

THE *saint* in Color on NBC-TV Network-Sundays

THE
saint
MAGAZINE

AUG.
50c
3/6 in U.K.

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



LESLIE CHARTERIS' *THE saint*
in A Brand New Book-Length Novel

THE DEATH GAME

Adapted from The Original T. V. Script

ALSO

WENZELL BROWN

ROBERT L. FISH

FLEMING LEE

BAYNARD KENDRICK

MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

Last month on this page I was marvelling at the strangely purblind permissiveness with which the accelerating pollution of the air we breathe is being tolerated, while tens and scores of millions of city dwellers are habitually forced to live and work in an atmosphere which if it were inflicted by an enemy in wartime would be branded as a barbarous gas attack.

I had space in that jeremiad only to consider pollution by smokes and chemicals, the form in which it is at last attracting some belated and inadequate attention. But there is another pollution of the air which has become almost as prevalent and which may be almost as noxious, but which has so far aroused even less interest—doubtless because it is even less dramatic than smog.

I refer to the waves of sinister assault on the human system which it transmits as efficiently and relentlessly as any gaseous contaminant: in one word, *Noise*.

By this time it may seem almost fatuously sentimental to recall that the human race evolved, and for a long time lived happily, in a world where the wind in the trees and the chirpings of birds were the normal sound background, where a rustle of undergrowth or the snap of a twig might be a vital alarm signal, and a clap of thunder might be the crack of doom.

Today, at work or at play, most of us have our ears bludgeoned by a ceaseless medley of din that would have driven our primitive ancestors up a tree.

The unit of measurement of noise is a decibel, which is approximately the smallest difference of comparative loudness that the human ear can detect between two sounds. To give you an idea how this mounts up, starting from absolute silence, a whisper comes in at 20, and ordinary conversation goes to about 60 decibels.

The people who live near jet airports and complain of what they have to put up with are usually only reached by about 85 decibels. They are still better off than they would be in Piccadilly Circus, London, with 88 decibels' worth of traffic, or the Place de la Madeleine in Paris, with 90, or in Times Square, New York, with 92 — which is exactly the same as they would get at the foot of Niagara Falls. The New York subway scores 100 decibels, and a bus grinding off can hit 103. This is still mild compared with the 120 and 130 that workers in many factories have to suffer, which is getting towards the 140-160 range of a jet at close quarters. Only rocket engines are louder, with a blast from 180 on up.

Doctors have warned that exposure to 100 decibels for a regular eight hours a day, or 135 for only 12 seconds daily, can cause a permanent loss of hearing. 160 decibels has killed experimental rats, and, in humans, can drive one of the small hearing bones clear through into the inner ear. And yet thousands of people enthusiastically "relax" in discotheques and suchlike dives where amplified orchestras often wind up beyond the boiler-factory level. And think they are smart.



Leslie Charles



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THE *Saint* MAGAZINE

August 1967
Vol. 25, No. 4



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<i>The Death Game</i>	3
<i>A Complete Book Length Saint Novel adapted from the TV script of Harry W. Junkin by FLEMING LEE</i>	
<i>Spy Story</i>	87
<i>by ROBERT L. FISH</i>	
<i>The Moors Murders</i>	90
<i>by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD</i>	
<i>Treacherous Triangle</i>	98
<i>by WENZELL BROWN</i>	
<i>Mary — Mary —</i>	128
<i>by BAYNARD KENDRICK</i>	
<i>What's New in Crime</i>	137
<i>by STEFAN SANTESSON</i>	
<i>Lady in the Moon</i>	140
<i>by DOROTHY THATCHER</i>	
<i>The Cork Tree System</i>	148
<i>by FLEMING LEE</i>	

THE SAINT MAGAZINE, August 1967. Volume 25, No. 4. Published monthly except February, June and November, by Fiction Publishing Company, 155 East 50th Street, New York 17, New York, by arrangement with Saint Magazine, Inc. Single copy price 50c. Subscription in U.S. and Canada, \$5.50 for twelve issues. Subscription in foreign countries, \$6.50 for twelve issues. Names of persons and places are fictitious and any use of the name of an actual person or place is purely coincidental. No responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited submissions. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright 1967 by Fiction Publishing Company.



LESLIE CHARTERIS'

THE *saint* in

the death game

**A Brand New Book-Length Novel Adapted by FLEMING LEE
From an original story by JOHN KRUSE
Teleplay by HARRY W. JUNKIN**

Photos in this story are taken from the NEW TV Series produced by ITC
now broadcast in color every Sunday evening on the NBC-TV Network.



**The Saint has just bested Grey Wiler in the TV film version of THE DEATH
GAME, STARRING Angelo Douglas as Jenny, and Roger Moore as The SAINT.**

FOREWORD:

This is another novelization of an original script written for the SAINT television show. Its evolution was exactly the same as that of THE GADGET LOVERS, which we published last month: I read the first outline and made suggestions on it, I read the subsequent script and made suggestions on that, I discussed the adaptation with Fleming Lee and suggested certain changes which would improve the story as something to be read instead of seen, and I personally revised his first draft. This is not a "ghosted" job: I had a hand in what you will read, but full credit is given to all my collaborators.

L.C.

"HELLO, DAHLING," the voice from the telephone said. "Zis is Zsa Zsa Gabor."

Simon Templar, his face freshly shaven, dark hair newly brushed, his clean shirt half buttoned, was not expecting a call from Zsa Zsa Gabor. He did not know Zsa Zsa Gabor, and he had no reason to believe that the actress with the often mimicked voice was any better acquainted with him.

"I'm sorry," he said with hesitation. "I'm afraid you have the wrong number. This is Captain Kidd."

While his formerly gushing caller hesitated, experiencing the disconcerting vertigo of rapidly turning tables, Simon admired his own psyche's impromptu choice of a pseudonym: it was fairly appropriate for a man who had often been called—among more censorable things—the twentieth century's brightest buccaneer. Most assuredly, had Simon Templar's rakishly piratical face been exposed to the world three or four hundred years sooner, it would have been found on the poop of some white-winged marauder. As it was, his present day forays against the gold and jewel laden galleons of the Ungodly had brought him at least as much fame and perhaps even more fortune than in earlier times when heroism and daring were more common and less denigrated qualities on the face of the earth.

"You arc kidding wiz me, dahling," said the alleged embodiment of all things good in bed. "You are ze man zey call ze Saint."

"That's also a possibility," said the Saint. "Now if you'il tell me who you are we'll be almost even."

"I've told you, you funny man." Her voice took on a sudden urgency. "But I have no time to argue any more. I am in trouble and I..."

"Perhaps," Simon interrupted helpfully, "you'd better speak to your family doctor."

It was impossible to tell definitely whether his caller snickered or suppressed a sigh of exasperation. At any rate she went on a moment later in the same desperate tone.

"I am told zat you are ze only one who can help me. Please, it is most important. I must see you. If you will meet me at. . ."

Simon, as she went on unnecessarily detailing a route by which he could arrive at a certain street corner not far from the British Museum, glanced at his watch and then out the window of his bedroom. Though it was only six in the evening, a heavy fog enveloped the autumn streets of London, and it was almost as dark as it would be at midnight.

"Listen," he said, having no intention of refusing to accept the gauntlet which was being so charmingly flung at him, "I'm dressing for dinner now, and it just happens that I have no engagements for this evening. Why don't you meet me at the White House at seven and. . ."

"White House?"

"It's a restaurant, darling. No relation to the Birds' Nest in Washington. Meet me there at seven and we can discuss your difficulties over the most delicious. . ."

"I couldn't. It. . . it must be later, and. . ."

"Then how about here at my house when it suits you? You know where I am, no doubt, since you have my number."

"Yes, I think so. Upper Berkeley Mews. But. . ."

"And a charming spot it is, too," Simon said nostalgically. "I lived here years ago and just found that the old place was available again. And I can't think of a better partner for a housewarming than you."

His Zsa Zsa or pseudo-Zsa Zsa was beginning to sound pressed.

"No," she said. "It's impossible. I beg you. Meet me where I said. At ten o'clock. Please."

Whatever nefarious intentions she or someone she represented might have, her insistence on choosing her own ground assumed a naivete on Simon's part which implied an almost unbelievable naivete on hers. Still, there was an inducement to go along with the proposal: if someone was out to ensnare him in some way, the Saint would not have chosen the venue but he would know where and when to be on guard—which advantage was several cuts above not being forewarned at all.

"If you insist," he said pleasantly. "But it's only fair to tell you that I don't believe for a moment that you are Zsa Zsa Gabor. I'm just curious enough to want to know what the gag is—and it'd better be good, or you may find yourself getting spanked."

"Oh, zank you for coming. It will be worth your while."

"I'm sure it's intended to be worth someone's while—but just whose is the question that fascinates me."

The fascination stayed with him as he finished dressing, cast a fond glance over the walls and refurbishings of his old haunt, and piloted his car off into the mist. It added a special piquancy to a meal which was as relaxed and fine as he had anticipated, but which without the earlier phone call would have turned his thoughts more toward relaxation and eventual sleep than toward the expectation of excitement. The voice, even if spurious, had had a timbre of genuine sexiness which he recognized in the same way that a connoisseur recognizes the scent of a good wine; and it was an article of his faith that adventure never came to those who sat at home in fear of making a mistake.

A little before ten he drove to the appointed area and circled through the almost deserted streets, always keeping a block's distance between himself and the corner his Zsa Zsa had mentioned. He saw nothing to change his mind about keeping the date. Then he zigzagged deviously through several blocks to confuse any possible observers, and parked a full five minutes' long-striding walk from his destination. He did not think, under the peculiar circumstances, that there was any taint of paranoia in his desire to arrive in as discreet a way as he could.

Of course it was possible—just barely possible—that the much photographed form of Miss Gabor would come drifting toward him out of the dampness like a Magyar mermaid. She had been reported in London, and only the day before he had read one of the usual idiotic newspaper interviews with her. That could also have inspired a joker whose calendar had stuck at the first of April to use her name for a stupid hoax, even more probably than that the real Zsa Zsa would have had any reason or inclination to call him. But stranger things than that had happened in his incredible life, and he could never have slept peacefully again if he had not given this one at least a sporting chance to surprise him. And yet at the same time, even while logical skepticism was resignedly prepared for a pointless jape, the conditioned reflexes of a lifetime still found themselves tautening to respond to any-

thing more sinister than either of those simple alternatives.

As he was about to emerge from an alley half a block from the trysting spot, he stopped and listened. The neighborhood, composed of small shops all closed in the evening, seemed absolutely deserted, and the more distant sounds of the city were muffled by mist. He looked along the street, both ways. Visibility was held down to barely a block, but it was obvious that within that area, at least, there was no one waiting for him.

He moved around the corner, out of the narrow passage, and went along the sidewalk. Then, almost like an echo of the sound of his own shoes on the dimly gleaming pavement, he heard the other steps. He went quickly around the corner of the block, where he was supposed to meet Zsa Zsa, and stood still to listen. The steps continued, drawing closer, from the direction of the alley he had just vacated.

As he heard them, swiftly analyzed their character, compared them with footsteps in general, the Saint felt the hairs prickle icily on the back of his neck. For the footsteps were not those of a woman—nor of a man either. Certainly of no animal. With mechanical steadiness they came on, accompanied now by a faint-whirring sound like that begun by a cuckoo clock just before the bird pops out to announce the hour.

Simon looked, and the unknown—which had aroused such aboriginal stirrings of his body fur—became the ridiculously familiar.

A metal toy soldier about twelve inches in height was marching along the sidewalk, its tin rifle on its shoulder, its wide painted eyes staring sightlessly straight ahead.

The Saint, feeling it safe to assume that the clockwork man had not happened along at just that moment by sheer accident, watched its progress as it passed him by and walked straight off the curb, falling on its face in the gutter. From that unmilitary position it continued its stiff movements, going nowhere, until finally, with some sporadic dying ticks, it lay still and totally silent.

Only after that did Simon venture a close approach to the thing. He rolled it over with his foot, then knelt to pick it up. For a second or two after he took it into his hands, searching it for a sign of its purpose—it seemed more the vehicle for a joke than for anything serious—nothing happened. Then it almost soundlessly emitted, from the barrel of its rifle, a single puff of black smoke.

