $3.95) is Guernsey, and I have an idea many people will become curious about what has been called "the most beautiful of the Channel Islands". (For these I recommend Compton Mackenzie's story of his experiences as leaseholder of the islands of Herm and Jethou, in MY LIFE AND TIMES: OCTAVE FIVE, just published by Chatto & Windus in London). Lorna Myles' problems start in Inspector Smith's "little kingdom" which "extends from Shilstone in the south-west to Penrhuan on the county boundary". Here, on the Cornish coast, and then in Guernsey, her own future is determined for her—a particularly unpleasant murderer commits his last mistake—and the lives of still others, whom violence or

suspicion or fear had touched, are changed. Do read this if you haven't done so already.

Roy Stratton's new Massachusetts State Police mystery, ONE AMONG NONE (Mill-Morrow, $3.50), has to do with the disappearance of M.I.T. Professor John Mason and the prompt interest expressed therein by the Department of Defense, the C.I.A., the F.B.I. and the Massachusetts State Police itself. Gradually it becomes obvious that this is not just a case of murder—Professor Mason's body is soon found—but that there is an espionage angle, the full details of which are uncovered as a result of teamwork between the investigative agencies and police departments throughout the country. An interesting procedural novel.

We are told that Mark Napier's thriller, DOORWAYS TO DANGER (Abelard-Schuman, $3.50), conveys an authentic picture of "the seamy brew that is Singapore" (to quote the publisher's blurb)—at least that part of Singapore that is most likely to be known to Europeans such as Sam Cape, Pacific patrol officer, and to those others who seek to lose themselves in the shadows of Singapore's underground. The author, a former soldier and explorer, is at the present time "a school teacher, a writer on many subjects, and a distinguished military historian".

This may be so.

Canadian novelist Frances Shelley Wees' FACELESS ENEMY (Doubleday, $3.50) is a beautifully done study of the evil done by a woman who, all her life, has been living in a nightmare. As the girl whose life she has come close to wrecking says, "She has been living in a terrible nightmare for a long, long time." And she could never dare to wake up . . . This and the Nicholas Freeling novel, and of course the Elizabeth Ferrars novel, were the three mysteries I read while in the hospital. And also Compton Mackenzie's MY LIFE AND TIMES: OCTAVE FIVE, which SM author Harry Harrison had sent to me from London; Lajpat Rai's AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS (University Publishers, Delhi), which I had seen in the India House library in London last fall; and STAMFADRENS ANTECEDENTIA (Stockholm, 1863), Magnus Jacob Crusenstolpe's somewhat less than reverent story of the early years of Karl XIV Johan of Sweden.

Care is normally taken, in adoption proceedings, to ascertain the views of both the mother and the putative father of the child before the court acts on the

application of the couple who wish to adopt the child. In Henry Cecil's A CHILD DIVIDED (Harper & Row, $3.95), insufficient care was originally taken to be sure of the position of the putative father. As a result, there is first an attempt to blackmail the couple who have adopted the child, by a man who has known the child's father in jail. And then the child's father, released after it has been proved that he was innocent, discovers that the child had been given out for adoption while he was in prison —and starts proceedings to annul the adoption order. Extremely interesting.

Private investigator Norman Pink is hired by the victim's widow, in Mark McShane's NIGHT'S EVIL (Doubleday, $3.50), to investigate the murder of her husband in the traveling fair. Some excellent characterizations contribute to making this novel of carnival life in Scotland both interesting and effective.

Apropos of the weeks spent at Presbyterian, I see I've said nothing about the day I left there . . .

Jack Gaughan, who in addition to being a neighbor and friend is the artist who did the cover for RULERS OF MEN, the S-F anthology published by Pyramid Books last fall (which I hope all of you bought), came and collected me, my books and my flowers, and brought me home—the long way . . .

I sat outside the Hospital for a few minutes, waiting for him to bring up the car, and revelling in the cool wind beating at me (anyone who has spent several weeks in a hospital will know what I mean . . .), and trying to make up my mind whether I should head straight for home, or stop by at my office and take a look, briefly, at the mail of the last few days.

The office won—for an hour.

I can understand the interest in Don von Elsner's COUNTDOWN FOR A SPY (Signet, NAL, 50 cents), and not just because of the current interest, to put it mildly, in all espionage material, whether it be credible or somewhat less than credible, Freudian or sub-Freudian.

David Danning's commission as Colonel is "temporarily reactivated" under powers granted to the Secretary of Defense—a ploy the annoyed Danning, whom we have met before, had expected. The second paragraph of the letter, signed by the adjutant to a four star general, added that he was to stand by for instructions from Brutus. The third paragraph of the letter described Brutus who had apparently come to Hawaii for only one reason,

or so it seemed—to involve Danning in tracking down the key figure in an espionage operation, originally but no longer a joint Sino-Soviet enterprise, the success of which could endanger our own security. If not our future.

Do read this.

This year's Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner of the Mystery Writers of America (the 20th Annual Dinner held by that organization), took place at the Hotel Astor, in Times Square, on April 22, 1966. John Creasey, the founder of the British Crime Writers Association and the incoming President of the Mystery Writers of America, pointed out, in the *Mystery Writers' Annual,* that whether the members of the organization "know it or not, or whether others know it or not, we have become part of the literature of our age." A viewpoint with which this column heartily agrees . . .

I was particularly pleased by one award, for the Best First Mystery Novel of 1965 (American authors only), to John Ball for his IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT, reviewed in the September 1965 issue of this magazine. Adam Hall's THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM (Simon & Schuster) was awarded an Edgar as the Best Mystery Novel published in America in 1965. Truman Capote's in COLD BLOOD (Random House) was awarded an Edgar as the Best Fact Crime Book in 1965, and THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD (Paramount) was awarded an Edgar as the Best Motion Picture of 1965. Both awards, to the Truman Capote book and to the movie, were announced to mixed reactions. Understandably so.

In the September 1965 issue of this magazine, in discussing the socio-documentary trend in this field (which I feel John Ball's excellent novel is an example of) I wrote something which I would like to repeat at this time . . .

"A hundred or two hundred years from now there will be, one hopes, some interest (amused or otherwise) in these times—and not only in the doings of the great and of the near-great, but in the lives and times of those men and women whom history will pass by—the raw material of these days' social statistics, the people who've fought or shouted or have prayed—or have died—and those others, those many others who have lived on throughout all this, uninterested in what went on around them, aware only of what they could see and touch and experience within their own immediate circle. And frankly afraid of anything alien, of anything strange. . . ."

For good or for bad, these are after all the times we've all known.

And I still insist that much of the writing in this field, that of Nicholas Freeling for instance, and of Julian Symons (in his THE END OF SOLOMON GRUNDY), in Aaron Marc Stein's BLOOD ON THE STARS and in Len Deighton's FUNERAL IN BERLIN,—and in John Ball's IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT—does mirror these times . . .

William Stanley's MR. HOLROYD TAKES A HOLIDAY (Abelard-Schuman, $3.50), reports on "some queer goings-on" as the omniscient "counter-espionage lads" somewhat fumble their way towards victory over a ring whose primary mission it is to attempt to wreck the Anglo-American alliance by strengthening American doubts of British security procedures. With Britain discredited, to whom can the United States turn? "France with her delusions of glory? Germany? Can you not hear the squeals of terror from the rest of Europe at the thought?" No! "The two great powers of the world will face each other alone."

The dream is ambitious, though one can question such a programme being entrusted to an operation of this nature. Jack Holroyd's part in it all, as he is sought by all sides for what he can presumably contribute to the total picture, is that of a wartime intelligence agent—none too effective then—who can identify a key figure in the present puzzle. Holroyd is perhaps not as heroic as the role demands, but then how many would be if asked, after twenty-odd years, to open the door on the past, and to do so with the handicaps which Holroyd has to hurdle. This, to me, is what makes MR. HOLROYD TAKES A VACATION (surely an ironic title), more plausible than some of the other epics of this sub-genre discussed in these pages.

Sara Woods' THE WINDY SIDE OF THE LAW (Harper & Row, $4.50), once more features Anthony Maitland, the barrister, last met in her TRUSTED LIKE THE FOX.

Peter Hammond wakes up in the hotel in London, not knowing who he is or, for that matter, where he is. He goes through the pockets of the jacket thrown over the back of a chair, and finds an envelope addressed to Peter Hammond, at an address in Ceylon, and a wallet and traveler's checks—and a passport. There is a diary, with some phone numbers and notes, including Anthony Maitland's name and address, but even when they are talking together, soon after-

wards, he does not recognize Maitland, whom he had known most of their lives, until he'd gone out to Ceylon. And the Maitland flat brings back no memories.

This is the beginning of an unusually effective suspense novel, which I am certain you will like.

The Sherlock Holmes Tour of London, originally scheduled for May of this year, has been postponed until this Fall. The tour (to quote the Travelers Counsel International announcement) will be an attempt "to investigate the vast metropolis that is London today, and to recreate the atmosphere of a London that vanished sixty years ago, if it ever existed at all—the romantic and sinister city where Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson pursued Professor Moriarty and his evil minions."

Further details next month.

the decline and fall of the bipartisan review

by Les Dennis

You probably remember the headlines when the murderer, Brick Saunders, surrendered to the *Daily News*. Brick was treated to the traditional steak dinner given to fugitives who give themselves up to the News, and the News received its traditional thanks from the police commissioner.

Brick got a chance to tell his own story in a heart-tugging piece on page three, right next to a first-person account by the copy boy who recognized the killer when he walked up to the News city desk.

But all the stories lacked one important detail. A day earlier Brick had given himself up to another publication, the littlest of the little magazines, the weekly *Bipartisan Review*.

Of course, Brick didn't tell the News about this earlier transgression and Robert Sloat, Ted Thornstein and I were the only ones who knew the real story. And we, the editors of the now-defunct *Bipartisan Review*, would rather forget it.

The whole thing started inno-

You probably do not remember the Bipartisan Review, "the littlest of the little magazines" but bearing no resemblance to the tradition evoked by its name . . . This is the story of how once—but much too late—greatness almost did come to this dedicated journal of opinion . . .

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cently enough. I was on my way to work one day, after the rush hour when the breeze whips through the almost empty subway cars. A *Daily News* scudded across the floor and nudged me around the ankles.

I tried to ignore it and get on with my Times, but it is hard to say no to a News when it wants to be read. It wrapped itself around my feet and, when I looked down, flapped a four-column scar-faced picture at me.