The Saint flung it away from him and backed off, covering his

mouth and nose with his handkerchief. But even though a little of the smoke had found its way into his nostrils he was suffering no ill effects beyond a mild and easily satisfied urge to sneeze.

The next event, however, was less harmless. There was a swift hiss over his head, and he turned to see an arrow, shaft fractured by its impact with the brick side of the building, clatter to the sidewalk at his feet.

The angle of the arrow's flight told him the approximate place of its source and at the same time the location where he would be most safe. Out in the open, taking pot shots into the fog, he might very well receive, during the next few seconds, an unwelcome steel-tipped addition to his already quite adequately equipped anatomy.

In three strides he achieved the shelter of the nearest doorway and waited, automatic in hand, for some further charming manifestation from his rendezvous. It was not long in coming. A car barely poked its nose around the next corner, a red MG convertible with the top up, and from its blacked-out interior came a quick drum-roll of faint popping noises that matched the closer thudding of lead slugs pocking the brickwork on either side of the entranceway.

Flattening himself as deep into the alcove as possible while he was trying to decide where he could aim back most effectively against an invisible sniper with some kind of silenced automatic rifle who had to be in the rear part of the MG that was still mostly shielded by the corner building, Simon felt the door that he had his back to yield slackly to his pressure. His change of purpose was faster than thought; he was outgunned, and he knew it, and anything was better than his present exposed position. In a flash he was inside, slamming the door behind him.

The shooting stopped. There was no further sound.

The Saint took advantage of the lull and his new temporary security to survey what he could of his surroundings. His pocket flashlight, combined with the glow of streetlamps filtered through the transom from outside, showed that he was in the entrance hall of an obviously vacant building. Ahead of him was a staircase whose landing had been appropriated by spiders. The target shapes of their webs, stretching from bannister to wall, had an unpleasant association for him: he did not like being a target himself, a tin duck in somebody's shooting gallery—especially a somebody who was probably insane as well as an incompetent marksman.

There was a closed door near the base of the stairs, facing the street entrance, and on the right was an open door, leading into a room which had to overlook the street. Since the Saint did not want to signal his position with the beam of his torch, he put it back into his pocket before leaving the hall.

The front room showed even more signs of decrepitude and neglect than had the staircase. Its only furnishings, aside from the marbelized bowl which covered its ceiling bulb, were a sagging table and a three-legged chair. The naked windows gave a full view of the street, but Simon could not see the MG, or any other assailant. The toy soldier lay dented where it had fallen in line of duty. Fog veiled everything else.

Then Simon's fantastic reactions, in the blinding fragment of time which followed, sent him to his knees by the wall even before his conscious mind had been able to register what was happening. Only then did he realize that the overhead light in the center of the room had flashed on, though no one stood by the wall switch. Immediately afterward there had been a sound like that of a firecracker exploding.

Now, down from the light fixture drifted a long black rectangle of silk, attached at the top to the marbelized bowl, unfurling to its full length of a yard or more, so that its vivid scarlet lettering became perfectly legible.

BOOM, it said.

Simon, preferring invisibility to the continued opportunity of admiring the artful banner, shot out the light. He did not even care if the report of his gun brought Chief Inspector Claud Teal himself scurrying over from Scotland Yard. Indeed for once he might have welcomed Inspector Teal's presence, if for no other reason than to have an independent witness corroborate the nightmarish *ballet macabre* in which he had been caught up.

A click and a humming noise came from the part of the room where the chair lay near the rickety table. Then a muffled voice began speaking.

"You have been gassed by a toy soldier, been shot through the head with an arrow, been mowed down with a submachine gun, and been blown up by a plastic bomb hidden in a light fixture. This is your killer speaking. You, the once famous Mr. Simon Templar, are dead."

Another click signaled the end of what was obviously a recording, and the Saint, feeling unamused but somewhat more at ease,

decided that he was simply the victim of one of the most extreme practical jokes ever perpetrated. That realization, however, did not diminish by one erg his earnest desire to discover the identity of his persecutor. Using his pocket light again, he went to the table, opened the drawer, and looked in at a small battery-operated tape recorder which by means of some clever Japanese mechanism had turned itself on and then turned itself off again.

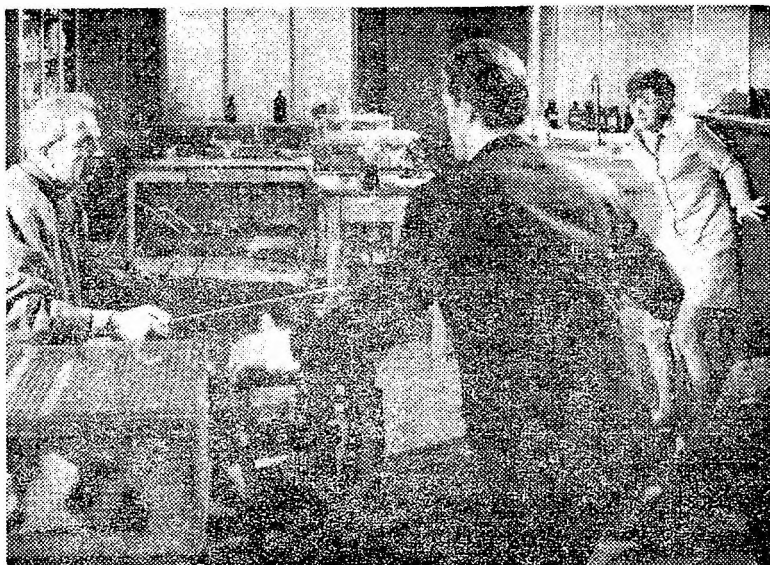
He closed the drawer. The recorder might carry fingerprints, or the comedian might come back to get it. And then Simon realized that there might be no need on his part for the tracing of identities or the setting of traps: a most faint sound had just reached his ears—a sound which, if noted at all by an ordinary man, would have been passed off as the inevitable creaking of antique lumber. But if the Saint had not possessed senses discriminating enough to prevent him from assuming such things, he would never have survived so long to enjoy the material rewards of his adventures.

What he was hearing, after the creak, was the stealthy approach of stockinged feet from behind him. Either his assailant had not been content with four types of mayhem and was about to attempt to add a fifth, or some new character was taking the stage.

The Saint waited for him, his back turned as bait, reasonably certain that any violent move would be presaged by a warning noise beyond that of foot-filled woolen material padding on old boards. Besides, any really serious killer would not have passed up his chance with a goodly proportion of the weapons in the human arsenal only to engage Simon Templar, of all people, in face-to-face combat.

So the Saint waited those few breathless seconds—breathless at least on the part of the stalking individual behind him. Simon's lungs continued operating at the same easy pace they would have kept during the annual radio reading of Dickens' *Christmas Carol*. And then, when the moment was exactly right, and he could somehow feel the presence of another body at just the proper position, he moved.

For the stalker turned victim, it must have been an astonishing sensation. At one moment his cautious feet were on the floor; an instant later he was in the air, experiencing the delightful but short-lived astronomical sensation of weightlessness without any effort at all on his part; and then he was forcibly reminded of the persistence of those natural laws which make apples fall and keep pigs



The Saint meets up with murder in the laboratory of the Death Game students, in the TV-film version of THE DEATH GAME

out of the paths of soaring hawks. Then he knew nothing. He was flat on his back, unconscious.

Simon, using his pocket torch, found only one thing surprising about his sleeping adversary: the man was scarcely a man. He could not have been much over twenty—thin, brown-haired, neatly dressed in turtle-neck sweater and slacks, with a kind of intelligence in the molding of his face which one would not expect to find in the countenance of any ordinary young back-alley bandit.

He was carrying a single weapon: a string necktie, one of whose ends was still wrapped around his left hand. With that, in traditional commando fashion, he had apparently intended to throttle the Saint—or to pretend to throttle him, if his use of the strangling cord was to conform with the mock attacks that had already taken place.

Out in the hall, from the vicinity of the base of the stairs, a door opened. This time there was no attempt at silence. The door not only opened quite noisily, but was kicked back against the wall, and the footsteps which followed were completely uninhibited.

The hall bulb was flicked on, flooding the larger room with

light, but by that time the Saint had already flattened himself against the wall just inside the door. He was ready for almost anything except what happened.

A very pretty young blonde walked in, carrying a tray on which were arranged a tea pot, three cups, a pitcher of milk, and a bowl of sugar. On the young lady herself were arranged, with much greater effectiveness, a very tight little sweater, a very short little skirt, and a pair of fashionable white boots. As she entered and saw the prone figure on the floor just beginning to groan and stir, she stopped and said to him in the mildly exasperated tone of a housewife whose husband has just failed to bring the swatter down directly on the fly, "Oh, Grey, you didn't get him!"

—2—

Simon, who had planned a startling and entirely physical greeting for the newcomer before he got a look at her, decided that even without her hands full of tea things she would have posed about as much threat to him as a gladiola bulb.

"For heaven's sake, don't drop it," he said softly.

The girl gasped, turned quickly, but did not drop the tray, even when she saw Simon's automatic aimed at her middle.

"Oh, Mr. Templar, you frightened me."

"And that's only the beginning. Why don't you set that stuff on the table over there and put your hands very high over your head until I can check over your few available hiding places for knives, bombs, and mustard gas grenades."

The girl giggled as she freed her hands of the tray and raised them over her head.

"But *I'm* not even *playing*," she said.

"Neither am I," said Simon.

"I hope you're not going to be mad at us."

"That's the chance you have to take when you ambush people," the Saint replied. "Now I shall shoot both of you and be on my way."

The girl's ingenuous green eyes became a little rounder.

"Wouldn't it be awful," she said, "if you took this seriously and really *did* kill us?"

"Oh, I am going to kill you," Simon said casually. "The only thing that's stopping me is a question of etiquette. Does the old business about ladies going first apply when one's performing an execution?"

The girl blinked, and her high spirits were visibly lowered. Her accomplice was sitting up on the floor now, rubbing his face with both hands in an apparent effort to restore the clarity of his eyesight.

"Grey," the girl said tentatively. "Grey? I think he's angry at us. Why must you always overdo things?"

The young man managed to focus his eyes on the Saint.

"I'm Grey Wyler," he said, pushing strands of hair out of his face, "and this is Jenny Turner."

Simon nodded, and the little imps of humor which had beat a temporary retreat reappeared in the clear blue of his eyes.

"It's safe to say the pleasure is all yours," he remarked. "But curiosity may move me to spare your lives if you'll tell me what this is all about."

"We're psychology students," Grey Wyler began.

"At the bottom of the class, no doubt," said Simon.

Wyler did not seem to share any of the light-heartedness of his female companion. His whole manner reflected an inner tension, and there was an unrelieved seriousness in the tone of every word he spoke which made the Saint feel an instinctive distrust and antagonism. The humorlessness showed the kind of lack of perspective which so easily verges over into insanity—and certainly nothing which has happened during the evening so far gave him any assurance as to the mental stability of his playmates.

"This is what's called the Death Game," Wyler went on. "It's a hunters and victims kind of thing. Nobody really get hurts, of course, but..."

"May I put my hands down?" Jenny interrupted.

"First step over this way and let's see what sort of armaments you're packing," Simon said.

Jenny obeyed, keeping her arms up while the Saint checked over her from neck to knees with a gentle but not entirely discreet hand.

"Oh, Mr. Templar," she murmured. "It's such a thrill meeting you in person."

"Same to you, Zsa Zsa. You can put your hands down now."

The girl laughed.

"How'd you know it was me?"

"It took some very high class reasoning—the first step of which is that your boyfriend's voice is about an octave and a half too low for the job."

Jenny looked at him admiringly.

"You're funny, too," she said, "and better looking in person than your pictures. Don't you think he's better looking than his pictures, Grey?"

Wyler made a noncommittal noise and got to his feet.

"How about pouring us some tea before it gets cold?" he said. "Mr. Templar?"

"No, thank you. My nine lives have just about been used up tonight, and I can't afford the chance of drawing a tea bag with a skull and crossbones on it."

"Game's over," Jenny said, serving. "No more killing tonight. Sorry you have to stand up, but this place belongs to my Dad and he's trying to sell it. At least the kitchen was still in working order."

Simon allowed himself to be talked into taking a cup.

"Now," he said, "what is this Death Game?"

"It's a bit kinky, but terribly in," said Jenny. "Grey gets slightly carried away—he does with everything—but most people take it as a joke. Milk?"

"Please."

Grey Wyler took over the explanation.

"The players are divided into hunters and victims."

"They're doing it in universities all over the place," Jenny interrupted.

Wyler looked at her with cold irritation.

"If you'll let me tell it."

Jenny shrugged and moved to stand nearer Simon, watching him with an intensity that bordered on worshipfulness.

"Sometimes the hunters and victims are paired by lot," Wyler said. "In our department at the college here we use a computer. There's an instructor, Bill Bast, who works the game in as part of the educational process. Doctor Manders, our department head, encourages it too."

Wyler had pronounced the words "educational process" with a subtle sarcastic sneer which the Saint soon realized was one of his most persistent mannerisms. It was the boy's way of making it clear that in his vast superiority he could not risk being identified with or associated with anything on the common earthly plane. Someday, Simon thought, he would fit in very well as a professor.

"At any rate," Wyler continued, "the hunters are told who their victims are, and the victims are told only that they are on somebody's death list. Whose, of course, they don't know. Then

the hunter proceeds to try to 'kill' his assigned victim in the most ingenious way possible."

"And as many times as possible, apparently," the Saint said. "Tonight's the first I've ever seen mass murder performed on one man—assuming your attempts on me would have worked if you'd been serious."

Wyler again demonstrated his lack of humor by narrowing his eyes and looking almost venomously indignant.

"You deny that I could have succeeded?"

Simon studied the boy for a few seconds and decided that an argument over hypothetical murder was not worth his own time.

"I'll let you be the judge of that," he said.

"It's the scoring Grey's worried about," Jenny explained. "Just killing somebody won't get you much. Like if you shoot him in the back or something while he's getting out of his car it's only worth a couple of points."

"But something like the toy soldier with the poison gas," Wyler put in, "would be worth four or five."

"On the other hand," Jenny said, "if you kill an innocent bystander you get docked three points."

"The first person to accumulate ten points is named a decathlon winner," said Wyler.

"And gets a prize," added Jenny.

Simon gazed at her with fascination.

"It beats tiddlywinks," he conceded finally.

"Groovy, isn't it?" Jenny bubbled. "We're all just absolutely wild about it."

"And just how did I get involved?" the Saint asked.

"My psychology advisor, Bill Bast, bet me ten pounds I couldn't kill the great Simon Templar," Grey said. "Frankly, I thought it would be much more difficult."

It took some unusual adherence to the qualities implicit in his nickname for the Saint to avoid an overt demonstration of his feelings about Grey's puppy haughtiness.

"Assuming, since it's only a game, that you did kill me tonight," he said, "I have to remind you that you weren't playing fair."

"In what way?"

"You didn't notify me that I was a victim."

Grey Wyler tensed.

"The circumstances were... It wasn't practical. Bast knew I

couldn't let you know. It was part of the bet. We assumed that someone like you would *always be* on his guard."

"They were afraid you wouldn't go along with it," Jenny said. "And besides, old Manders would've hit the ceiling if he'd known they were going after somebody outside the university. I almost think he takes this more seriously than the students do."

"Old Manders being some recalcitrant bulwark of professorial tradition?" Simon asked.

"Exactly," Wyler said. "But you'll meet him in a few minutes. Now that I've won I don't give a damn what he knows or thinks."

"I'll meet him?"

"At the party," Jenny said. "End of the term—and the Death Game winners get prizes and everything."

"Having passed the age for student pranks," Simon said, "and having been killed several times over, I think I'll just retire to my cozy den and try to summon up forgiveness for those who lured me out of it in the first place."

His refusal instantly brought from Jenny some of the most ingenuous persuasion to which he'd ever had the pleasure of being subjected. First she gave a little squeal of dismay, and then she flung both her arms around one of his arms, pressing herself against him and fairly jumping up and down.

"Oh, you just can't disappoint us! I told everybody you were coming—and you're supposed to pass out the prizes, and everything, and if . . ."

"The Death Game prizes?" Simon asked, intrigued at the prospect of getting to know more about this college fad that was so much like the game he had played, for real life and death stakes, during most of his existence.

"Oh, yes," Jenny exclaimed, seeing her opening. "And the winners tell about their kills. You'll love it. You've been such a great sport so far. Just string along a little longer, won't you, please?"

"Jenny," he said, "you're more than I can resist. I'm yours to command."

Jenny's car was parked a block from the building where Simon had met his imaginary doom. It was, of course, the red MG from which the shots had been fired. They all squeezed in, as far as the place where Simon had left his own car, and then he followed them out of the deserted neighborhood of shops to the university district half a mile away. The college, forced to expand in the heart of a crowded city, had done so by occupying already existent structures in the area surrounding its original core. The

only things distinguishing the academic buildings from nearby apartment houses, book dealers, and purveyors of technical supplies were most identifying plaques beside each entrance door.

The MG stopped in front of a building labelled PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY. It was dark except for a single row of lighted windows on the ground floor.

"Party's not here." Jenny called as Simon left his car and joined her and Wyler. "but Bill Bast is. We'll run in and see him first, then go over to the club."

"Looks practically deserted around here," the Saint commented as they went through the door and entered a corridor smelling strongly of age and floor wax and mildly of unidentifiable chemicals.

"End of term," Jenny explained. "Most people have left. In fact just the ones who really took an interest in the Death Game are still here. They aren't all in psychology, of course. Here we are."

She opened the door to the very large, long room whose windows had helped to illuminate the street outside. Two rectangular tables surrounded by chairs ran down the center. Along the walls were a number of smaller tables, some desks, built-in storage cabinets, and cages of drowsy mice. At the far end was a computer, and beside it a tall almost skinny man of thirty or so wearing a white laboratory smock over his street clothes. The care he did not lavish on the crease of his trousers or the shine of his shoes was apparently devoted to experimental work.

"We got him!" Jenny called as she took a proprietary grip on Simon's arm and led him between the tables. "This is Bill Bast, our assistant lecturer in psychology. Of course he knows who you are."

Bast turned from the computer, smiling, and offering the Saint his hand.

"It's a privilege to meet you," he said. "I've been looking forward to this very much."

Wyler did not contribute to the general good-feeling.

"You owe me ten pounds," he said in a flat tone that emphasized his arrogance. "It was at least a five point killing, and every step went just as I planned."

Bast's acknowledging glance at Grey was not marked by affection.

"Congratulations," he said coolly, digging into his pocket for a pair of notes which Wyler took without thanks.

"It was nothing," he said.

Bill Bast turned again to the Saint.

"I take it Grey and Jenny have filled you in on the Death Game?"

Simon nodded.

"It sounds like good clean fun."

"We think it may have a real psychological value, too," Bast said. "Just a second, I'll cut off the computer and we can talk."

"This machine is what pairs hunters and victims?" Simon asked.

"That's only a sideline for it," Bast replied. "It's used primarily for much more important things—all kinds of data-comparing functions."

"As a matter of fact," Jenny said, "I'm surprised old Manders lets us use it for the game at all."

"Doctor Manders is the head of the Psychology Department," Bast explained, and it was immediately obvious that a subject had been broached which was disturbing to him.

"He's a good man," Jenny said. "Not many of these scholarly types would go along with something like this. I think he'd like to pitch right in himself if it wasn't beneath his dignity."

Bast seemed to feel increasingly uncomfortable as the discussion of his superior went on.

"Shouldn't you kids be getting on over to the party?" he asked, looking at his watch.

"Right," Jenny said. "I promised to help touch up the decorations. Will you bring Mr. Templar? Don't be late, though. Prize giving's at midnight sharp."

"What other time could it be?" Simon said.

"You're absolutely groovy. It's right around the corner—base-ment of the University Club, and..."

"I'll see that he makes it," Bast assured her, recovering enough of his former good mood to laugh and shake his head as she and Grey went out.

"Quite a girl," Simon remarked. "Does she ever slow down?"

"Never. But Mr. Templar, there's something I must talk to you about."

Simon did not miss Bast's sudden reversion to an apprehensive tone.

"Yes?"

"In fact, I have to admit that wanting to involve you in this—to give myself an opportunity of talking with you—was one of my motives in making the bet with Grey Wyler."

"It does seem a little touchy, attacking strangers on the streets, even in fun. They might fight back—with real bullets. Or lawsuits."

"I know. You were the first one. Outside the college, I mean."

The Saint was growing a little impatient with Bast's reluctance to get to the point.

"Well," he said, glancing at his watch, "just what is it that's bothering you?"

Bill Bast hesitated one more and finally got it out.

"I'm afraid that the Death Game. . . is becoming something more than a game."

—3—

But that was as much enlightenment as the Saint was to receive just then on the subject of Bill Bast's worries. The unannounced entrance of a third party cut off his words as abruptly as if a guillotine had cut off his head. Simon himself was almost startled by the entrance, which was so entirely unheralded that there was something suspect about it. The sound of a walking man should have been audible for some distance through the almost deserted building, and yet there had been no sound at all until the door opened and a short, round-headed, balding man stepped in, his middle-aged portly frame invested with more dignity than it probably deserved by the black folds of an academic gown. He spoke with what might have been either ungraceful surprise or ill-concealed irritation.

"Ah, Bast. . . not at the party?"

"Dr. Manders," Bast said. "We weren't expecting you here."

"I trust not."

"This is Mr. Templar. Mr. Templar, this is Dr. Manders, head of the Psychology Department."

Dr. Manders gathered enough aplomb to grant Simon a soggy handshake and a limp rendition of a smile. Even those improvements, however, failed to put him anywhere near the category of people whom the Saint found charming at first sight. The only things intriguing about Dr. Manders—who otherwise seemed as spiritually weak as his handshake and as characterless as the bald expanse of his forehead—were his unhappy effect on Bill Bast and his peculiar ability to approach doors without making any noise.

"How do you do?" said Simon, realizing even as he spoke that

certain groups of synapses were meshing beneath Dr. Manders' hairless cranium, bringing cloudy recognition to the gray lenses of his eyes.

"Could it be Simon Templar, the Saint, by any chance?" he asked.

Simon nodded.

"I confess. My halo's in need of some repairs, though, after my contact with your students."

Manders looked puzzled.

"I didn't know you were acquainted with any of them." He put down the book he had been carrying when he entered, at the same time trying to suppress the annoyance which had crept again into his face. "But of course there's no reason for me to know the details of my students' and associates' private lives."

"Mr. Templar was brought into the Death Game," Bast said, reminding Simon of a ludicrously overgrown George Washington confronting his father beside the cherry tree. "By Grey Wyler."

Manders' irritation broke the surface entirely.

"Wyler? Brought in a non-student? There could be serious trouble from something like that. I really must say..."

"He had my permission," Bast said.

Possibly it was a well-formed habit of coming to the rescue which prompted Simon to interpose himself.

"Not that he'd need anyone's permission necessarily," he put in. "I assume that what students do with their time outside the college is their own business. I can't say I was delighted to have my hair parted by your prize pupil's arrow, but I wouldn't hold anyone responsible but Wyler himself."

Whatever gratitude the Saint's intervention earned from Bill Bast was more than balanced by the obvious hostility he seemed to provoke in Dr. Manders.

"I'm pleased that you take such a broadminded view," said the professor acidly. "On the other side of the situation, however, is the fact that the Death Game is so closely associated with my department here at the university that any public unpleasantness that grew out of it would reflect very seriously on me."

Bast was holding himself in a state of controlled rigidity. His tone was stiffly correct but not obsequious.

"I didn't expect you'd be quite so upset. Now that it's done there's nothing I can say except that it won't happen again, as far as I have any control over it."

"There's no harm done," Simon said. "And the fad will prob-

ably pass after a few more weeks anyway. Why don't we just forget it and go see how the new generation enjoys itself in between mock murders?"

Bast looked at his watch and began pulling off his laboratory smock.

"You're right. We should be getting along." He paused and then gave Dr. Manders' sensitivity another inevitable tweak. "They've asked Mr. Templar to give out the prizes."