To tell the truth I'm a sucker for a *Daily News* murder story (I think a discarded News can sense this) so I set aside my Times and picked it up. The story, on page three under a triple byline, began as follows:

"Scar-faced Brick Saunders—wanted for the slaying of an attractive blonde widow in her posh East Side apartment—continued to elude police yesterday despite a city-wide search.

"More than 50 detectives assigned to the case have questioned scores of underworld figures in a futile attempt to get a lead on the 29-year-old Saunders who was fingered by an ex-pal after the wanton murder of Mrs. Nina Alexander.

"The red-headed killer with a four inch scar across his right cheek has been the object of an intense manhunt for nine days, but . . ."

An intense manhunt — the words were foolishly exciting. I smiled the tight, crooked smile of a hundred grade-B movies at my own reflection in the subway window and wondered how it would be to be hunted.

Images swirled through my brain. Guns, dark alleys dingy bars. Seemingly I was the hunted. I looked deeply into the eyes reflected in the subway window. What curious mystery lurked behind them linking me to all the world's past and all the worlds to come. There seemed to be a message behind those piercing eyes. I squinted to read it. It said: "West Fourth Street." My stop!

I leaped from my seat for the closing subway doors and reached them before they shut entirely. Straining, pulling them apart, I wedged my body between the soft rubber cushioned edges. Half in, half out, I half heard a woman on the platform say something about me being crazy. The Times was abandoned at my seat, the News spilled back upon the floor of the car. I pushed the doors and burst free, standing panting on the platform.

The woman who had said I was crazy was standing next to me and I smiled stupidly at her and adjusted my tie.

"Crazy," I muttered to myself, shaking my head. It was crazy. Scar-faced faced killers were the last thing I should be worrying

about. There were more pressing problems. For one, the *Bipartisan Review* was going out of business.

When I arrived at the office, I found my two associate editors, who made up the entire editorial staff, hard at work on what would presumably be the final issue of the Review. The Magazine would be greatly missed, I thought, particularly by the 427 readers who bought last week's issue.

Ted Thornstein, whose poetry almost everyone praised but almost nobody read, barely nodded when I came in. Robert Sloat, whose scholarly career was built on a Ford Foundation grant, didn't even nod.

I had just settled down behind my own pile of work when the door of the office opened and in stepped a gangling, red-haired young man with a stubble of a beard. He closed the door behind him and turned to face us. I dropped my copy pencil and felt sick to my stomach. A livid four-inch scar spanned his right cheek.

"Okay," he said. "I want to give myself up."

I scrambled to my feet, knocking a pile of papers to the floor.

"Who the hell are you," I stammered, knowing fully well who the hell he was.

"Brick Saunders," he said. And then he added, by way of identification, "the killer."

Ted and Robert turned white and off-white respectively.

"What the hell are you doing HERE?" I said.

Brick shook his head.

"Look," he said, nervously fingering an ominous bulge inside his jacket, "maybe I shouldn't a come. You know, most of the guys give themselves up to the News and get a steak dinner and their picture taken."

Swallowing hard, I started to say something, but nothing came out.

He pointed a finger at me. "You Ted Thornstein?" he asked.

"Him," I said, pointing to Ted, who flinched.

"I liked your poem about the waterfall," scar-faced Saunders said. "Last October 22nd issue."

It was the ultimate rave—from a critic with a gun. Ted was ecstatic.

"The vine growing out of the rocks," he gushed, "was symbolic."

Brick looked a trifle bewildered and Ted babbled on.

"I'm not supposed to tell, I mean it isn't usually done," Ted said, "but the vine stands for life, indomitable, persevering."

It was Brick's first brush with the world of serious literary discussion, where the rosy-fingered dawn comes slowly. But suddenly a twinkle of understanding flashed in his eyes and a faint

puzzled smile gave way to a broad grin.

"This," he said, "is lots better than the *Daily News*."

Feeling more at ease now, Brick explained his surprising acquaintance with our magazine. It seems that for the last eight days he had been "holed up" (as he put it) in the stack room of the public library where copies of the *Bipartisan Review* are as hungry for readers as the News on the subway. During that time he had read every issue of the Review published in the past two years.

His purpose in turning himself over to the Review, he said candidly, was two-fold. First it would give us the chance to do a probing, incisive, perceptive account (those are not his words) of a crime from a criminal's point of view.

"There's a book called Crime and Punishment with this guy called Raskolnikov," he said. "I'd like a story kind of like that."

(This literary allusion gave us a jolt until he explained that he was attracted by the title and read it during his holing-up period.)

Brick's second reason for choosing the Review was less artistic.

"You don't come out until Friday," he said. "This is Tuesday. I figure you got to let me hole up here in comfort until the story comes out."

He looked around cautiously for a reply, then eased his way into a large leather easy chair we used for problem solving.

"What do you say?" he asked.

Robert got to his feet slowly. He was a tall man who held himself slightly stooped and peered over his glasses like a young actor's vaguely overdrawn portrayal of Clarence Darrow.

"Look," he said, obviously piqued by the praise of the poetry in the Review and not a word about his prose, "we're not the Daily News. We're not even a news magazine. This fugitive business isn't our line."

Saunders leaned forward and fixed Sloat with a sincere stare.

"Right now," Brick said, "I'm the hottest thing in the country. You could sell a million copies. You could become the biggest little magazine around."

The idea of selling a million copies in a lifetime, much less a single week, left us momentarily mute. All three of us had been prepared for failure by years of graduate work in the humanities. But success was something else. It was frightening.

I thought I saw a ray of darkness.

"I think it's a hell of a nice thing you're doing," I said, slipping into a tone of easy camaraderie. "I mean thinking of our

success and all of that. But we just can't keep you here."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Harboring a criminal," I said smugly. "It's a crime. If we keep you here until Friday, we'll all go to jail. And if we turn you in before then, we've lost our exclusive."

He snapped back so quickly that I later came to the conclusion he had laid a trap for me.

"We work on my story today and tomorrow," he said. "Then tomorrow night you send a letter to the police telling them . . ."

"But then, sir, we've lost our exclusive," interrupted Robert, a bit too theatrically, I thought.

Brick never hesitated.

"No you don't," he said. "Not if you're careful to enclose the letter in a Bipartisan Review envelope. It certainly won't be opened immediately. It may lay around police headquarters for weeks, unopened."

Brick's grammar may have been faulty, but his analysis of the sense of urgency a Review envelope inspired was painfully accurate. Robert and I had no rebuttal and we glanced at Ted who had an odd, mystical look on his face. He held a paper on which he had been scribbling.

"What do you think of this," he said in a quivering voice. He began to read:

"A frightened fawn, society's tiger,
Crouched amid rows of library books . . .

"That's great," Brick broke in, beaming. "That's the kind of stuff you don't get at the News."

And soon it was settled. With Ted siding with Saunders, they convinced us that the Review should make a final grasp at solvency. Robert was something of a recalcitrant at first, but he was intrigued by the chance to play Dostoevski. Eventually, I gave in too, but not without misgivings.

My apprehensions increased when I got home that night and thought about it more. There are places where fugitives—if they have a bent for that sort of thing—should turn themselves in. The News is perfect. Winchell is fine. I wasn't so sure about the *Bipartisan Review*.

Besides the immediate dangers (I wasn't certain the unopened letter in the police station would save us from jail) there was the question of starting a trend.

What if every criminal surrendered to his favorite magazine? I envisioned a line of dishonest basketball players, still in their satin shorts, outside *Sports Illustrated* and a queue of price-fixing steel magnates at Fortune. There was no doubt about it, the possible consequences of what we were doing were terrifying.

When I arrived at the office the next morning, I realized I

had not been worrying unnecessarily. Brick was lounging in the big easy chair where he had spent the night and Robert was pacing back and forth trying to interview him.

"What did you think of when you killed her?" Robert asked, his voice a metallic rasp.

"I told you, I didn't do it," Brick replied.

"What do you mean, you didn't do it?"

"Well, I'm not gonna tell you . . . even if I did."

Robert gave me an exasperated look—as if it were my fault—and slammed down his pencil.

"You want to be a Raskolnikov," he shouted. "You want to be Raskolnikov. How the hell are you going to be Raskolnikov if you won't at least admit you killed the woman."

"I don't see why you can't leave out whether I did it or not," said Brick. "I mean, otherwise, you're gonna make it hard for me in court."

Robert sighed the sigh of the defeated.

"All right," he said, "when you were hiding in the library. How did you feel when . . .

I tried not to listen and turned toward Ted who was red-eyed and surrounded by crumpled scraps of paper.

"Frightened fawn," he said. "Now he doesn't like it. He says it sounds effeminate."

And that is the way the morning went. Brick had discovered that we needed him more than he needed us. He sat regally in our leather chair, criticizing our work. When Robert finally finished his interview and began to write, Brick leaned over his shoulder suggesting changes for nearly every sentence.

"Don' cha think it'd be better," he would say, "if . . ."

Robert, his face set in the expression of grim determination worn by soldiers carrying heavy packs on long marches, would whip the paper out of the typewriter and start again.

It was even worse for Ted. He would bring Brick a poem or a few typewritten lines. Brick would read it ponderously, his lips moving. "No,' he would say finally, and that was that.

My own job was relatively simple. Besides informing the printers that we wanted to print as many copies as possible (they immediately thought I was out of my mind or kidding, in fact, they phoned me back twice to make sure I was serious) and arranging a revised layout, I was to do an essay on capital punishment.

The topic was my own idea. I had written an undergraduate paper opposing capital punishment and decided I could lift enough of it for an appropriate piece for our fugitive-man edition.

The arguments, which had seemed cogent when I put them down originally, still seemed logical, but a new factor had been added.

While I wrote, Brick paced up and down behind me, not like a frightened fawn or society's tiger, but like a boorish pedant. Periodically, he would pause, look over my shoulder and offer some inane advice, or—worse yet—just shake his head. I grew angrier and angrier and gradually saw that, logic aside, there were some fine arguments for capital punishment.

It would be hard to describe the afternoon without using the word nightmare. At one point I thought Robert would lose control of himself completely when Brick casually suggested that we place his picture on the cover of the issue. Robert explained that the *Bipartisan Review* didn't use photographs and then lapsed into exasperated silence when Brick said a drawing would be all right with him.

Ted, who had become unaccustomed to rejections of his work since becoming poetry editor of his own magazine, was near tears.

And suddenly all three of us, Ted, Robert and I, knew it wouldn't work. There were some things the News simply did better than the *Bipartisan Review*. We all wondered later why we hadn't realized it sooner.