Manders turned away abruptly to busy himself with some charts on a nearby table.

"Oh, really?"

"You don't mind, I hope?"

"I assumed. . . It doesn't matter."

"Dr. Manders," Simon said, "if I'm interfering with any plans of yours I'd be more than willing to withdraw."

Manders looked up pettishly from his charts and performed another of his flaccid smiles, making only too clear the effort it cost him.

"Not at all, Mr. Templar; the students will be thrilled to have such a . . .celebrity at their bash. Go right ahead, please. I'll join you there in a few minutes."

"Pleasant chap," Simon remarked when he and Bast had left the laboratory. "Sort that makes you love the human race."

Bast, his gangling stride emphasizing his eagerness to get away from the awkwardness they had just experienced, shook his head.

"He wasn't always like that. A year ago he was a different man. Jolly almost. Then. . ."

"Hullo there, Mr. Bast! They're waiting."

Two young men had appeared from around the corner as Bast and Simon came out onto the sidewalk, evidently a search party from the student assemblage, and any more private conversation was impossible.

A couple of blocks' walk through the clammy mist brought them to a large brick building whose stair facade bore the modest legend, lettered on a small wooden plaque, THE UNIVERSITY CLUB.

The basement of the Club—or at least that one moderately sized room of it which had been commandeered for the night's social affair—was anything but staid. Jammed with thirty or forty students from wall to wall, unlighted except for candles, it gave the immediate impression of a tin of anchovies viewed from the inside. On closer inspection, it became apparent that the students were sharing the confined space with a half dozen round tables

covered with red and white checkered table cloths, with a mercifully silent juke box, with a small dais near the door, and with a striking assortment of strange or macabre decorations: strings of onions with black ribbon bows on them, skull and crossbone pennants, ketchup-stained rubber daggers, and hangmen's nooses.

Simon could not inventory much more in the general turmoil, before Jenny Turner came shoving through the crowd, waving and shouting to him.

"Oh, Simon, I'm so glad to see you. What about the old Death Game motif? Great, huh? I did almost all of it."

Simon was amused to find that she had already put him on a first name basis, but of all the young women he'd seen for some time he could not think of any to whom he would have been more willing to permit such familiarity. In fact, what Jenny Turner's lushly curved shape did for her short skirt and sweater would have guaranteed a desire for intimacy in any even semi-sentient male.

"It's lovely," said the Saint. "Are these spiders on the tables hors d'oeuvres or guests?"

She laughed.

"I made them out of dyed pipe cleaners."

Bast was opening a pack of cigarettes preparatory to further enriching the already dense atmosphere of the cellar.

"A highly developed originality quotient has our Jenny."

"Among other things," Simon said appreciatively.

If he expected a maidenly blush and lowered eyelids he had for once miscalculated. The girl gave him a bold gaze, and the half-smile that lingered on her lips took on a tinge of expectancy and invitation. Far from turning shyly aside, she drew her shoulders further back as if to make it impudently clear that she knew quite well what he was referring to.

"It's almost eleven," Bill Bast said. "If we don't want a riot on our hands we'd better get on with the prize giving."

As the young lecturer led the way to the dais, Jenny leaned towards Simon.

"Where's Dr. Manders?"

"Sulking in his tent," said the Saint in a low voice. "I'm afraid he's not only upset about you people attacking strangers on the streets, but also because you're giving me the spot he should have had."

"He's acting like an old sourpuss. Who cares? Come on."

She took his hand and led him to Bill Bast's side as the din of chattering and laughing died away.

"Tonight," Bast said, "we're very fortunate to have with us a gentleman who—if even half the legends about him are true—has been through much more in reality than we've ever dreamed of in our Death Game."

The speaker went on in the same vein for several minutes, working in some humorous comments about the game in general. Dr. Manders came into the basement, avoided meeting Simon's eyes, and took up a station next to the wall on the other side of the room, sucking his cold pipe as if it were his thumb. Jenny, who had seen fit not to relinquish her warm grasp on Simon's hand, squeezed his fingers and looked up at him with something uncomfortably close to adoration as Bast concluded his remarks.

"Now," he said, "I'm very pleased to introduce Mr. Simon Templar, who will give out the prizes for the three highest scores in the Death Game."

Bast started to step aside as applause filled the low ceilinged room, but then he had an afterthought.

"And let's hope this too shall pass, and in the next term we can stop dreaming up ways to kill one another and get back to our white mice and mazes."

He said it without a smile, and Simon thought it doubtful that many of the students even heard him, since most had begun clapping enthusiastically to welcome the Saint. But it probably did not matter to Bast whether they heard him or not. He had addressed himself directly to the sullen Dr. Manders.

Simon was given a piece of paper with the citations on it, and Bast briefly explained the procedure to him. Then it was his turn to take the stand.

"As one whose bones tend to creak with boredom at the mere thought of anyone lecturing me on any subject whatever for a period of more than three and a half minutes," he said, "I'm going to spare you all the funny cracks and solemn thoughts and get on with the prizes. I'll just say that it's quite a novel experience to be here—even though my invitation did arrive on the nose of a bullet—and that I truly appreciate this unique opportunity to see how the world's leaders of tomorrow are spending their time today."

There was laughter and more applause. Simon looked at his script by the light of a candle which Jenny held for him.

"Now for the Death Game first prize. Will Alastair Davidson stand, please? He's one of the dead ones."

A tall, blond, sheepish-looking boy raised himself halfway from his chair, grinned, and sat back down.

"Mr. Davidson's hunter was the winner of the prize for the highest accumulated score. And I must say that after my experience with him this evening I can testify to his homicidal skills: Grey Wyler."

As Wyler got to his feet with a lazy, contemptuous nod, it was apparent that the applause he was receiving was not really what he would have expected for a first-prize winner. And to anyone who had spent ten seconds in Grey's arrogantly chilly presence the reason for the lack of popular enthusiasm would also have been predictable.

"We'll ask the champion to describe his prize-winning murder for us," Simon said.

"Rather simple, actually," Wyler said, letting it be known with his expression and tone that he found the whole business of public acclaim slightly boring. "Alastair has ambitions to be a writer."

Alastair squirmed as Wyler paused to let his unspoken but completely obvious evaluation of his victim's literary potential impress itself on the group. Then Wyler continued.

"I knew he had an electric typewriter and that he spent a couple of hours every night writing his fictional productions. I wired the typewriter space bar to a pen light concealed under the machine. As soon as Alastair started to type the pen light turned on. But it wasn't a pen light. It was a laser beam. In two seconds it had burned through his vital organs to his spine, rendering him quite dead. . . and depriving the world, I'm sure, of a quantity of artistic outpourings second only to the works of Tobias Smollett."

Grey sat down amid grudging chuckles and a new round of applause.

"Congratulations," the Saint said drily. "It seems you won't get your prize until the other announcements have been made." He looked at his paper and then out over the crowd. "Would Eleanor Knight please stand?"

In the dim light Eleanor Knight was not much more than a plump ghost with long dark hair and an apologetic smile.

"She doesn't look dead," Simon said gallantly, "but according to these notes she is. And the one who killed her is certainly one of the most lovely murderesses I've ever met: Jenny Turner."

Jenny, still holding the candle, told her story. Unlike Grey Wyler, she was more giggly than blase about her accomplishment.

"I gave Eleanor a can of hair spray for her birthday. When she pressed the button the first time, out came a blast of spray, the top popped off, and there was a note that said, 'Congratulations. You have just been instantly killed by prussic acid gas. Many happy returns of the day. From your hunter, Jenny Turner.'"

The next victim introduced by the Saint was almost invisible at his crowded table in the darkest recesses of the room.

"Now David Green's hunter, the third prize winner, Bill Bast."

Bast, like Jenny, treated the whole thing as a joke—emphasizing even more Grey Wyler's seriousness about the whole thing.

"I wrote David a letter commenting on his work," Bast said. "On college stationery. All very official. But at the end I put something like this: 'For the last minute you have been handling paper impregnated with a deadly contact poison, phenyl-hydrazine. This is spreading through your system. By the time you finish reading this, you will be dead.'"

As the applause subsided, Simon gratefully concluded his own part in the program.

"The nature of the prizes has been kept secret. I'm told that Dr. Manders will make the announcement."

Manders managed to suppress the more obvious signs of his peevishness as he mounted the dais. Simon supposed that all men who spent a great deal of time lecturing must develop some skill as actors. Manders, while hardly enchanting, at least arranged his face into a pleasant mask.

"The prizes have been kept secret because of their nature," he said. "And I think the news of that nature will come as a surprise to all of you—who perhaps expected something on the order of a fountain pen or a cheap chess set. You will be very pleased, I think, to hear that a special grant has been made to me by the British Foundation for the Advancement of Psychological Research—five hundred pounds worth, to be exact."

When the *oos* and *ahs* abated, Manders went on.

"This, along with certain anonymous private donations, will be used to send our three victorious young murderers to an international conclave of Death Game prize winners. . . for a week's holiday on Grand Bahama Island."

At that point, which might have set loose an uproar, the audience seemed too stunned to move.

"I have the air tickets, which I shall now distribute. Grey Wy-

ler, Jenny Turner, and Bill Bast will be flying across the Atlantic to the Bahamas tomorrow."

As Manders stepped down, pulling an envelope from his jacket pocket, the response delayed from the first moment of the announcement broke with full force. Simon kept to the relative safety of the wall as students milled among the tables talking excitedly and trying to shake the hands of the prize winners. Manders had opened his envelope and was holding the tickets over his head, making his way into the center of the tumult.

Bill Bast emerged from the melange of bodies like a particle compensatorially discharged because of the entry of Dr. Manders' greater mass. He wore anything but the expression one might expect to see on the face of a man who has just been awarded a free trip to a West Indian island.

"You don't seem very pleased," Simon volunteered, to give Bast another chance to resume his interrupted confidences.

"I . . . I'm not. This is even worse—or maybe I should say stranger than I expected."

"I gather you want to tell me about it, so I don't think I'm prying if I suggest that you speak up. The suspense is beginning to get me."

"Not here," Bast said, glancing into the crowd. "You leave now while they're all worked up and not noticing anything. I'll join you in a couple of minutes."

The Saint nodded agreeably. He knew now that his instinct had not been at fault. The night was definitely not going to have been wasted.

—4—

In the space of a few welcome lungfuls of comparatively unpoluted smog, the Saint found his way back to the psychology building. He entered the main hallway without any difficulty, but found the door to the laboratory locked. He did not have to wait long, however, before Bast appeared, a lanky figure loping along the hall like a worried giraffe.

"They think I left something behind here," Bast said, as he unlocked the door. "They don't know you're with me, so I'll try to explain fast."

When they were inside the big room he relocked the door behind them and looked furtively around as if expecting some spy

to be hiding among the fragrant cages of drowsy mice which occupied the lower part of one wall.

"If you're worried," Simon said, "I'm fairly certain nobody followed me."

Bast motioned Simon to one of the wooden chairs arranged around a central table.

"I feel like an idiot, carrying on like this," he said. "But I know it's not my imagination. Or at least I think I know. Maybe I'm manufacturing a big dramatic fantasy out of almost nothing."

"The psychologist speaking," Simon said. "Let's not worry about the epistemology of it and get on with the facts. What's on your mind?"

Bast took a deep breath and perched on a stool with all the relaxation of a praying mantis on the head of a pin.

"I don't have a clue as to how this Death Game started," he said, "but it wasn't here in London. Six months ago nobody'd ever heard of it. All of a sudden students all over the world were playing it."

Simon shrugged.

"Stranger things have happened. Hula hoops, marathon dancing, the frug. You think there was something ominous involved?"

"Not necessarily in the beginning. As I say, I don't know. It's what's happened since—here—that bothers me and makes me wonder if the whole thing really did start merely as some kind of spontaneous student fad."

"Well, what *has* happened?"

"To begin right now instead of at the beginning, the British Foundation for the Advancement of Psychological Research didn't give Dr. Manders any grant of five hundred pounds."

"So you think Manders is lying?"

"I know he is."

"You checked with the foundation, I suppose," Simon said.

"I couldn't," Bast answered. "I couldn't even *find* the foundation."

"It doesn't exist?"