Without saying a word, Robert laid aside his half-written article like a man setting down a heavy stone. He got up and walked to the center of the room with dramatic self-assurance.

"I guess it's about time to send out for pizza," he said.

I sat forward in my seat. This was it, of course, a way out. The editors of little magazines are the pizza eaters and hamburger connoisseurs of our times. The Brick Saunders are used to better things.

"Let's get half with anchovies," I said, and turned to Brick. "Do you think you could run down to the corner and get it while we finish up here?"

Brick, I think, sensed a revolution, but he refused to panic.

"Pizza?" he said. "Hey, the guys that turn themselves in at the News get a steak dinner. At least let's send out for some chicken."

Still standing in the center of the room, Robert shook his head slowly, let his shoulders sag and his arms hang loosely at his sides.

"It's our way," he said with mock sadness. "Our fate . . . We measure out our life in pizza pies."

Brick got to his feet uncertainly.

"Look," he said, his voice losing its arrogance, "for these next few days, at least, maybe we

could eat better. I don't mind helping you guys out with a few bucks . . ."

"Sorry Brick," said Robert, staring at the floor.

Brick shifted his weight uncomfortably. "Hell," he said, finally, "I hope I haven't put you guys to a lot of trouble . . ."

"But," he added, moving with a sudden swiftness to the coat rack and slipping into his jacket, "I really want a good steak."

Even faster now, Brick stepped across the room to the door. He opened it, but stopped and looked back.

"Why don't you guys try something else," he said. And he was gone.

After emptying the petty cash box and splitting the money three ways, we closed the office of the *Bipartisan Review* for the last time. We went to McGuire's steak house on West Fourth Street, but decided to sit at the bar where you can drink beer and fill in on crackers and cheese. It was almost midnight when we walked around the corner to a luncheonette, had hamburgers and read about the surrender of Brick Saunders in the first edition of the News.

On page one there a picture of Brick eating a steak.

IMPERIAL SABLE — IN MOSCOW

We have all been told how the Russians bug the hotel rooms of the distinguished who, for one reason or another, have occasion to visit Moscow. This presumably comes under the heading of insurance. There is always the possibility that the distinguished guest or guests will say something which can be useful.

The former Empress Soraya of Iran reports that she and her husband, having heard about all this, confined their conversation to safe platitudes which both felt would offend none.

Except for one thing. The Empress did mention that she intended to look, the next day, for a new fur coat. There is something about the Moscow air . . .

The next morning, by a strange coincidence, Her Imperial Majesty was presented with a full-length sable . . .

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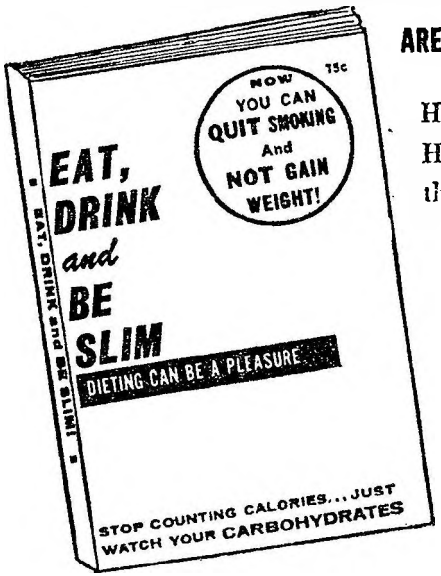

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the eunuch

by Ed Lacy

USUALLY I'm in the office by 8:30 a.m. but this morning I was leaving the house when the phone rang at 8:40. Rosie said, "Mr. Sims wants to see you, Harry. I told him you'd be in any minute."

I glanced at my wife. "Did he say what he wanted?"

"No, but he seemed anxious. Of course maybe he sounds like that all the time. He never called before. Anyway, he wants you to phone him at once. Here's the number."

I said, "Thanks, Rosie," and hung up. From the exchange it sounded like Sims' home number.

Edna, standing in the kitchen doorway, asked, "What's it about, Harry?"

"I don't know. J. A. Sims wants me to phone him," I said slowly, dialing the number. From the worried expression crossing Edna's plump face I knew we were both thinking the same

When Harry Davis retired from the police force, he had started a guard agency. He now had nearly two hundred uniformed guards working in the stores operated by the group headed by J.A. Sims. But nothing had prepared him for the proposal made to him by this man who could, in one moment, break him ... Ed Lacy, author of the explosive HARLEM UNDERGROUND *(Pyramid, 50 cents) reviewed in the March 1966 S.M, is the author of more than twenty other novels.*

thing: if Sims yanked the rug from under me, Edna and I had stayed up late last night discussing nothing.

A deep man's voice answered and before I could say, "Mr. James . . . ?" he cut in with, "Is this Harry Davis?"

'That's right, Mr. Sims. I . . ."

"Are you in your office, Mr. Davis?"

"No sir, but I'm on my way in. Is something wrong, sir?"

"Davis, are you driving?"

"I take the subway in, from Jamaica."

"Harry, can you be at the corner of 7th Avenue and 53rd Street at 9:30? I think the subway stops there."

"I'll be there, sir. Was one of the stores robbed? Or . . .?"

"Good. I'll pick you up." Sims hung up.

As I rushed out of the house Edna called, "Hon, let me know what this is all about."

I nodded as I dashed for the subway bus. Except for seeing his picture on the society pages once or twice, I didn't even know what James A. Sims looked like. Nor could I understand his meeting me on the street. If anything was wrong at the stores, he would have called me to his office, or have one of the vice presidents do it. There was always the chance one of his bright young executives had decided to put in their own security force. But why tell me *that* on a street corner?

And most of last night Edna and I had had this mild argument, over a few brews. Our boy, Gerald, had written that he wanted to work his way while studying for his Masters in Anthropology. He could get a teaching job. Edna had said, "Harry, we have the money, let's do his education up right, stake him until he finishes. If he teaches it will only take longer for him to get his degree."

"I like the idea he wants to work, be on his own."

"Harry, we're not hurting, let him concentrate on his studies.

"Okay." It had always amazed me that a couple of horses like Edna and me had turned out a skinny, owlish-looking scholar. Gerald was a good boy and I was proud of him — the first Davis to go to college. Around midnight I'd said, "Hon, you write him that he doesn't have to take any teaching job. As you say, I'm making it."

Standing in the subway, now, I wondered what I'd do if Sims took his stores away. It would be rough pinching pennies again after these two lush years. When I'd retired from the police force I had started a guard agency. My best customer was a department store using 26 of my uniformed guards. But the personnel manager was always shaking me

down, phoning me for a brace of tickets to a Broadway show any old time, or a case of booze, or other handouts.

One day I was abruptly informed that the store had been bought by a syndicate headed by J. A. Sims. They operated seven other stores in the metropolitan area. Instead of giving me the boot, Sims had used my men in all his stores. I now had 186 uniformed guards working and there never had been a hint of a kickback.

I was coining money with a small overhead. Rosie, the widow of a cop, ran the office while Eddie Parks, a detective who had lost an arm in a hold-up, and I kept an eye on the men—mostly retired cops.

At 9:20 I was on the corner when this sleek Jaguar roadster gave me the horn. I recognized the fleshy face and brushed silvery hair as the picture on the society pages. I said, "I'm Harry Davis, Mr. Sims."

"Indeed. You look like the old movie version of the burly detective. Get in, Harry." Sims had very white and good teeth for a guy his age and talked with a cultured voice. You know, like an actor.

I slid in awkwardly beside him, my 240 pounds wasn't designed for a bucket seat. I was glad Edna had insisted I buy this expensive suit. I looked as much the executive as Sims did—well, almost.

Sims headed back out on Long Island, crossing the 59th Street bridge, driving with expert ease. He said, "A car is the safest place to talk. But, I don't have to tell a detective that."

I didn't answer but felt relieved. Whatever he wanted was a personal deal, not connected with the stores. The traffic was headed the other way and once we hit the parkway the Jag did a steady 60 an hour. I wondered if we were going all the way to Montauk as I waited for him to talk.

"Harry, what do you know about the Eunuch's Eye?"

"The what? Oh, you mean the ruby taken from the museum?"

He nodded. I was too astonished to say a word, for a second. Then I added, "Nothing, Mr. Sims, except what I've read in the papers. The TV news last night said they had collared the thief."

"I want you to get it back, Harry."

I tried hard not to let my big mouth fall open.

"Contact whoever has it and offer them $100,000, if you have to go that high. No questions asked. I realize buying stolen goods is against the law, but don't worry about the ethics involved—I only want the gem in order to return it to the museum.

Did you know I gave it to the museum?"

"No sir."

Sims sighed. "Some years ago my wife was hell bent to become a member of the museum's board of directors. Frankly, one of these silly status things. The Eunuch's Eye is a 600 karat pigeon-red ruby with a bloody history. About 700 years ago a rajah struck his favorite eunuch with a whip, taking out an eye. Later he erected a statue to the eunuch with the great ruby as the sole eye. Since then people have murdered, cheated and whored for it. We knew the museum wanted the gem and I bought it for a half a million dollars. Actually it didn't cost me that much, it was a tax deduction. The point is, my wife was elected to the board and after a year she tired of the job. I became a board member. In a way, I feel responsible for the theft."

"How could that be, sir?" I asked, dizzy. When I had retired I'd merely been a run-of-the-mill detective, not Sherlock Holmes, first grade.

"Well, the museum is always strapped for money and I argued that having a round-the-clock guard of the ruby wasn't necessary. Whoever thought a stuffy museum would be robbed? Needless to add, this is strictly confidential and my name isn't to enter into things. You locate the ruby, buy it and I will return it to the museum."

"A stone that size, won't it be broken up?"

"That's your job, to buy it back before it can be broken up. And I doubt if that will happen: most likely they had a private buyer set. Some people get a bang out of owning famous objects. Like having a Picasso hanging on your living room wall only for your own eyes. Of course the ruby is priceless but I understand a thief is lucky to get 10% of the original value from stolen goods. Especially with all the publicity in the papers, you should be able to buy it back for under a hundred thousand." He made a screaming turn at an intersection which took my breath away, headed back for New York City. "I don't have to stress that time is the biggest factor in all this. You must contact whoever has the ruby before he tries to sell it."

I nodded. I hadn't paid much attention to the headlines but I knew the gem had been taken yesterday by some nutty acrobat. According to the papers he had somehow leaped across a 20 foot space to the museum room, lowered himself down to the gem room by a venetian blind cord.

"Naturally this has no connection with your security work for the stores. You will be well paid for this, plus expenses. I want

that ruby back!"

"I'll try my best, sir."

"You understand, neither my name nor the museum's enters into this. You'll be working on your own, so to speak. I'm sure you know how to handle things. When you locate the jewel, call me and I'll fly to wherever you are, with the cash. Your office is not to know about this and when you phone me, either at my office or at my home, be careful: never mention the Eunuch's Eye."

"Yes sir."

He pulled out a pigskin wallet and handed me ten $100 bills. "Openers — for expenses. The . . ."

He was speeding by Kennedy Airport now, doing 60 in a 40 mile per hour zone. I heard the siren of a motorcycle cop and Sims silently cursed. When we pulled up I *had* to make my big play, flash my Policemen's Benevolent Assoc. card as I told the young bike cop we had no idea we were speeding.

I hated doing it, I've always had a deep respect for the law and what did a fine mean to a guy like Sims? But he was impressed. The bike cop grinned, said to take it slow, waved us on. I told Sims to drop me at 3rd Avenue. As I struggled to get out of the car, Sims said, "You know they've released this bragging thief?"

"Oh. I thought they had the case sewed up," I said, stupidly, wishing I'd read the morning paper.

"They had to release him, they couldn't find the ruby. Work fast on this, Harry and keep in touch." Sims stuck out a surprisingly hard hand. I shook it, said I'd call him within hours. He drove off as I stood on the corner, feeling completely bewildered.

I called Rosie and told her I'd seen Sims, that it hadn't been important and I'd phone her later. I hung up before she could ask questions. Then I called Jack Moore, an old drinking buddy I'd shared a radio car with years ago. Jack was now a lieutenant in the Correspondence Unit of Criminal Identification, knew the inside dope on everything. He wasn't expected in until noon. I left word that I'd call him and to wait.

Then I dropped into a cafeteria for coffee to shake me awake, opened the paper and read about the theft. In many ways this was similar to the Star of India theft from the Museum of Natural History some years before. But the Eunuch's Eye was a larger stone and seemingly only one clown was involved—Buddy Star, if that was his real handle.

Buddy was hardly camera shy: there were pictures of him flexing his muscles, doing a handstand on a chair and close-ups of his rather thin but handsome face, the carefully brushed and wavy ash-blonde hair. According to the papers, which were padding and rehashing the case, Buddy had moved into a modest hotel a week ago and immediately started living it up. He had plenty of money for booze, was handsome enough to attract babes and he seemed to like company. One of his favorite tricks was to hang out of the window, by his finger tips, some 15 floors above the street. He claimed to have once been a member of the U. S. Olympic gym team and despite his heavy lushing, Buddy had been in good enough condition to walk on his hands up two flights of hotel stairs and after being picked up he had jumped over two stacked tables in a detective squad room, for the reporters.

He had boasted that only a person with his gymnastic ability could have done the robbery, openly said that he had visited the museum twice to look at the great ruby, the last visit being the day before the robbery. Buddy claimed he had been an extra in a number of movies, that he made his living by giving muscle-control and karate lessons on one of California's "muscle beaches." Buddy was a weird character: although he had hinted that he had taken the ruby—he hadn't *actually* confessed to anything.

I couldn't ask Jack Moore to let me talk to Buddy, much less offer to buy the ruby. That would be a hell of a thing for a former cop to ask. But Jack might give me the names of some of Buddy's girls. I had to start some place on this screwy case.

By the time I'd finished the papers and two cups of coffee, without thinking any clearer, it was 11:30. I called Jack, told him I'd buy him lunch. I took a cab down to the sickly-green domed building which was the ancient Police Headquarters and we went to an old fashioned bar nearby for the kind of lunch we both liked: hamburgers and beers. I told him, "Jack, I'm interested in Buddy Star. Don't ask why, but I'm interested. What can you tell me about him?"

Jack has a lean and wrinkled long face and the only surprise he showed was to give me big-eyes for a second before he said, "I'm interested in him, too. He hasn't any record. He was suspected of taking a famous Aztec jeweled dagger down in Mexico last year. Also a fantastic entry job—some joker climbed up the face of a sheer cliff to rob a villa. The Mexican police held him for a time but couldn't pin the job on Buddy. He's a little

guy, but as strong and agile as a cage of monkeys."

"The police picked him up almost immediately after the ruby was stolen. A tip?"

"Aha. A bellhop at the hotel tipped off a dick that Buddy was acting suspicious before the robbery. That's the crazy angle—Buddy made no effort to hide the fact he was interested in the ruby. He even asked one of the museum attendants if they had a booklet on the history of the jewel."

"What happens to him now?"

"In about an hour from now he'll probably be swimming on a California beach."

"The police let him leave town?"

"Stop it, Harry. We found no prints at the museum. We searched his room. We can account for almost every hour of his time, except for a few hours on the night of the theft and we couldn't find a smell of the ruby. He has a big lawyer who got him out on bail. All we could do was hold him as a material witness. He put up a grand for bail, in cash, took a jet to California three hours ago."

"Has he really got money?"

Jack shrugged. "Mostly flash. I doubt if he's loaded."

"Who's paying this lawyer?"

Jack gave me a pained look. "Come on, Harry, big name lawyers were climbing over the precinct house to defend him. The publicity. How else can a lawyer advertise?"

"Jack, I'm not asking for favors, but can you give me the name of the bellhop who tipped off the detective?"

"Harry, you know better than to ask that." Jack winked. "But the newspapers said it was the oldest bellhop in the hotel. I understand they only have three working there. How come you're interested? Buddy do some shoplifting, too?"

"I'm just interested," I said, calling for the tab. Jack was a good enough friend not to ask any more questions.

The bellhop was a baldheaded guy with the nose of a rummy. He told me, "I don't have to ask if you're a cop, you look like one. But I already told the police all I know."

I gave him ten bucks. "I'm a private cop, interested in this from another angle. Tell *me* what you know."

"Well, like I told my friend Danny, the detective, I was suspicious of this joker from the go. Too wild. He was spending money like it was going out of style. And a real nut. First he tells me he's a famous Hollywood star traveling under a phony name. Then he says he's a stunt man, used to do all of Allan Ladd's stunts. Well, I knew he was a liar because he told me

he was Steve Mason, the ex-fighter. So Friday night there's bouts at the Garden. It was on TV and they introduced Steve Mason and some ex-champs from the ring. Mason has black hair and has put on weight. Buddy is a natural born liar. He acted the great lover and had a dozen broads around him. But some of them told me he was strictly a talker. Same with his drinking; bottles all around but he was always sober."

I thanked the bellhop and picked up an afternoon paper on my way downtown. There was a picture of Buddy doing a one-armed handstand on the plane steps. He had gone to a town called San Gope on the California coast.

I made reservations on a 6 p.m. jet, called Rosie and told her Gerald was sick and I would be out of town for a few days. When she asked what Sims wanted I said, "Oh that, some garbage about giving the security men red uniforms. You and Eddie can run the office okay."

Next I called Edna and I told her to pack my bag, that we'd have supper at the airport. Then I phoned Sims, told him I was leaving for San Gope, asked, "About that painting, how can I be certain I'm getting the real thing? I don't know beans about art and don't want to buy a phony."

"Don't worry, Harry, before I buy the Dufy sketch, I'll examine it. You just see if the art dealers have it."

I picked Edna up at the house and gave her $500 of the expense money, to hold. As she drove me to the airport I told her what Sims had wanted. Edna had been a cop's wife long enough to keep her mouth shut. She said, "But Harry, you're going on 56, too old for action."

"Honey, I'm out to buy, not to collar somebody. There won't be any rough stuff."

"I don't know. In the papers this Buddy Star looked like a nasty little man."

"Don't worry, Buddy never took the ruby. His job was to put on a big show while somebody else stole the gem. The way I got the picture Buddy is merely a frustrated big shot, enjoys showing off but is probably a front—an office boy. But through him I'll find the real thief, make my offer."

"I still don't like it," Edna said. "Harry, your back has been acting up and . . . and . . . I just don't like it."

That was the first dumb thing I'd heard Edna say in a long time. When I was on the jet I kept thinking about that—Edna is usually very level-headed and she hadn't said a word that what I was doing was breaking the law. Nor had she seen the main

point: if I *didn't* pull this off I could probably kiss the department store work goodbye, be back to the pennyante hustling, supplying guards for dances.

All she had said was she didn't like it, hadn't even mentioned that I could be in way over my head. I not only didn't like it—I was scared stiff.

Due to the difference in time I reached San Gope early in the evening and there wasn't much to see. The next morning wasn't any better. I never was a small town man. I was staying in a modest motel, the only hotel or motel in the little town. San Gope had a short main street with a modern supermarket, too many bars and a few gift shops and an art gallery. The town was an odd package of old, retired folks and young bearded artists and bearded would-be artists, plus some oddly dressed chicks. There was a clean sandy beach on which a number of young men and gals, none of them wearing much more than old fashioned athletic supporters, were lifting weights. Even the gals were hoisting barbells. But mostly they all kept striking a pose.

I'm not knocking San Gope: I'd been wearing an overcoat a dozen hours before and now I was walking along the beach in pants and a sport shirt I had bought. It was a nice day, with the blue Pacific on one side and palm trees and flowers on the other. I'd long distanced Edna to give her my address and she had sounded a little nervous—probably had forgotten the time difference and had expected to hear from me sooner. I'd also phoned Sims. He'd told me he would be in San Francisco late in the afternoon, on business, gave me the name of his hotel there.

Finding Buddy Star was easier than locating the Pacific. Buddy was the center of an admiring group of sun-tanned men and women. He sure was a well-built cat and watching him work out on the parallel bars near the life guard's stand, I knew Buddy was a damn good acrobat. He was a runt, maybe an inch or two over five feet and the over-handsome face under the sun-bleached blonde hair was weak—in contrast to the rugged and powerful body.

Sitting on a newspaper I took off my shoes and socks, rolled my pants up to let the sun hit my legs, opened my shirt wide. It was a very enjoyable way to watch a guy.

But it seemed Buddy was going to spend the whole day on the beach. A photographer took his picture while two reporters interviewed him and he ate it up. Despite the reporters and the fine looking babes, Buddy was watch-

ing me. In my own way I too was a standout—I was the oldest and largest guy there, plus the only one with a pale skin.

By noon my face and neck had turned lobster red and I had to leave the beach. Picking up my shoes and socks, I started for the sidewalk bench. Buddy called out, "Hey copper!" a grin on his thin lips. The group around him chuckled.