Bast fulfilled the threat of his nervous posture and took off for a fast lap around the long table.

"Oh, it exists all right—on paper. But try to find out anything about it. They've got a post office box and somebody who sends out vague answers to queries, and that seems to be it. They claimed they were a branch of the International Foundation for the Advancement of Psychological Research, with headquarters in

Vienna, but when I inquired at that address—by mail, of course—I got no answer at all.”

“Well,” the Saint said, “so long as they’re passing out funds for worthy causes—like holidays for you in the Bahamas—I wouldn’t rock the boat. Some of the few millionaires left in this drearily democratized world choose strange ways of arranging their tax deductions.”

“I don’t think the gift comes without strings attached,” Bast said earnestly. “And I think there’s something fishy at the bottom of it. All Manders’ talk about the value of the Death Game as a research device. . .nonsense! There aren’t enough controls. There aren’t enough opportunities for observation—under the present setup, I mean. And who the hell would choose to donate five hundred pounds for transatlantic vacations when the department’s crying for a . . .well, for a better computer, for instance.”

“Maybe some millionaires just aren’t mad about computers,” Simon hazarded. “But that isn’t positive evidence of skullduggery.”

“There’s more, and this is what really got me worked up about this thing in the first place. About a month ago I was at Manders’ house one evening. We used to be on quite good terms back . . .before he started changing. You might say we were getting together for old times’ sake—after a faculty meeting. Anyway, he went out to the kitchen to get a bottle of whiskey. I happened to notice a letter on the floor, and I picked it up. I think the breeze may have flipped it off a stack of other papers. It was very short, so even with a glance I got the idea. It told Manders—as if it were from somebody who had a perfect right to give him orders—to send a full report on Death Game activities. The whole thing was so strange that I took another look at the signature. It was typed in under an initial ‘T’ splashed on with one of those splurgy felt-tipped pens: Kuros Timonaides.”

The expression that appeared on Simon’s face reflected the combined feelings of recognition and distaste of a man who, after being bothered for some time by mystifying noises in his home, has just discovered a rat under the bed.

“You’ve heard of him?” asked Bill Bast.

“Haven’t you?”

“Just vaguely before I saw that letter. Mostly because he entertains film stars and titled people quite a lot and gets his name in the papers because of them. Since I saw the letter I’ve tried to find out more about him, but nothing much has been written, as far as I can tell.”

"I'm sure he likes it that way," Simon said. "He's one of those characters who becomes less endearing in direct proportion to the amount you know about him."

"I can tell I picked the right person when I helped to get you mixed up in this. I've heard you have more in your head about the underworld than Scotland Yard has in its files."

Simon stretched out his long legs and gave Bast a deprecating smile.

"Possibly," he said. "More that matters, anyway. But before I share my treasure trove of knowledge about the life and good times of Kuros Timonaides, let's hear the rest of your side of the story."

"Just one more thing—and this is all I've been able to find out. Twentyfour students are flying to the Bahamas tomorrow, from all over the world. Until the party, or whatever you want to call it, tonight, I didn't know *where* they were going, but I managed to find out by contacting friends at different universities that something like this was coming up. And all financed by that phony-sounding International Foundation. The only trouble is, everybody has the same reaction you had at first. . . ."

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth?"

"Exactly."

The Saint stood up and paced across the room to the window, by completely automatic force of habit positioning himself so that he could see out without being easily seen.

"In Timonaides' case I'd make an exception," he said. "I'd have any gift horse of his inspected by the most highly qualified dentist I could get—and I expect I'd find I'd just been given the world's first stallion with three-inch tiger fangs."

Bast grinned.

"Quite a hybrid."

"That's Timonaides for you: a real hybrid. Traitor, patriot, philanthropist, thief, Friend one month and blackmailer the next. But the fact that he's not in jail, or dead, shows how skillful he's been at keeping his head above the legal waters. Unless you can prove something—for instance that Manders is breaking the law, or that fraud is involved, or somebody's being bilked, you won't get much but sympathetic shrugs."

"I have something more concrete," Bast said.

He stood there hesitating, and the Saint gave him an encouraging nod.

"Yes?"

"I hate to admit. . . that I stole it."

Simon smiled.

"What fun would it be if the bad guys had a monopoly on such grand old methods? Where is it, whatever it is?"

"Here."

Bast plunged his hand into his jacket pocket and drew out, his fingers trembling with nervousness, a folded sheet of stationery. Simon took it and began to read. As he scanned the typed lines his expression changed from one of tolerant interest to intense concentration.

Manders:

Enclosed, 5000 for expenses. In answer to your first question, we realize that you cannot control winners of competitions at your school, but we emphasize again the extreme importance of discovering and encouraging properly oriented students. In answer to your second question, regarding suspicions of colleagues, we hold you entirely responsible in such matters and remind you of our earlier warnings. It may be necessary to eliminate B, and if so you need no further authorization.

The letter was signed by brush-point pen with an ornate capital T.

Simon looked at Bast with his lips thoughtfully compressed.

"Well, B., I don't blame you for feeling nervous. I don't suppose I need to ask if Manders might have somebody else with the same initial in mind."

Bast shook his head.

"No. He's realized I was watching him for some time. I can tell, and I know I'm not a very subtle spy. But of course I can't take seriously this business about eliminating anybody. Manders isn't the sort to..."

"I wouldn't be overconfident about that. Remember, Timonaides is today's greatest living proof of the power of unscrupulous money. Blackmail and bribes can turn a worm into a snake. You..."

The telephone rang and Bast automatically turned to answer it. "Bill Bast..."

He glanced at Simon, puzzled.

"Doesn't seem to be anybody there," he muttered. "Hullo? Hullo?"

He frowned, and held the earpiece just slightly away from his ear.

"Sounds like somebody's whanging a bloody tuning fork..."

That was the last thing Bill Bast ever heard, except perhaps

for one unearthly eternal instant of shattering thunder as the telephone receiver exploded with the noise of a shotgun shell and blasted away the side of his head.

When Simon reached him he had already stopped writhing. A final twitching spasm passed through the long body, and it lay as dead and meaningless as the slaughtered carcass of a cow or the car-smashed body of a rabbit.

—5—

The Saint had spent his life in the tangled jungles of violence, but he was not so inured to the spectacle of death that he could see a man destroyed directly in front of him, even one who could not yet have been called a friend, and not feel a powerful compulsion to guarantee personally that the same fate would be dealt to the murderer. He knew now that whatever plans he might have made for the next few days would have to wait until he had played out his own part in the Death Game that had not remained a game.

Within thirty seconds after the explosion, an old and half blind but obviously not entirely deaf night watchman had arrived and departed to spread the alarm, cautioning Simon not to leave the scene of the crime. The aged guardian of taxpayers' property showed his trust of the stranger he had found in the psychology lab by locking the door behind him as he ran out and went off skidding and stumbling down the freshly waxed hall.

Simon chose not to depart by one of the easily available windows, and instead spent his time of confinement searching through Manders' file for further clues as to his more than scholarly interest in the Death Game and his contact with Kuros Timonaides. But he had found nothing when there was a renewed sound of running footsteps in the hall and a rattle in the lock of the door.

Dr. Manders hurried in, key in hand, with Jenny Turner and Grey Wyler following. Behind them were several other students.

"The watchman. . ." Manders gasped.

Simon pointed.

"Oh, no. . ." somebody whispered.

It was to Jenny's credit that she did not scream as girls do in the movies when confronted with terrible sights. She simply gasped and turned away, supporting herself on the side of the nearest table with her eyes closed. Manders looked palely sick, and for a moment Simon thought the man was going to faint, but he held

himself up, mouth trembling, and his eyes seemed to dart around the room as if looking for a place where they could hide from the sight of the mutilated body.

Grey Wyler was the first who was able to say anything. After an initial moment of shock he had begun to study the scene with the intense fascination of a strong-stomached biology student peering into the bowels of his first dissected cat.

"It's real," he murmured to himself. "It happened."

He looked at Simon, who appeared to be the only person with sturdy enough nerves to hold up the other side of a conversation.

"It really worked," said Wyler.

"Am I to take that as a confession?" asked the Saint.

Wyler ignored the question and bent down to inspect the blasted end of the telephone receiver without touching it.

"I invented the idea," he said. "I used it to get Peter Collins several months ago. My first decathlon."

"Oh, Grey," Jenny said. "This is no time to..."

Wyler interrupted her.

"The beauty of it is, you can control the timing. There was... I suppose you wouldn't know... a tuning fork used at the other end of the line?"

"He mentioned the sound of one," said Simon.

"There," Wyler announced triumphantly. "Exactly as I planned it. If the wrong person answers when you call to set off the blast, you don't twang the tuning fork."

"Ingenious," Simon said with dry abhorrence. "You deserve something for that."

He had the distinct feeling, as he watched Wyler babble enthusiastically about his deadly inventiveness, that he was in the presence not merely of a neurotic, but of a mind that was dangerously unbalanced. Wyler was reacting to the whole thing as an immodest author might react to fondling a copy of his first published book. That, more than any display of shock and sorrow could have, dispelled any thoughts the Saint might have had about Wyler's responsibility for the killing. It was highly unlikely that a murderer would choose a mood so grotesquely akin to enthralled delight for the purpose of covering his guilt. More bizarre dramas had been tried, but in Wyler's case the abnormal reaction seemed genuine.

Within three minutes the first policeman arrived, with the ancient watchman panting at his heels. Dr. Manders, who after a

long period of silence had managed to recover control of his breath and quavering lips, chose that moment to address the Saint.

"I wouldn't be so ready to accuse Wyler, if I were you," he said hoarsely. "You were the only one here when...when Bast was killed."

Simon had to wait for a predictable but none the less flattering response on the part of the policeman, who recognized him immediately, came to a sudden halt, and seemed ready to back out of the laboratory and run for reinforcements.

"Simon Templar," the officer said, as if he had to hear it himself to believe it.

"And the top of the evening to you," said the seraphically innocent cause of his discomposure, with a slightly exaggerated bow. "How are the wife and kiddies?"

"Quite well, thank you... How'd you know about them?"

"You just have the look of a nice family man."

The policeman swallowed and tried to recover a stern and authoritative air.

"Inspector Teal is on his way."

To one unacquainted—if there are any such still squandering their impoverished lives in the backwaters of this planet—with the history of the relationship of Simon Templar with the upper echelons of Scotland Yard, the officer's latter statement might have seemed irrelevant, even eccentric or inexplicable. But to the more enlightened multitudes of the earth it will be perfectly apparent that the cognomen of his chieftain—Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, always bested and even more often outwitted by the Saint—was in spite of its connotations of defeat and frustration the nearest thing to a protective amulet or holy name which he could draw upon in these trying circumstances. He would let the gods and Titans fight their own battles. As for him, he would merely issue the customary warning against illicit departures from the scene of the crime and busy himself with writing down the names and addresses of those present in his official notebook.

Simon turned his attention back to Dr. Manders.

"I believe you were accusing me of the murder when this efficient guardian of peace and tranquillity arrived on the scene."

Much stronger men than Manders had quailed before the sharp blue penetration of the Saint's eyes.

"No," he said feebly, at the same time trying to insert a measure of defiance into his tone. "I merely stated that you were the only

one with Bast when he was killed. Therefore if I were in your place I wouldn't go around insinuating. . ."

"Dr. Manders," said the Saint coldly. "I am not in the habit of shooting people with telephones. And I defy anybody on earth—even Inspector Teal—to come up with an even remotely plausible reason why I should want to do away with a man I met only two hours ago and don't know the first thing about."

The last phrase, while slightly mendacious, might at least forestall any suspicions on Manders' part that Bast had revealed his apprehensions before he was permanently silenced. It was no more than a hope, but there was no harm in trying.

Manders opened his mouth and thought better of it. He went over to one of the larger chairs at the end of one of the tables, sat down, and supported his elbow on the surface, morosely resting his cheek on his hand.

Wylér, having completed his inspection of the death scene and given his statement, turned superciliously back to the constable, who had begun to question one of the other students.

"I see no reason for our staying here," he said. "The crime was done by remote control. Mr. Templar couldn't have done it, if he was here in this room when the shot went off, and the rest of us just happened to be the first to arrive after we got word about the explosion. You've got no more reason to suspect us than those people hanging around in the hall outside."