I stopped and asked in a mild voice, "Are you calling me?"

Buddy strutted to within a few feet of me and asked loudly, "Don't you know you have New York City copper written all over your fat puss?"

"Only goes to show how false first impressions are—I'm not a police officer." In a lower voice I added," I'd like to talk to you. Alone, Mr. Star." I took a few steps and he followed me.

When we were out of listening range of the others, I whispered, "Mr. Star, I'm a private detective. I'm authorized to offer fifty grand for the Eunuch's Eye. No questions asked.

Buddy laughed, even his blue eyes were amused. "You think I'm some kind of a dummy? You trying to get me to admit I took the damn stone?"

"Come off it, Buddy, I *know* you didn't do the job." He was still smiling but his baby-blues told me I'd hit a nerve. "However I think you might know who has the ruby. Tell them I'm interested in buying. Fast, cash and no questions."

"Are you trying to frame me?" This was said loudly, for the ears of his friends a dozen yards away. The almost naked girls giggled, shaking a lot of things.

"Stop the act. I'm here on business only and my business is to buy the ruby." I turned and walked away. He came at me like a ball player sliding into first. His feet hooked around mine and I sat on the sand with quite a noise.

Buddy bounded to his feet with a real spring, the cocky grin on his tanned face. I got up slowly, shaking the sand out of my shoes. I whispered, "You ought to respect your elders, sonny."

I said it low to get him in closer, holding both my shoes in my right hand. I always had a fast left hook.

"What was that, pops?" Buddy asked, mockingly cupping his ear with his right hand, stepping in. I hooked his ridged stomach right above the brief trunks.

A gut wallop takes the starch out of anybody. Air burst out of Buddy's wide open mouth as he sank to the sand, folding like a sick cat. I said loudly, "I said you ought to learn how to respect your elders, sonny." Walking toward the bench I heard a girl scream, "Filthy fuzz brute!"

Brushing sand from between

my toes, I watched the circle of semi-nude tanned young men and women move to reform around Buddy. He'd be sitting there for quite a few minutes.

I walked into a drug store and bought suntan lotion. I looked as if I was wearing a lobster-red scarf. I stopped at the soda counter for a sandwich and a orange drink. About the time I finished eating a new radio car double-parked in front of the store. A middle-aged cop in a snappy deep-blue uniform with a dazzling gold badge, strolled in. Nodding at the clerk he told me, "Mister, I run a clean town, don't stand for our citizens being assaulted."

I paid my check and got up, had a half a foot on him. "Don't you tell your citizens about it being poor manners to knock down an older man?"

"Look, if you New York City police think you're dealing with a hick cop, I'll run your fat butt out of San Gope!"

"I'm not a police officer and I never called you a hick," I said, picking my words carefully. "A beach full of people saw Buddy Star tackle me, for no reason."

"Reason? Offering to buy stolen property is against the law."

"I never offered to buy anything."

"Buddy says you did, that you were trying to frame him."

"He's a liar." It was only Buddy's word against mine, although I didn't doubt his word would carry the most weight here. There was a moment of awkward silence. I added, "I'm merely a tourist, seeing the sights."

The local law still didn't say anything. He sure had a pretty uniform but the shield—like a saucer. Finally I asked, "Are you holding me for anything?"

"Naw, I came in to give you a warning. Watch yourself."

"Thank you. I will." I walked outside and rubbed sun tan lotion on my red neck and face. I smelled like a perfume factory.

It took a while for the law to leave the drug store, he was having a soda. One thing I learned over the years: cops stick together. So when he finally came out I showed him my Police Association card and said, "I'm retired and thinking of settling down in California. I didn't mean to cause you any work, officer or . . ."

"Tom Hansen." He held out a lumpy hand. "I was on the L.A. force for 9 years. Well, so you're thinking of settling here?" It was amazing how friendly he'd become.

"Yeah. I like the climate and I'm looking around."

He pointed at the radio car. "Get in . . . Harry. I'll show you about."

He really gave me the full

tour, with a running commentary. "We got us a little of everything in San Gope, Harry. Up there in those hills, the houses hanging on the cliffs, you'll find some mighty big people, money-wise. Movie producers, oil men and the like. Never see them but their taxes help a lot. I wouldn't build on a cliff—there's rattlers up in those hills and any kind of earthquake tremor and those houses. . . . Funny, 20 years ago San Gope was nothing but a sleepy village with a few tourists coming for a day's charter boat fishing. Then the old folks started living here and the wealthy began buying estates. Next a few artists arrived and now the muscle boys. I got a four man police force but it's rough keeping any good men. The pay isn't the highest and there's no pension."

"Seems like a quiet town. Any trouble?"

"Hardly any but San Gope needs more officers. These artists live near the beach: one real storm and their shacks will be flooded. Oh, they get a little drunk and look like slobs and I hate to think what goes on inside the shacks — but they keep to themselves. As I said, we rarely see the estate people. The old folks, well, they're just old folks. Weekends we get a lot of fishermen and sometimes they get loud and wrong. As for the beach crowd, they cut up a little, mostly rough house stuff on the beach. But being on this health kick, they don't drink or raise the usual hell. If you ask me, I think a gal is safe with any of 'em. Crazy, ain't it, all those muscles and most of 'em are queers?"

"Yeah. Of course the papers back East are full of Buddy Star. Is he really a crook?"

Tom Hansen took off his gold-braided cap to scratch his bald head. His head was like a pale white skull cap above the tanned face. "I know Buddy pretty well and he's harmless. His trouble is, he was born 30 years too late."

"How's that?" I asked politely. We were riding through a colony of little, neat cottages, the elderly couples sitting on the lawns giving the street an almost institutional air.

"Buddy wants to be a big man, fame-wise. Years ago the movies would have snapped up a Buddy, made him rich as a second Douglas Fairbanks or an Errol Flynn type. He's a damn fine stunt man. But the movies are dead now and Buddy ain't any real actor. So he works out on the beach. Often he takes off for a few weeks. Lives comfortable."

"How?"

Tom glanced at me in the windshield mirror. On the car radio a man said, "Tom, Mrs. Lister phoned in, her poodle is lost again."

Hanson picked up the mike.

"Okay, Jed, I'll keep an eye out for the pest. He's probably down at the beach swimming. I wish she'd keep the mutt on a leash." Then he turned to me. "How come you're so interested in Buddy, Harry?"

"Like I told you, he's all over the headlines back East, that museum robbery."

"Buddy's mostly hot air. One time he got fresh with me when I flagged him down for speeding, started telling me what he could do with a judo chop, karate, all that stuff. All I did was take out my billy and ask him if he'd ever seen a guy worked over? Buddy damn near fainted. What I think is this: Buddy has some rich character keeping him, that's where he gets his money from, where he goes when he leaves here. I told you, most of these muscles lads are faggots."

We were now riding along the ocean front. As we neared a pier, Hansen laughed and pointed to something black swimming a 100 yards out. I asked, "A seal?"

"Mrs. Lister's poodle. He's nuts about the water. He'll come back and run along the sand, then go home. All these cabin cruisers are charter fishing boats." Tom waved at a small, plump man: the deeply tanned face under the fishing cap looked familiar as the man waved back.

Tom asked, "Know who that is, Harry? Steve Mason, the ex-fighter. Makes out good with his boat, lot of people still remember when he was a welterweight contender. Quite a few former athletes live . . ."

"He was in the Garden, in New York City, a few days ago," I cut in.

Tom nodded. "Sure. Every time there's an important fight, they pay his way to be introduced from the ring. Great advertising for his boat. I wish I'd seen Steve fight."

"I saw him a few times. One of the cleverest. Nobody ever laid a glove on him in the ring, so he gets hit in the eye by a baseball some kids were throwing at a country club, got a detached retina and his ring days were over. He was about ready for the champ, too."

"Steve's a regular guy."

I nodded. "I was at the Yankee Stadium when they ran a benefit for him. Seems he didn't know about it—he was in the hospital — and when they gave him the check for five grand, he said he didn't need the money. Gave it to the cancer society, I think."

"That's Steve, modest and level-headed. He has a swell wife and a nice kid. Harry, I'll take you to a real estate guy who'll show you some good cottages. Live inland and you can get one cheap. You won't find a finer or cleaner town than San Gope in

all . . ."

"Best I hold off on seeing any houses. I mean, that's the wife's department and she's still back East. I'm only looking."

"Okay. I'll take you to your motel. But think about settling here. I can use an experienced police officer. We operate on a tight budget but I could work you in as a special—weekends and a few hours here and there. It wouldn't be any strain on you and you could make $40 or $50 a week. It ain't much money, although I don't take home much more than that myself. But with your pension, you'll live well. My wife will get your wife into the Ladies Village Aid Society, so there will be plenty to keep her busy."

As he stopped in front of the motel he said, "Think about settling here, Harry. San Gope is a healthy little town. I guess your kids are grown."

"Our boy's in college. I'll think about it. Nice meeting you, Tom."

As I got out of the radio car he said, "Harry, some ex-cops carry a gun. We don't allow it here. If you have one, let me hold it."

"I'm not packing anything."

"Good. How long will you be staying with us?"

"I don't know, a few days. This is a kind of vacation for me."

"I'll take you fishing, got my own skiff. And I'll introduce you to Marty Prince, the old cowboy star. He lives up in the hills with his horses. And Lefty Munez, the ex-pitcher, runs a chicken farm not far from San Gope. Harry, how about coming over to the house tonight for supper?"

"Thanks, Tom, but the sun has sort of knocked me out. But I'll keep in touch."

I was glad to be rid of him, he was pressing too hard. Nor was I kidding about the sun; I was happy to stretch out on my bed, neck and head burning. As I dozed off I saw myself in the fancy blue uniform — chasing poodles. I forced myself to think about Buddy Star. Taking the risks he did, being the front, a guy with his great vanity would only do that for a man he respected a great deal. Sure, for the money, too, but being so vain he wouldn't play second fiddle to anybody he didn't admire . . . or was frightened stiff of.

I awoke at about 5 p.m., a little ashamed at sleeping on the job and having to face up to the fact I was old—needed the rest. After a shave and a shower my neck was still a cooked-red. Belting Buddy had been a rock play. He was my only lead to the ruby and I should have buttered him up instead of losing my temper.

Leaving the motel I went into

the bars and restaurants, looking for Buddy and also my supper. The first place was a seedy coffee house with solemn faced babes and bearded young fellows reading books or merely staring at each other in a kind of daze. Jeans, dirty T-shirts and bare feet was the correct dress in this morgue.