"Nobody is allowed to leave," said the policeman, as if quoting from some rule book, and he went back to writing his notes.

"We have to fly to the Bahamas tomorrow," Wylér persisted, moving close to him, tilting back his head a little so he could look down his nose at a man approximately his own height. "We can't stay up here all night when there's no reason for it."

"Nobody leaves," said the constable grimly, taking a renewed stranglehold on his stub of a pencil.

"Surely we won't be going," Jenny said, finding her first words since she had entered the laboratory.

She looked questioningly at Dr. Manders, but he had already made a slight but definite jerking movement of his head, as if her sentence carried a minor electrical charge.

"Of course you will," he said. "We can't let. . .this interfere with everything."

Jenny glanced in the direction of Bast's corpse and shuddered, looking quickly away again.

"I . . . I'm not sure I could. I mean, I don't really feel like much of a . . ."

Simon's mind had been working with a speed and efficiency that would have dazzled the computer at the end of the room and possibly made it blink its little rows of glowing red eyes with envy. His theories and plans were not fully formulated yet, but certain broad shapes were already emerging. He was enough ahead of the game to know that if Jenny pressed her point certain things he had in mind for the immediate future might be endangered.

"Dr. Manders is right," he said gently, but with a subtle undercurrent of pressure which he hoped the girl wouldn't try to resist. "It's all planned, and a trip is just what you could probably use right now."

Manders looked approving, surprised, and vaguely suspicious. The Saint turned to him, still giving the impression that he was speaking to Jenny.

"And other people might be inconvenienced if you changed your plans. That wouldn't be fair to them, would it?"

By the end of his words he had definitely focused his attention on Manders, who uncomfortably nodded agreement.

At that moment there was a bustling in the hall clearly attendant on the arrival of some important personage. An instant later the door was thrown open by a uniformed constable, and a plump pink-checked man in a belted overcoat marched ponderously in, his jaw-working mercilessly on a wad of chewing gum entrapped somewhere in the vicinity of his left upper and lower second molars. When he saw the Saint—as he did almost immediately—the gum received a moment's reprieve, for the man's jaw promptly ceased its labors and fell slackly open. The massive self-confidence seeped out of him like water out of a muslin sack.

Simon affected a second or two of puzzlement, and then of delighted recollection. He rushed forward, his hands fraternally extended, his voice throbbing with emotion.

"Why, as I live and breathe, it's Claud Eustace Teal! Claud, I thought you were dead."

Claud did not look nearly as happy about the meeting as his enthusiastic friend. The pink of his cheeks coagulated into blotches of a deeper crimson.

"I'm not," he said unoriginally.

"Then why do you look so bloated? It must be your diet. Are you still stuffing yourself with spaghetti and suet puddings? You

don't need to, really. When they want to put you in a museum, they'll have a taxidermist do a professional job."

Chief Inspector Teal conquered a wincing grimace with a steely new set to his facial muscles.

"What are you doing here?" he barked.

"Claud, you have the most delightful way of coming right to the point."

"Yes. And what are you doing here?"

"You said that before."

"I'm asking you."

"I meant asked. Of course. Yes. Well, I happened to be wandering by outside when I ran into an elephant. It wasn't one of those pink ones, either—it was green. 'Excuse me, sir,' it said, very politely, 'but could you help me?' This was in Hindi, of course, because it was an Indian elephant. I asked what the trouble was, and it said: 'This is very embarrassing, but you know the saying that elephants never forget? Well, I just can't remember who said it.' I said I didn't know either, but why didn't he go into the University and look it up in the library? And he said 'I was going to do that, but I can't get through the door.' So being a kind-hearted bloke—"

"That's enough," Teal said.

Simon looked hurt.

"Don't you believe me? Didn't you see an elephant waiting outside?"

The detective turned away and went to the body. He peered at the shattered telephone.

"Now," he said stubbornly, hooking his thumbs in the belt of his coat. "Let's hear all about this."

"I was here when it happened," he said. "But before I tell you, let me introduce my friends to the finest officially approved ferretter of misdeeds this side of Mayfair—Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal of Scotland Yard. This is Dr. Manders, professor of psychology, Grey Wyler, student, and Jenny Turner, another student."

Teal nodded and grunted the required number of times, brightening a little when it came Jenny's turn.

"I'll have to question you all," he said.

"But it's late," Wyler protested. "And we weren't involved."

"I'll make it as fast as possible. In the meantime..."

"Claud," said the Saint, taking an urgent grip on the fat de-

tective's arm, "if you'd question me first I'd very much appreciate it."

Teal also recognized when the Saint had stopped fooling, and having benefited before from Simon's misappropriation of his duties, he had sense enough to give in without an argument.

"I'll talk to you first down here," he said.

He led the way to the far end of the room and planted himself at a workbench, in the center of which was a complex open-topped maze of the type used for the confusion and intellectual testing of mice. Simon relaxed gracefully into the place beside him.

"Now," Teal said, "let's hear the real story."

The Saint was very sober now. He began, without elaboration, at the point of Jenny's mimicked phone call and quickly brought the detective up to the time at which Bast had asked Simon to leave the prize-giving party so that the two of them could talk.

At that stage of the narrative, a little Saintry selectivity seemed advisable. A plan had already evolved in Simon's mind, and if Teal learned too much too soon his unimaginative and congenitally uncooperative nature would surely lead him to become a hindrance. Simon wanted Manders out of the way until he could get his own plans moving, but he was not yet prepared to present Teal with the complete possible background of Manders' misdeeds. Fortunately, the letter Bast had given him, while incriminating, was quite vague in most respects, and did not even mention the Death Game.

"If this Wyler invented that telephone-tuning fork trick," Teal said, pocketing his gum chipmunk-fashion in one bulging cheek, "and you think he's some kind of nut anyway, then. . ."

Simon shook his head patiently and inserted a long finger into the entrance of the maze, whence it began to move quickly along the convoluted paths, occasionally hesitating, avoiding a dead end, then hurrying on again with greater certainty.

"No," he said. "It's Manders. I feel completely sure of that."

Teal watched with fascination the progress of the Saint's finger through the maze.

"Can you prove it?"

"I think so. Aren't you going to ask what Bast told me when we left the party?"

"Of course. I was just trying to think. . ."

"No need to overtax yourself, Claud. I have evidence."

Simon's forefinger slid victoriously around the last corners of the maze and emerged from the exit gate, ignoring the bit of

dried cheese which waited there as a reward. Then it reached, in combination with his thumb, into his shirt pocket and pulled out the letter, which Teal eagerly read.

Almost before he finished the last line, the chief inspector was starting to gather his legs under him to stand up, but the Saint restrained him with a firm hand and a cautionary look.

"Don't jump the gun, dear old bloodhound. One bit of advice first."

"What?" Teal asked impatiently, partly settling back again.

"Since Manders seems to be tied in with other people in some nefarious scheme, get rid of the other witnesses first, then take him off quietly, and keep him under lock and key and away from any telephones, telegraph offices, or outside contacts for as long as you can. Don't tell the newspapers about him. We don't know what Manders was involved in, but it would seem wise to avoid changing the plans of anybody connected with him."

"What kind of plans?" Teal asked.

He was eyeing the maze, its challenge distracting his thoughts from more important business. His right forefinger made a tentative move toward the entrance and then hopped back to his paunch like a cautious bird.

"Any kind of plans," Simon answered impatiently. "You don't want to tip off Manders' buddies that he's been pinched; otherwise they may just fold their tents and silently steal away before you can sweat their names and addresses out of him."

"Bast didn't tell you anything about this 'T' who signed the letter, or what it was all about?"

"Sorry. He didn't have a chance.

"It could stand for Templar," Teal said, with chronic dubiety.

"Or Teal?" responded the Saint goodhumoredly. "Shall we call it a stand-off?"

Teal did not answer immediately. He had just succumbed to temptation. His pudgy finger, a good inch shorter than the Saints, lunged at the entrance of the maze and barged down the first aisle.

"You may have the right idea," he said grudgingly, running immediately afoul of a triple-pronged, interconnecting cul-de-sac which must have brought frustration to many a hungry mouse.

"I do," said the Saint. "And isn't it nice that the fun of investigation will be all yours—because for once I don't know a thing about what's going on."

Teal's finger had backtracked and was once more near the en-

trance. After a moment of desperate study it rushed off again in another direction, and rapidly reached another dead-end. With a grunt of exasperation he snatched his hand away and hid it beneath the table.

"I just hope for once you're telling the truth and will stay out of this," he growled.

"Don't feel bad about being beaten by a tricky little puzzle like that," the Saint said sympathetically. "I'll bet lots of mice never made it even half as far as you did."

—6—

Teal's simmering expression said that if he had had the power he would cheerfully have produced a razor-edged scimitar and with one careless flick disengaged the Saint's impudent head from his body. But he was practical enough to know that the Saint's position was logically irrefutable, galling as it was to have to concede it.

"Is there anything else you have to tell me?" he asked.

"No," said the Saint with genuine sincerity, "except I wish you all the luck in the world with this case, and I'll be looking forward to reading about it in the papers."

He stood up, and the detective regarded him with lingering regret and habitual distrust.

"Saint—don't think for a minute I believe you'll stay out of this if you thought there was something in it for you."

"But what could be in it for me? After you've done the spadework I may step in and reap the harvest, but for the time being I wouldn't have the faintest idea of how to proceed."

Teal glowered and called for Grey Wyler, who came sauntering over with a bored expression that plainly stated his feelings about having to waste his time talking to anyone with the low intellectual equipment of a policeman. Dr. Manders had picked up some scientific bulletin and was pretending to show his detachment by reading it, but the drumming fingers of his other hand betrayed his nervousness.

Simon stopped beside Jenny on his way to the door and murmured in her ear.

"Don't change any plans. Don't speculate out loud about what's going on."

"Are you leaving?"

"Before Teal changes his mind about letting me go. Do you know Manders' address?"

"Not offhand, but he's in the phone book."

"What's the first name or initials?"

"G. F. . . . But listen, won't I be seeing you again?"

"You seem to know my number," he smiled, and went out to his car.

He drove off in the general direction of Tottenham Court Road, but came upon a street-corner phone booth before he got there, and quickly found the address he wanted in the directory. It turned out to be in Bloomsbury, right on the fringe of the University area, and he took the shortest way to it as automatically as if it had been his own home, calling on a knowledge of the complex streets of London that had once been as complete as that of any taxi driver although he had mastered it for less legitimate purposes. And in this case his most urgent purpose was to get there before Teal or some of his deputies got there with similar quests in mind.

Whenever they got around to it, they would be armed with proper search warrants. Simon Templar was perfectly happy to dispense with such luxuries, but his project might be complicated somewhat if the professor turned out to have a family snoozing at home while he was being questioned by Inspector Teal at two-thirty in the morning. Even a wife and possibly a tribe of juvenile Manderses would not, however, present insurmountable difficulties to an adept second-story man like the Saint. Besides, he did not think he had to worry; Bast, in telling about his visit to Manders' place, had not mentioned the presence of any relatives, and Manders showed no signs in face or jewelry of the bonds of married life.

As he had expected, then, the Saint found Manders' dwelling dark and to all appearances deserted. It was a very small house of dingy exterior, wedged between larger but even dingier former mansions which had probably been divided into flats or had decayed into student rooming-houses. There were no traces of wakefulness in them either. Simon's only potential problem, then, would be the possible untimely arrival of Dr. Manders himself if Teal failed for some reason to detain him. But even a thorough questioning would take a while—and a while, even a short while, was all that Simon needed to carry out what amounted to a routine search for additional evidence.

The lock of Manders' door offered no more resistance to the

Saint's skill than a stick of butter to a hot knife. Within a few seconds he was inside, carefully replacing the door in its original position, and in fact locking it behind him. Even Manders, if he did return, would not have to know he had a guest.

Simon's eyes were already accustomed to darkness, and he did not need to add his pen flashlight to the general luminosity of the night in order to find his way through the house. The dining room and the kitchen held no interest for him, nor did the living room at the front of the house. A scholarly type such as Manders would surely possess a room devoted to books, files, records, and the other paraphernalia of his profession, even if the University furnished him with office space at the place of his work.

And if Manders, in addition to being a scholar, also was involved in dishonest or even questionable dealings, he would not be likely to leave incriminating documents lying around the college buildings for any charwoman or prying student to stumble on. The most logical spot for the beginning of a search, then, was his private study, and within two minutes of entering the house the Saint had found it.

It was not a large room, and its lack of space was exaggerated by the quantity of bookshelves and cabinets which lined the walls. Near the single window was a desk and chair. The Saint began his search in the unlocked drawers of the desk and soon decided he was on the wrong track. Even a man quite sure of the safety of his home from prying eyes would not leave damaging papers lying about in the most obvious and easily accessible places—particularly if he had murder on his mind. On the other hand, common sense indicated that Manders was no professional criminal, and it was unlikely that he would go to the extreme of having even minor alterations made in the architecture of his home, the solidity of his chair legs, or the stuffings of his mattress for the purpose of hiding things.

What would such a man do, then, with materials he didn't wish to share with anybody? He would probably just lock them up in something—assuming he did not burn them—and indulge in the usual naive relaxation of people who think that any run-of-the-mill lock can cause more than three minutes' discomfiture to a really dedicated searcher.

So Simon quite simply went around the study until he came to the first locked cabinet—a wooden one—and forced it with a letter opener from the top of the desk.

There he found a number of photographs which would ordi-

arily have held no interest except to a student of a rather specialized type of pornography. The nature of the pictures, however, implied that Dr. Manders might be particularly susceptible to blackmail. Such peripheral facts were pleasantly enlightening, but not of much concrete use to the Saint. He was delighted to find, beneath the pictures, some other materials.

The most immediately striking was a letter, typed except for the flourished initial "I" at the bottom, whose text ran as follows: *Manders:*

An additional payment of 5000 for each recruit at Bahama meeting. Meeting to be held as scheduled.

Further delay in disposal of B. will result in the most serious consequences for you.

Simon appreciatively noted the second mention of five thousand pounds in two letters, which seemed to imply a handsome private income for Dr. Manders beyond his legitimate earnings as a certified enlightener of the nation's youth.

He wished that the professor had been thoughtful enough to leave whatever part of the earlier sum that remained after the purchase of airplane tickets and such, lying about in the cabinet with his dirty pictures, but unfortunately he had not, and the other treasures that the cabinet yielded had a less immediately obvious value than would a nice stiff stack of ten-pound notes. Besides another letter from Manders' sponsor—the first one seen and mentioned of nine or ten pages each.

A closer inspection with the thin beam of his pocket light showed Simon that they were some sort of statistical reports. Had they been lying among other reports and papers in plain view it is probably that he would never have noticed them unless in the last painstaking minutes of a thorough search. But since they were so carefully hidden, he carefully noted their titles.

The first was called VARIETIES OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE IN PLAYERS OF THE DEATH GAME. The second: DISTRIBUTION OF HOMICIDAL OBSESSION IN AGE GROUPS 18 TO 25, WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA.

It was not exactly the ideal moment to take up those psychological studies, so the Saint folded the reports and stowed them in his pocket along with the letters. By taking them into custody he would at least have an opportunity to study them before the police did, and if it seemed best that they be discovered eventually

in Dr. Manders' house, that could be arranged, too—perhaps with another brief visit like tonight's.

Satisfied that he had found as much as he could hope for without completely ransacking the house, Simon closed the cabinet, shut off his small light, and left as he had come. By now he was expecting that Teal would have Manders safely tucked away for the night; there was not a soul in the foggy streets, and he had every reason to think his expedition had gone completely unobserved.

So it was more than a small surprise to him when he opened his car door and saw Jenny Turner huddled down in the corner of the passenger seat.

"Hullo, Simon."

The Saint, with considerable restraint, continued his interrupted movement of getting in, but not without first assuring himself that no one else was hiding down in the space behind the front seats.

"Either there's more that one of you or you sure get around a lot," he said quietly.

"I followed you. Or I should say I thought you might come here, so I came myself. I left my car around the corner when I saw yours."

"You're quite the little private eye."

He started the engine and let in the clutch.

"The next corner on the right," Jenny said, pointing.

"I suppose," the Saint said as he drove slowly in the indicated direction, "my intentions were a bit obvious when I asked about Manders' address. But what made you come after me?"

Jenny shrugged, slipping her arm through his.

"I wanted to be quite sure I wouldn't be left out of whatever you're going to do next. It isn't every night a girl has the chance to play a real death game with the Saint."

Simon drove up behind the red MG and stopped again. They were far enough beyond the turning to be out of the ordinary view of any police posse that might belatedly arrive at Manders' house.

"We're not playing any more," he told her firmly. "This thing has stopped being a game, and I think the sooner you get home and curl up with a good textbook the better off you'll be. But first can you tell me what happened to Manders?"

"After that fat detective questioned me he sent us all away except Manders. I drove off around the block and came back

where I could watch. An ambulance arrived, and another car with men in plain clothes. One of them was lugging a lot of gear. . .”

“The police photographer, no doubt.”

“Then one of the plain-clothes men came out with one of the bobbies and they were holding Dr. Manders between them, it looked as if he was handcuffed, and they put him in the car and drove away. When I realized they must have arrested him I almost dropped my teeth, but I thought if you really did think he did it you’d probably have come straight here.”

“And are you sure Inspector Teal didn’t enlist you as his own personal little spy?”

“I wish you wouldn’t call me little,” Jenny said indignantly. “I’m not a child, I’m over twentyone!”

“Well?”

“Of course he didn’t. I told you. . .”

“Well,” the Saint mused, “maybe I’ll never know, but if dear old Claud did hand you some kind of a line and ask you to report back anything interesting I might do, he’s come up a bit on the evolutionary scale. Those bumbling bipeds he usually employs to follow me around could lose track of an egg in a tea-cup.”

“He really didn’t.”

Simon touched her lips with one finger.

“Never mind. No point forcing you to betray any confidences or tell any fibs. All I want to be sure of is that you’re not a deep-dyed member of the Other Side. And I think I’m convinced of that.”

“Other side?” she repeated.

He had leaned very near her—which did not take much leaning.

“Yes,” he said, and then he kissed her, very lightly. “Other side. There’s always an other side, and you and I are going to the Bahamas tomorrow to meet them. What do you think of that?”

She just stared at him, so he kissed her again.

“Now, off to bed with you. We’re going to have a long trip ahead of us, and there’s a lot of packing to do.”

“Are you really going to the Bahamas?” she asked a little desperately, suddenly getting her voice back.

“Don’t you recall that Sebastian Tombs, part-time lecturer in Egyptology, won the Death Game fourth prize and was moved up to take Bill Bast’s place?”

"Oh," Jenny said, with no easily definable nuance of expression.

"Of course, Claud Eustace isn't supposed to know that, or he might try to stop me. I don't think he'll find out till it's too late, if you don't tell him. And just so that Grey Wyler can't spill it, don't say anything to him either. Later I'm counting on you to help persuade him to go along, with the scheme wheeze."

He got out, and opened the door on her side and walked her to the MG. He leaned in the window for a farewell warning.

"Aside from helping me to crash the party, I hope you'll just play dumb about everything. I can't protect you every minute, and I'd like to see you live to blossom into the fullness of womanhood—if it's humanly possible to blossom any further than you already have."

"But Simon!" she wailed, as if the realization had only just dawned on her. "You still haven't told me what you were looking for at Dr. Manders' house, or if you found anything!"

He kissed her once more, lightly and said: "I'm not sure yet. Sleep tight, Jenny. I'll see you at the airport."

—7—

There was one important detail which the Saint had neglected to specify: the airport at which he expected to see her was not London, as she assumed, but Freeport, Grand Bahama Island.

To Simon Templar, the subterfuge was only a normal avoidance of unnecessary risks. Just in case Teal should have second thoughts—or even if Jenny's allegiance was not as complete as it seemed—they would naturally expect the Saint to travel on the same plane as the Death Game party, leaving late the next afternoon. Whereas he intended to be well on his way before they even missed him.

The fog was lifting, he was glad to observe as he drove back to Upper Berkeley Mews, so there should be no disorganization of plane departures. A quick search through the international air timetables which were one of the most vital sections of his library showed him the best connections to aim for, and a phone call to BOAC secured him a seat on the 11 a.m. VC10 to New York and a promise to work on his onward reservations.

Simon packed a single capacious suitcase, and still had time for three hours' refreshing sleep before he showered and shaved and set off for the airport. He noted that no Teal-sent bloodhounds

had made their conspicuously inconspicuous appearance in the vicinity of his portals, and took it as a good omen, which presently vindicated either his good luck or his craftiness when he was able to board his flight without any complications.

With the additional unpremeditated good fortune of drawing a seat neighbor of the true bulldog breed, who buried himself sarcophagally in the *Times* and made it pointedly plain that he never opened conversations with strangers unless a wing fell off, and perhaps not even then, the Saint was finally able to settle down to an unhurried perusal of the statistical reports which he had removed from Manders' cabinet, while he sipped on the first of the airline's bountifully proffered Martinis.

The unspectacular conclusions of DISTRIBUTION OF HOMICIDAL OBSESSION IN AGE GROUPS 18 TO 25 were not so interesting as the mere fact that Manders had chosen such a subject for his private collection, and also—judging from his underlinings—that he was especially concerned with the section on characteristics of murder-obsessed young people who had gone beyond obsession to actual killing.

The second report, VARIETIES OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE IN PLAYERS OF THE DEATH GAME, included a few pages of general information which apparently had been furnished Manders by an outside source, since it covered a number of different colleges. In addition to the general section, however, were several more pages almost certainly written by Manders himself; they discussed in detail, and by name, students who had reacted in various ways to taking part in the game.

Jenny Turner, for instance, was considered "*clever but frivolously casual, taking the whole thing as a joke.*" The report predicted that she would probably outdo most competitors but would be "*of no real use.*"

Simon, while he begged to differ with that pessimistic conclusion, went on to read a much more enthusiastic evaluation of Grey Wyler. Not only was he "*ingenious*" and "*highly intelligent*" but his attitudes toward "*society*" and "*wealth*" gave him "*additional motivation.*" He also showed happy signs of "*those characteristics typical of individuals who lack any strongly developed moral sense or appreciation of the feelings of others, and may under certain circumstances almost casually perform highly anti-social acts.*"

As Simon sat back to digest that slab of jargon, he felt the pleasant sensation that comes with clearly discerning a pattern in an apparent confusion of events. The word "recruit" in what must

have been Timonaides' most recent letter was a fairly solid tipoff, but the statistical reports confirmed the reality of a fantastic idea.

Kuros Timonaides, the master of legal illegality, was harnessing a student craze—whose beginnings he had probably himself encouraged—as a means of discovering and testing potential recruits for his criminal organization. He obtained the cooperation of men such as Manders with well-practiced techniques of blackmail and bribery—and if that cooperation showed signs of flagging, a more passive and permanent form could be ensured by convenient suicides or accidents—a method Timonaides' agents had been suspected of using in the past.

And now Simon Templar was flying right into the final heat of the Greek impresario's giant talent contest. He had one particular advantage over the rest of the contestants, however: he knew that a contest was going on. If he played the stacked deck right, he might even end up a winner.

It was only 1:30 p.m. in New York when the plane landed at Kennedy airport, and a BOAC representative met him with confirmed seating on a National flight to West Palm Beach, and after the customs and immigration formalities he was able to make the transfer very comfortably, without leaving the airport.

The plane to West Palm got in in time for him to catch one of the evening excursion flights to Freeport that had lately been inaugurated to ferry Florida tourists across to the gambling facilities of the emancipated British island. There was still enough daylight to enjoy the 50-minute flight out over the smooth sea at what seemed a barely drifting speed in comparison with the jets of the earlier parts of the trip. The incredibly dark blue waters of the Gulf Stream were below for awhile, and then the eastern boundary of the flow was delineated by an abrupt shift to translucent green. The ocean bottom was in many places as clearly visible as if there had been no water covering it at all, and Simon wished the plane flew low enough to allow a detailed view of the colorful coral reefs and the gliding forms of their finny inhabitants.