I stopped at a plain little stool joint for a good fish supper, then tried two dingy bars and finally the best bar in San Gope. Tom had been wrong about the muscle lads not throwing their heads back: Buddy was sipping champagne at a table with three gals and a long-haired joker with a bull neck. Buddy wore sharp slacks and an expensive and loud sport shirt. The girls' blouses ended an inch or so above their belly buttons, while the hip-rider tight pants started a few inches below the navel. Some mighty soft belly curves were exposed.

Steve Mason, in a dark business suit, was at the bar with a cute blonde of about 30, both drinking beers. I got the impression the blonde was his wife. Walking over to Buddy's table I held out my hand, made my pitch: "I'm sorry we tangled on the beach today, Buddy."

He flashed a big grin up at me as his hand lightly slapped mine. "Sit down, pops." He turned to the others. "You remember pops, he Sunday-punched me this afternoon."

I gave them a silly smile. "Guess I lost my head when you tackled me."

"Come on, lap up some champagne." Buddy kicked a chair out with his Italian-styled loafers. "No hard feelings. I admire the way you hit, for your age. That's a fact, old man."

I sat down and drank champagne, which never impressed me, asked, "Am I butting into a party or a celebration?"

"Pops, listen to your mouth. Man, champagne is my drink. I have fizz every night. But not with the fuzz." Buddy winked at me and laughed loudly.

They talked about water skiing and I sat like a lump, trying to figure how to get Buddy alone. This was solved for me minutes later when, during a heated discussion whether a double tank SCUBA diving outfit was easier to handle than a large single tank model, the juke box played some jerky music that moved Buddy and his bull-necked pal to get up and dance. The remaining gal looked at me and I said, "Don't bother asking, honey. The Frug, the Monkey, the rest of these new steps, are foreign words to me."

She smiled, a real pretty young gal with the deep sunburn matching her auburn hair. I kept my eyes away from her bare belly and felt like an old goat. Finish-

ing her class of champagne she said, "Excuse me but bubble water makes me tinkle."

Crossing the dance floor to a door cleverly marked FILLIES, she said something to Buddy's girl and they both headed for the john. Buddy danced alone for a second, or maybe he didn't know the gal had left him, before returning to the table.

I said, "About what I told you on the beach, Buddy, I'm still offering fifty grand, no questions asked."

"You off on that again, pops? I don't have it."

"Let's say you just might have somehow heard who has the ruby. Take me to whoever has the gem and there's five grand in it for you, whether I buy or not."

"Five fat big bills?" he repeated, maybe mocking me.

I nodded. "Cash on the line."

For a second he stared at me, then threw his head back and roared with laughter—a hammy gesture. All stage people are part nuts. When I was starting out as a patrolman, we once raided a stag show and as we took the naked babes out to the paddy wagon, one of them yelled, "You wait until I fix-up my face before I pass that crowd out there on the sidewalk."

Buddy got up and walked over to the bar. I followed him. "It's easy money, if you can deliver, Buddy," I said.

He let out this hammy laughter and told Steve Mason, "Hey Stevie, you see how famous I am, pops, here, offered me five grand in cash to take him to the Eunuch's Nose, or whatever they call that damn gem. Pops is a buyer." Of course Buddy had to say all this loudly.

Mason said, "Well, if you know where it is, that's nice folding money, take it."

"If I knew who had it, after all the trouble it's caused me, I'd bust whoever has it on the kisser and take the ruby," Buddy said, striking a fighting pose. His girl came out of the john and as he started for her, I caught his arm, said softly, "In case you should be able to help me, I'm at the motel."

"Hang up, dads, you're boring me with your stupid chatter!" Buddy said with a sudden snarl.

I turned to Steven Mason. It was remarkable that after 80 bouts he still had this baby-face, not a mark on him. I said, "I saw you fight several times back East, Mr. Mason. You were a joy to watch."

He smiled. "Thanks. This is my wife, May."

As I introduced myself I noticed his bad eye was on the yellowish side. Mason said, "Of course you're a cop."

"Retired. I know somebody who's anxious to return the ruby to the museum. I'm . . . eh . . .

sort of doing him a favor. Or trying to."

"And you think Buddy stole the ruby?"

"No. But I think he might know something about it."

Mason shrugged. His shoulders were still clean, the weight he'd picked up was around his hips. "From the little I've read in the papers, I think you've traveled in the wrong direction. The crook should be heading for Europe, to Amsterdam, try to sell it over there."

"Maybe. I was heading for California anyway, so I thought I'd try to help my friend."

Mason smiled. "If your friend can pay five grand for a tip, he shouldn't need help."

May Mason said, "Imagine anybody walking around with a jewel worth . . . I think the papers said it was priceless? Steve once wanted to buy me a mink stole but I told him I'd only be uneasy wearing it. I mean, brush up against a nail or something and there goes a hundred dollars. I've no use for expensive things."

"That was never my problem," I said. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"Thanks, but we're leaving. I have a party going on on my boat at 6 a.m.," Steve said.

"And our baby-sitter has a 9 o'clock date," May added.

They left minutes later and I remained at the bar, sipping a beer, watching Buddy order more champagne. It was after 8 and there didn't seem any point in my hanging around: I'd said all I could to Buddy. Also my neck burned and I was sleepy again.

As I paid for the beer the bartender said, "Here's a tip, put a wet tea bag on your neck. It will take out all the burn."

I thanked him, waved at Buddy and left the bar. The night was comfortably warm with a salty tang to the air and the sky full of stars. I walked along the short main street, looking for a newspaper. All the stores, except the bars, were shut.

The motel clerk gave me one and as I went to my tiny cottage, I wondered if it was worth renting a car. If nothing shook with Buddy I'd have to start shaking down San Gope, which was an impossible job for a stranger to do in a few days.

I had the folded newspaper under my right arm as I unlocked the door and the second I stepped into the dark room, I had this feeling I wasn't alone. As I started to back out, my sore neck was clobbered. My fat head seemed to orbit as I sunk into a blinding white glare. I hooked with my left wildly, felt it strike something thin and hard, like a bone giving.

I came to, seeing a couple of pink balloons between me and the ceiling light. Then I got the

faces of the desk clerk and Tom Hanson in focus. I sat up, blinking. My room was a mess: the bed had been taken apart, drawers dumped, my one overnight bag open. An amateur had ransacked the room.

I rubbed the back of my neck and nearly went out again. The clerk asked, "Are you allright, Mr. Davis? Another guest passed your cottage a few minutes ago, saw the open door. This is the first robbery we've had in over a year."

"What happened, Harry," Tom asked, his gold badge blinding me. "You aren't cut but there's blood on the carpet."

I got to my feet, Tom helping me. My noggin was still soaring a little. My wrist watch said it was 9:16. I felt of my pockets—my wallet was gone. That figured. I said, "Somebody was laying for me, gave me a judo chop on the neck. But I'm pretty sure I busted his nose, by luck, before I went out."

"A broken nose? That will give us something to look for. I'll put that on the air. Do you need a doctor, Harry?"

I shook my head, a mistake. Tom went out to his radio car while I waited for my head to come down on my neck again. The clerk stared at the blood-stained rug with sad eyes. I went into the bathroom to shock myself awake with cold water. The knuckles of my left were swollen and bruised and the lump on the back of my neck said I'd been sapped, which is hardly a cure for sun burn.

I asked the clerk, "Did anybody check in tonight?"

"No sir, you were the last guest to join us."

Tom came in. "I've notified our two doctors to be on the lookout for a busted nose. Also the hospitals in Los Angeles. This is the first mugging we've had in months. How much were you carrying, Harry?"

"My wallet's gone, with some credit cards and about $260 in cash."

Tom pushed his fancy police cap back to scratch his pale dome. "You don't look like ready money, Harry, odd a punk should lay for you."

"Yeah." Obviously Buddy Star thought I was carrying five grand. I buttoned my shirt and started for the door. Tom asked, "Where you going?"

"To get some air."

"Harry, take it easy. If you start having headaches call me and I'll take you to a doc."

"Thanks, Tom."

Buddy Star was still guzzling champagne with the three gals and bull neck: no broken noses. He waved to me as I sat at the bar, ordered a beer. The bartender said, "Did you try tea bags, mister? Your neck looks better."

I silently told him to shut up. Digging in my pocket for change I found I just could pay for the beer. I asked, "Has Buddy been on the bubble water all the time?"

He nodded. "While I don't sell champagne every night, I wish he'd leave. I had to stop him from doing a wild dance with one of his dames a little while ago."

I tried recalling who else had been in the bar when Buddy had shot off his mouth about my offering him five grand. Of course the barkeep could have phoned a pal to tell him about this alleged soft touch. Or bull neck or any of the girls could have.

One thing didn't need any thinking about: I was broke. I walked over to Buddy, who asked, "Back for more fizz water, pops? We . . ."

"Lend me a dime."

He stared at me with open mouth. Then he laughed and pulled some change from his pocket. "That was a stopper, pops."

I took a dime and went into the phone booth, called Edna long distance, reversing the charges. While I was waiting for the call I did some expert detective work: I found Steve Mason's address in the local phone book.

A man answered my phone and I silently cursed—at a time like this I had to get a wrong number. I asked, "Who's this? Is Edna there?"

"Dad! It's me, Gerald."

"What are you doing home?"

"I had a few days off at the university. How are you?"

"Fine. I'm glad you're home." I didn't like Edna being alone in the house. Then I remembered how nervous she had sounded on the phone this morning. "Gerry, is mama okay?"

"Oh sure. She's getting out of bed. I'll put her on. She told me you're on a case. How's it going?"

"Lousy."

Edna asked, "Harry, anything wrong?"

"Hon, wire me a couple of hundred bucks at the motel. I lost my wallet."

"Oh my. I'll do it at once. Are you sure you're allright?"

"I'm fine. How long is Gerald going to be home?"

"A few days. Probably until the end of the week."

"Maybe I'll be back before he leaves. Are you okay?"

"Of course. How's things coming out there?"

"Nothing breaking, yet. Hon, get that money on it's way tonight. Let Gerald do it. And call Rosie in the morning, have her report my credit cards are missing. I'll phone you again, tomorrow."

"Yes. Honey, be careful."

I went back to Buddy's table and returned his dime. Then I

asked the bartender where Grove Avenue was and left the bar. Mason had a ranch house with the usual large picture window, all set back on a neat lawn. There was a dull light on, probably the TV. My ring brought the sound of slippered feet and May Mason opened the door, looked startled on seeing me. She pulled her robe around her as I asked, "Is Steve home, Mrs. Mason?"

"No. I thought he was ringing the bell, wondered why he didn't use his key. He's getting bait ready on the boat, should be here soon. What did you want to see him about?"

"I . . . I thought I might go fishing tomorrow, if he hasn't a full party. Sorry I disturbed you."

I headed for the dock. While I couldn't see a guy like Mason mugging me, still five grand wasn't pin money.

The pier was dark except for the street light and the moon. The boats bobbed in a slight swell and there wasn't a soul around. I was about to leave but my neck was throbbing and I was mad. I walked down the pier until I came to a sign with Mason's name, jumped awkwardly down onto his fishing boat, the thin outriggers waving at the moon. I called his name, stepped down into the cockpit, leaned against a fishing chair. The cabin door was swinging with the motion of the boat. I stuck my head in, went down two steps and stumbled over something soft. I lit a match. Mason was dressed in the suit he'd worn at the bar. His face was still unmarked but there were two bullet holes in his white shirt.

San Gope has three detention cells in a two-story concrete block added to the squat old building which is the city hall, post office and police and fire headquarters. The cells were clean and bugless. I was in the upper one and hardly looking at it with professional interest. It was about 4 a.m. and through the one window, against the bars, I watched dawn struggling to break loose out on the Pacific horizon.

Under other circumstances it would have been comical, poor Tom Hanson had been more disappointed with me than angry. He'd said, "Jeez, Harry, *don't* settle here! You haven't been here a day and you're a regular crime wave—first robbery we've had in months and now our first murder. The bartender says you asked how to find Grove Avenue and Mrs. Mason told us you were asking for Steve. Exactly what the hell were you doing on his boat so late at night?"

"I told you, I was out for air, thought I'd ask Mason if I could

go out on his boat in the morning, "I'd said. I sure wasn't going to face any murder rap for Sims —but from the darkness of the blood around the bullet holes in Mason's chest I was sure he'd been shot at least an hour before I found him. In the morning, when the Medical Examiner did the autopsy, I should be cleared. I had a good enough alibi, at about the time of the actual shooting Tom had been shaking me awake on the motel floor. So I didn't tell him about offering the five grand to Buddy and I was praying the bartender or Mason's wife wouldn't mention it.

Tom Hanson had snapped, "You're holding out on me, Harry. Are you sure you didn't have a gun? Maybe that's what the thief took, used it on Steve!"

"Make sense, Tom, I haven't carried a gun since I retired from the force. And even if I had one, what would I gain now by not telling you about it?"

"I don't know. I don't know a lot of things about you! But I'm sure going to find out." Tom had left my cell and I'd sat on the cot, wondering what I'd stepped into.

I've never believed in coincidences so Steve's killing had to be hooked up with the ruby. In fact, I realized I'd been dumb, had overlooked the obvious: a nut like Buddy Star would only act as a front for a guy he respected and everybody admired ex-fighter Steve Mason. Mason knew he was going to be at the Garden in New York City last Friday, so undoubtedly he was the one who'd actually taken the Eunuch's Eye while Buddy confused the police with his big talk and clown act. But why had Steve been . . .?

There was a small noise outside the cell window and then hands grabbed the bars and Buddy's handsome face was framed by the concrete opening. I asked, "How the devil did you climb up here? The wall's as smooth as glass?"

"Never mind how," Buddy panted, his baby-blue eyes overbright. "Copper, you still want the ruby?"

"Yes."

"Wait in your motel room for me and have the fifty grand. I'll be there by morning."

"Look, it will take me time to get the money and . . ."

"Pops, time is something I haven't got. Twenty grand? A deal?"

"Okay."

"I'll be at your room in the morning. Don't have company or try to cross me, old man."

"I won't. But I'll probably still be right here in the morning."

Buddy blinked and for a moment, in the dim light of the cell, I thought he was crying. "No,

you didn't kill Stevie."

"Did you?"

He called me a name, said harshly, "But I know who did and I'll get them! I really will!" His face and blonde hair disappeared from the window. "Wait for me in your room."

"Buddy!" I called up to the window. "Make it in the afternoon. I'll have the money by then."

"Just wait for me and have the dough, pops." The hands left the window and I heard him drop the 20 or more feet to the ground below.

At 9 a.m. when I asked a young cop sporting another snappy blue uniform and large silver shield about breakfast, Tom Hanson opened my cell door and snapped, "Buy your own breakfast!" He looked drawn and in need of a shave. "The doc places the time of death at 9:30 p.m. and you hadn't left the motel by then. Also, from the lack of blood stains, Mason was shot elsewhere and dumped on his boat."

"Then, I'm free to go?"

Tom sighed. "There's a money order waiting for you at the Western Union office downstairs. You're free and I want you to go—get the hell out of my town! I still think you're holding out on me but I've checked with New York, know you are a retired officer, that you have your own agency back East. I can put my hands on you, if I need you. Just don't be around town by noon, Harry!"

"Checking out time at the motel is 3 p.m."

"Okay, okay! Don't be in San Gope for supper!"

Edna had wired me $300 and since I didn't have any identification, Tom vouched for me and I got the cash. While ordering breakfast at the drug store I called Sims in San Francisco. He told me, "Splendid work, Harry. I'm surprised you can get the ruby for only twenty thousand, but naturally I'm delighted. I'll meet you at the Los Angeles airport, at noon."

As my license was lost with my wallet, I couldn't rent a car but L.A. was less than an hour by bus. When I stopped at the motel to change my shirt the desk clerk stared at me with surprise, as if he hadn't expected to see me again in life. When I told him I was keeping the room for another day he said, "You see, Mr. Davis, I have a reservation for your room, received some days before you . . ."

"Stop it. There's at least 5 empty cottages in the motel right this second. You might talk yourself into a law suit."

The bus station was the newspaper and candy store across from the city hall. While I was waiting, Tom came out of his

office, looking worse than he had in the morning. He held out my wallet. "It was found on the beach an hour ago. The cash is gone but your papers and credit cards are there. We've no report of a broken nose as yet. Goodbye, Harry." The sad voice had the tone of a friend betrayed.

"I'll be back in a couple of hours, only going to L.A."

The tired face turned pink. "Be out of here by 6 p.m.! I mean that, Harry. If I see your big self around one second after 6, I'll run you out of town, so help me!"

I gave up trying for sleep on the bus. I could understand Tom being sore: I didn't care for myself very much, either. This was my first time on the other side of the law and I felt like a two bit punk for not telling Tom about Buddy knowing who had killed Mason.

I was at the airport a half hour before Sims arrived. Steve's murder rated the 4th page of the papers. I read it as I phoned Rosie that I had my credit cards. Sims came out of a private plane wearing a houndstooth sport jacket which must have cost a couple of hundred and dark slacks, looked the picture of the casual upper bracket executive. In a coffee shop booth he slipped me a bulky envelope, said there was two hundred $100 bills in it. I asked, "Aren't you coming up to San Gope, to look at the ruby? I don't know a real ruby from first base, Mr. Sims."

"I don't see the need and I have an important appointment in San Francisco this afternoon with some Japanese manufacturers. Since you're dealing with Buddy Star, we can assume it's the stolen gem. When you . . ."

"Why assume anything, Mr. Sims? After all, he's only taking twenty bills, so the stone may be a phony."

"But you said yourself you have no idea when he'll show up and I can't put off my business this afternoon. Harry, when you have the ruby come directly to my hotel in San Francisco. If I'm not in, I'll be there from 6 p.m. on, waiting for you. I want you to know I truly appreciate the speed with which you did the job and the low price. Harry, I can assure you there will be a handsome fee for this."

Sim was a real operator; I almost had to admire the way he didn't ask questions.

On the bus back to San Gope I felt uneasy, perhaps because of the cash I was carrying. Also I kept wondering if Buddy would really show. I reached the motel at 2 p.m. sharp. After locking the door I put the money envelope behind the toilet paper in the bathroom, stretched out on the bed, lay there thinking lazy thoughts.

Edna and I had talked about taking a trip, like a cruise to Europe, when Gerald finished college. Now, with the grand, at least, Sims would pay, we could take it right away. Rosie and Eddie could run the office for a month. But I had a hunch I'd never enjoy the trip, this smelt of blood money. It was a hell of a thing, I'd been the kind of cop who had refused Christmas presents from the storekeepers on my beat and now, when I was retired, I'd become a . . .

My window was open and Buddy Star suddenly vaulted into the room, landing neatly and silently on the rug. He was wearing blue slacks and a torn white sweater; there was a small bruise near his lower lip and his right hand was lightly bandaged. But the ash-blonde hair was carefully combed and the blue eyes were hard and bright. He sat on the bed. "You got the money, dads?" he asked, glancing around the cottage, his voice high.

"Where's the ruby?"

Buddy casually pulled what looked like a small red egg from his pocket, juggled it on his hand. We both watched the sun sparkling on the many planes. I got the envelope from the bathroom, fingered the ruby as Buddy quickly counted the money. I kept feeling of the gem as if I had the smallest idea of what I was doing. Buddy said, "Don't worry, pops, that's the stone taken from the museum. The bastard, he brought in two goons to kill Steve. The murdering bastard! With all his loot, he had no reason to cross us. I'm only sorry I didn't get him, too!"

"Why did Mason become a jewel thief?" I asked as I told myself the less I knew the better off I'd be. "I thought he was making out with his fishing boat?"

"He was, but Stevie used to take out a lot of rich cats. Some of them were queer for owning famous jewels or paintings. I don't know the kind of a kick it gives them, but it must be a big charge. One of them mentioned how much he wanted a jeweled, gold Aztec dagger some other wealthy joker owned down in Acapulco, said he'd give ten grand to get it. We got it for him. We always did jobs with a buyer in mind. No fuss, no talking. Like the Eunuch's Eye. Two hundred grand the double-crossing . . ." Buddy got up and started for the window. "Pops, remember, you never saw me. I'll be long gone from here by . . ."

"How did Steve take this?" I asked, watching the ruby sparkle in the sun like a toy.

"My God, it was a cinch. He hid in the men's room of the museum, came out during the night and used a glass cutter to open the case. All there was to

it. He walked out in the morning. You guessed the beauty of our plan, I put on the act, the old razzle-dazzle: I actually lowered myself down the museum wall to the window, left rope marks and all that—but I never took the ruby, so the more the fuzz investigated the less they could pin on me." Buddy laughed, high, nervous laughter. "You see pops, I was a false front all my life, too small to be a professional athlete, except as an acrobat and there's no money in that. But last night, I became a *real big man!* I found karate can kill, allright. I broke the necks of those two goons. They never expected anybody would come up the cliff, but I did!"

Buddy was standing by the window, thinking aloud as he gazed up at a modernistic house clinging to the side of a sheer cliff. "It was the first real thing I ever did on my own and it made me feel like a giant. Goodbye, pops."

He actually dived out the window, did a flip in mid-air to land on his feet. He picked up a small suitcase near a palm tree, ran out of the yard.

I stared at the ruby. It seemed stupid, all the bloodshed this had caused over the years. Gem, a rare jewel and all that, it was still only a hunk of useless rock, or whatever makes up a ruby.

Wrapping it carefully in a handkerchief I put it in my inside coat pocket. Then I packed quickly, paid the bill and walked to the bus station. It would be faster to take the L.A. bus, plane from there to San Francisco. Tom Hanson was watching me from inside his store front police station. He still looked sour. He'd explode when he found he had two more murders on his hands. I was glad I had my bus stubs to L.A. and back, from the morning. I'd kept them to put on my expense sheet. They'd also be an alibi, if I needed one. I looked away from Tom, ashamed again to find myself thinking like a punk.

A kid came along selling ice cream. Buying a cone I asked, "Who owns that big house up there in the hills?" I was pointing to another one, not *the* house on the cliff. The kid proudly told me it was built by a movie producer. Then, as I expected, he pointed out the other homes of the wealthy. The cliff house, according to him, belonged to a Mr. Fleming. "He's said to own oil wells all over California and even in Asia."

The bus pulled in and I patted the slight bulge of my inside pocket as I took a seat. The idea of carrying a priceless ruby didn't lessen my nervousness. Nor did the last sight of Tom, as the bus pulled out, the sad expression. He'd have something more to do

now than chase poodles.

I couldn't have asked for better connections. Within minutes after reaching the L.A. airport I was airborne on a prop driven job for San Francisco. I was too jittery to sleep, although I was out on my feet.

We landed in San Francisco shortly after five. As I left the main building, looking for a cab, a young girl carrying a small bag came racing out of a cab, ran for the inside of the air terminal, the bag flying at the end of her arm.

I dashed for her cab. She veered like a fullback as she passed me and I side-stepped to get out of her way. The girl stopped abruptly, to avoid running into a woman with two kids. Her bag caught me back of the knees, sent me reeling against a steel beam.

The girl turned to gush, "Oh my, mister. Excuse me, but I'm late," and ran on. There was this sharp pain over my right ribs. Putting my hand inside my pocket I felt a little blood . . . and the broken parts of the Eunuch's Eye!

I stumbled into the empty cab, stunned at the thought I'd busted a million . . . But a ruby was said to be as hard as a diamond? How come my 240 soggy pounds reeling against the pillar had busted it?

Reaching Sims' hotel I crossed the street and went into a small jewelry shop. I handed the old man behind the counter a piece of the red stone, asked, "Can you tell me what this is?"

He didn't bother placing a glass to his eye, merely held up the jagged bit of stone to the light, then showed me false teeth in a grin. "I hope you didn't buy this, mister."

"Glass?"

He nodded. "Pure glass. Well cut and it's part of a larger piece, but if you paid over $30 for the whole thing, you were robbed. Now I have . . ."

Picking up the colored glass, I dropped a five buck bill on the counter as I walked out.

Dropping the handkerchief with the bits of glass on his table I asked Sims, "Why didn't you tell me the ruby was phony?"

"Are you hurt?" He pointed a manicured finger at the bloody handkerchief.

"No. Damn it, Mr. Sims, if you'd told me that you had presented a glass ruby to the museum, it would have been simple to buy it back. And for a few hundred bucks, too. Now, three men are dead, including Steve Mason, who was a nice type!"

"Mason, the former boxer? I read about his death in the papers. They didn't say he was linked to the ruby?"

"He did the actual stealing.

Mr. Sims, I'm not getting through to you—there have been *three murders* because of this phony gem!"

"I've nothing to do with that," Sims said, sitting back in his chair, examining his polished shoes. "No more than I have to do with the many other deaths the Eunuch's Eye has caused. Harry, you're wrong. I did give the museum the real gem. However, when I purchased it, they also gave me this glass duplicate. As I told you, when it was necessary to trim the museum budget and I suggested doing away with the night guards, I thought if the glass one was quietly substituted for the true ruby it would be a fine precaution . . . Hell, Harry, I'll be frank with you, that's how it started but having the real Eye all to myself gave me a unique sense of satisfaction. Empires had fallen, women had given of themselves, princes and thugs had killed and been killed for it, and now it was mine alone. It's . . . hard to explain but touching the Eye was almost like holding history in my hand. It gave me a true sense of power. Of course, when the imitation was stolen . . . well, I had to recover it before it was known to be a phony. A thing like that could be most embarrassing. Nobody would believe I was . . . let us say, merely holding, the real Eye for the museum. Now I shall hand over the genuine ruby to the museum and explain that it was recovered at my own expense. And for you, Harry, $10,000 in cash! Up to you if you want to tell the tax people about the money. I won't. I was prepared to go as high as a hundred thousand to save my wife and myself this embarrassment, so . . ."

"Mr. Sims, when I took the job I was supposedly getting the ruby back to the museum. Sort of on the brink of the law but . . . What I'm saying is, three murders have been done and shouldn't go unpunished. I'd like to see the man who hired Steve Mason's killers, get his. A man named Fleming, some big oil tycoon, had Mason killed when he found the ruby was glass and thought Steve had . . ."

"Wilson Fleming? Not really!" Sims chuckled as if he'd heard a bit of juicy gossip.

"I don't know his first name, but he has a house in San Gope. All I have to do is tell the police there and they'll carry the ball. Your name will never come into it. Sims, don't you see, you and I are practically implicated in three murders and we . . .!"

Sims held up a hand. "Harry, I'm for law and order, of course, but I'm afraid you're the one not getting the full picture. I was willing to pay a large sum of money for a piece of glass in order that my social image would

not be smudged. Otherwise I could have merely come forward with the real Eunuch's Eye. If Mr. Fleming is arrested, then everything will *have* to come to light, and defeat the purpose of your mission. While I admire your sentimental feelings for this dead pug, he was a thief and in a broad sense, one could say justice was served—Mason was punished by death. And you and I are not implicated in a damn thing. Whatever Fleming, and I'm sure it is Wilson Fleming, did, is his own business. Do we understand each other, Harry?"

I heard myself say, "Yes sir." Everybody was minding their own business but I was the errand boy, doing their dirt. Me, a good cop, standing still while a windbag like Sims placed his "social image" on a level with the law. In the old days if anybody had talked to me about closing my eyes, I would have flattened them. Now, because I didn't have the guts to tell him to go to hell, see my agency go down the drain, all I could say was, "Yes sir."

Sims came over and patted my back. "Are you sure you won't see a doctor, Harry? There's blood on your shirt."

"Only a scratch, Mr. Sims."

"Harry, you return to New York now and I'll be back in a few days. I don't know when I'll make the announcement about returning the Eunuch's Eye. I'll have to talk it through with my lawyers first. While the real ruby was never stolen, I don't wish to face the D.A., explain how I bought 'stolen' goods. The point is, I'll be in New York by the end of the week and we'll have lunch. You'll get your $10,000 in cash, then, plus expenses. Since you put in about 48 hours, you're probably the highest paid private eye, outside the TV screen!" Sims burst out laughing and I smiled like his pet monkey.

I was glad to get out of his room. I went directly to the airport and was able to buy a seat on a jet leaving within the hour. I had a drug clerk bandage the cut on my chest. I slept on the jet and had two dreams. In one, Edna and I were in deck chairs on this fancy ship but all we did was glare at each other. In the other dream I saw Tom Hanson staring at me, the disappointed expression in his tired eyes.

I awoke and ordered a drink from the trim stewardess. One phone call to Tom and he'd fry Fleming, or at least put him away. Buddy would be up the creek, but somehow I had a hunch they'd never find Buddy. And he *had* killed. There wasn't much they could actually do to me, or Sims, but Sims crummy social "image" would be fogged.

I had a headache when the plane put down at Kennedy. I

took a cab to the house. Edna fell all over me and I held her tightly, asked where Gerald was. Edna began to weep. "Now Harry, I know how strict you are, so don't get excited at what I'm going to tell you. I didn't mention it over the phone because I knew you'd be angry."

"Edna, honey, don't cry. I have a surprise for . . ." I said, about to drop my ten grand, tax-free bombshell. I guess I was still groggy, it took me a second to realize what she was saying. "What's happened to Gerry? Is he sick, hurt?"

"Now Harry, take it easy. Gerald isn't sick but he was involved in . . . in some kind of civil rights teach-in, in fact he organized it and . . . He's been expelled! Gerald's in New York right now, looking for a job . . ."

"Expelled for how long?" I cut in.

"Well, this term is lost. He can return next term. Actually, he'll only lose a few months in . . . Harry, what are you smiling about? I expected you to explode?"

"Edna, I'm proud of our boy, at least he has the guts to follow through on what he thinks is right. Yes, I'm damn proud of Gerry!"

I kissed my wife and she said, "You're as full of surprises as a box of monkeys. We'll talk about Gerald when he returns. Tell me about the case. What happened?"

"In a moment, Edna. I have to make an important call first." I went into the hall, picked up the phone, started to dial long distance, call Tom . . . And suddenly the phone seemed too heavy to hold. I put it back on the table, thinking furiously of the ten grand fee and the trip for Edna and me—we could take Gerry with us, now; of his finishing college, even of Rosie, Eddie Parks, the guys working for me and how much the agency jobs meant to them. This phone call could end all that.

I also remembered the sadness in Tom Hanson's eyes and voice.

I stood there for a long moment, seeing myself in the little mirror back of the hall table, holding the receiver in my hand. I saw a fat man with thin gray hair, an old duffer. Gerald could be an idealist, he was starting out, what did losing a few months mean to him? But me, at my age, losing the stores, maybe the end of the agency, back to living on the pension, watching pennies . . .

I was seeing a stranger in the mirror, an old man looking at the receiver as if he was holding a snake by the neck and didn't know how to let go.

Suddenly I wasn't sure I had the guts anymore to make the call. Staring at my fat old self, I wasn't sure of a damn thing.

(Continued from other side)

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