He checked in at the Lucayan Beach Hotel, had dinner, played away a handful of chips at the Casino, and went to bed to catch up on the five-hour time change with a full night's tranquil slumber, secure in the knowledge that he was at last out of range of Scotland Yard's interference, at least for a while. His timetable studies had told him that the direct plane from England via Bermuda to Nassau which was bringing the Death Game prizewinners from Europe would get there too late for them to catch a plane

to Freeport that night, and they would have to come on the first flight the next day.

When he woke up it was a beautiful warm sunny morning, an almost unbelievable transition from the dark gray chill that he had looked out of when he last got out of bed, and only a swim in the balmy turquoise sea before breakfast could pay it the tribute it deserved. When he went back to the airport to meet the Nassau plane, now wearing only a gay sport shirt and featherweight slacks, he felt like a new man, with all the exhilaration that only summery climes could give him.

His last lingering fragment of anxiety evaporated when he saw Jenny's blonde head and Grey's brown coming down the boarding stairs. But he preferred not to cause a noisy and attention-attracting runion, so he waited until they had come through the arrival barrier before he stepped forward and greeted his London friends as they started across the lobby.

Both were absorbed in interpreting the meaning of some message they had apparently received at the information desk, which absorption did not contribute to their composure when they suddenly saw the Saint materialize, like an exceptionally tall and healthy ghost, smiling down on them.

Grey just came to a complete halt and stared. Jenny gave a little cry of surprise, then exhaled and almost laughed with relief.

"Oh, Simon, I thought you weren't coming. You couldn't believe how worried I was. How on earth did you get here?"

She had extended both hands, which he accepted, and then he kissed her on the cheek.

"You must not have noticed me," he said. "I was right there on the plane with you."

Jenny gave him a bemused stare.

"No, you weren't. You couldn't have..."

Wyler interrupted, with condescending boredom in his tone.

"He means his alias was supposedly with us," he explained.

Jenny flushed.

"Simon, I wouldn't have told him anything you said to me, but after we were on the plane I told him you'd said you were coming."

"It's perfectly okay," Simon assured her. "I was afraid the Ungodly might get curious about what I'd do next, and I didn't want to take the chance of being held up by some obstruction or other—including Inspector Teal. And this way our hosts here wouldn't

have time to object to any changes in the guest list. So I came a more roundabout but faster way." He looked Wyler in the eye. "Since we're all in on this thing, I assume there's no reason you won't cooperate."

"I'm a lone wolf," Wyler said. "I don't believe in involving myself in other people's affairs. If you want to play a ridiculous game of cops and robbers, go right ahead. Just don't expect me to do more than keep quiet—particularly since no one's troubled himself to tell me what kind of paranoiac fantasies have been built up around this thing."

The Saint's brows arched slightly.

"Paranoiac? I suppose Bill Bast just imagines he's been killed?"

Wyler shrugged and looked as if he'd prefer to end the dull discussion and get on with the journey.

"I don't see any reason to look beyond Manders. I could have told you six months ago he was on the way to leaving the rails. It didn't take gossip about his personal oddities to point that up. There were obvious signs of deterioration: nervousness, forgetfulness, bad temper, feelings of persecution."

"So one day he just flipped his lid completely and killed somebody?" Simon asked.

"It seems that way. Apparently you think otherwise."

"Yes," Simon said flatly. "I won't give you the arguments for it now, but I wouldn't have come here if I'd just been taken with a sudden notion to go travelling." He glanced at Jenny. "In spite of the charming company available. But unless you have a positive interest in not seeing justice done, there's nothing to stop you going ahead and enjoying your holiday and pretending you're not well acquainted with me at all."

"And shall we say Bast was confined with a headache?" asked Wyler sarcastically.

"There's no point in lying. The news might get here at any time. Tell the truth, maybe with a little emphasis on that theory of yours about Manders' mental instability. Now, where to?"

Jenny glanced at the message she had been reading when the Saint's sudden appearance had interrupted.

"It says there's a car waiting for us outside," she said, nodding toward one of the exits.

Just beyond the door was a parked limousine—gigantic, shiny, and black—and its idly standing driver, though not quite so gigantic, had a face and bare arms of approximately the same color and sheen. On his head was an impressive item of haberdashery

which resembled an Ethiopian field marshal's cap done in maroon. His shirt was a kind of iridescent pink, his trousers yellow, his feet sockless, and his shoes two-toned in oxblood and white.

Jenny looked appropriately awed by this specimen of native exotica; Grey, as usual, refused to look anything but superiorly bored.

"Mistah Bast?" called the negro vaguely, at the emerging passengers, referring to a bit of paper in the pink palm of his hand. "Mistah Willy and Miss Tuhnah?"

"That's us," the Saint said to him, explaining that Sebastian Tombs was substituting for Mr. Bast.

A minute later they and their bags were in the limousine, and soon they were raising dust on a northeast course. The driver set a speed he apparently felt commensurate with his vehicle's grandeur, but fortunately the limitations of Bahamian highway construction—which is not adapted to wide or swift machines—put a limit on his ambitions, and his passengers were able to relax on upholstery which would have been worthy of the bed of a rajah. Even the frequent trumpeting of the horn were muffled by the heavy construction of the car and the hiss of the air conditioner.

Wyler looked impressed in spite of himself, and stole admiring glances at the luxurious shiny chrome fittings of the interior, and ran his fingers over the velvety surface of the arm rests. Jenny showed herself to be more sophisticated and devoted most of her attention to the Saint, who had had a feeling almost from the beginning that Jenny had the easy assurance of a solidly entrenched member of the moneyed classes, while Wyler showed signs of the bitter pride and bellicosity of insecure brilliance on the make.

"What'll we do when we get there?" Jenny asked.

"Go swimming?" suggested the Saint.

At the same time he made an almost imperceptible negative motion of his head, which he was pleased to see that Jenny was sharp enough to pick up. The glass partition between driver and passengers was open, but even if it had been closed—as Simon could have requested—he did not have much faith that any back seat conversations would remain private. There were too many other possibilities for eavesdropping: a hidden tape recorder, for instance.

"Oh, doesn't that sound like fun?" Jenny bubbled, putting on an act for the driver. "It's fantastic to think that places like this exist all the time—while we've been creeping around in the fog."

"What's even more amazing," Simon said, "is that anybody would care enough about us academic types to fly us across the ocean

and drive us around in a fancy rig like this."

His line, too, was for the driver's benefit. Now he leaned forward and spoke directly to him.

"Does this car belong to our host, or do your hire out to anybody?"

"Belongs to Mistah Timonaides, sah," answered the driver in the lilting accent of the islands.

"Didn't you have anybody else to pick up—any other people going to the same party?"

The negro looked around for an instant, his eyes invisible behind the giant blue shields of his sunglasses.

"What party you mean, sah?"

Simon refused to believe that the man could be quite that dense entirely on his own initiative.

"There are other people besides ourselves, aren't there?"

"Oh yas."

"Well, that's the party I mean."

"Oh yas. Other people come yesterday."

Simon realized that twentyfive more questions would not produce any more results than had the first few. He had hoped the man would be eager enough to show off whatever he did know to let slip some bit of interesting information. With that possibility out of the way there was nothing to do but sit back and enjoy the ride.

And the ride was enjoyable. Not only did he have the very pleasant presence of Jenny on his left (she was between him and Wyler in the center of the seat) but he also had the shimmering sunglazed intensity of the sea on his right. The road eastward from Freeport ran along the southern coast of the island, away from the resort areas and real estate developments of the western end, whose once pristine beaches had been infected with spores drifting over from Miami and now glittered in places with the same disease, slightly adapted to new conditions.

Though Simon had never been to the eastern end of Grand Bahama, he knew it was still fairly untouched, and it struck him as curious that anybody—even such an unusual figure as Mr. Timonaides, who had a reputation for curious activities—should be able to provide accommodations for the entertainment of two dozen or so visitors at such a distance from the established centers.

The limousine had passed the area of the American missile tracking station about twenty-five miles from Freeport when Simon leaned forward and spoke to the driver again.

"Where is the place we're going?"

True to form, the fount of non-information uttered two words. "Not far."

"Not far" turned out to be another twenty miles or so along the same shore. Simon tried to keep in mind a picture of their progress. Seen on a map, the eastern end of Grand Bahama Island is like the head of a pick-ax running north-south, mounted on the thick east-west shaft of the main body of the island. The southern point of the pick, hooking southward into the ocean, disintegrates into many small islands, so the Saint knew that their journey would have to end about the time they reached that sharp southerly curve of coast, or else—unless they were to transfer to a boat—the limousine would leave the shore it had been following and take a more northward route.

The first possibility turned out to be the fact. Before a change of direction became necessary, there appeared on the right an augmentation of the somewhat barren aspect of the island which obviously had been achieved and maintained at considerable effort and expense. Coconut palms, twisted pines, and coarse-leaved sea-grape bushes formed the basic ingredients of the plantation, which stretched about three hundred yards along the water and was about half that in depth.

Beside a shell-rock road which turned off toward the landscaped oasis was a white sign, its red lettering clearly legible to the occupants of any passing car:

EAST ISLAND VILLAS
OPENING SOON
POSEIDON ENTERPRISES

Above the letters was the black silhouette of a porpoise.

"Quite a little garden spot," Simon commented as the limousine slowed to walking speed and crept along the narrow rutted drive into the shade of the trees and high shrubs.

"So it's a resort that hasn't opened yet," Jenny said. "I wondered what kind of a place they were bringing us to."

"I'm still wondering," Simon said. "That's one of the secrets of a long and happy life, my children: never stop wondering."

They glimpsed a number of pastel-toned cottages scattered among the vegetation, and then they passed through a final dense grove of banana trees and emerged into a wide clearing directly on the water.

There was what seemed to be the central building of the complex, something like a plush American country club, with many

windows, the typical low-pitched roof of hurricane resistant concrete slabs, with a little square, slatted tower in the center. Above the tower, moving with nervous response to the slightest changes in the direction of a gentle wind, was a weather vane in the form of the same black porpoise which had appeared on the entrance sign.

Next to the white building was a large swimming pool, in or around which half a dozen young people were splashing or basking, and not far from that two tennis courts were still under construction. At the other end of the building was a protected marina with a large cruiser moored at its dock.

The driver parked the limousine at the main stairs of the building—which was wisely built high enough to prevent an abnormal tide from someday flooding the ground floor—and came around to open Simon's side of the car.

"We take care of de bags. Step right inside here an' de lady tell you all about everything."

Simon doubted he would hear all about everything he wanted to know without considerably more effort than that, but he cheerfully complied with his guide's instructions. Wyler and Jenny were beside him when they were met at the heavy glass doors by a gorgeous black-haired personage in shoulderless flowered dress and white sandals who surely could be none other than "the lady" mentioned by the chauffeur.

"I am Maria Corsina," she said with the slightest trace of an accent, extending her slender hand to each of them in turn. "I'm so glad you could come."

Her smile and cordiality were a little forced, as if she had been through the same routine so often that her muscles were tired, but nothing could mar the extraordinary beauty of her deeply tanned skin and the long obsidian flow of her hair.

As they returned her greeting, she ushered them into an air-conditioned lobby of red marble and gleaming burnished steel. Opposite the reception desk was the wide entrance to a big reading and game room with a full view of the sea on two sides. Several young people sat over cards or chess at various tables. Pleasantly bar-like sounds came from an unseen quarter.

"What a pretty place," said Jenny.

"We hope it will be a success," Maria Corsina replied. "All the villas will not be finished for several weeks."

"In the meantime," Simon put in, "I'm glad you found such a good use for it."

"I am glad someone did," she said a little mysteriously. "You will enjoy yourselves very much, I hope. Lunch will be served at one o'clock, and in the meantime, you can settle in and make yourselves at home. Dress is informal. I shall have one of the boys show you to your villas. Fortunately, there are only eighteen guests, so most of you will have a cabin to themselves. Now, Mr. Bast. . . Which of you is Mr. Bast and which Mr. Wyler?"

Wyler out of naturally poor manners, and Simon deliberately, had not identified themselves. But now Wyler responded with more friendliness in his tone than Simon had ever heard him use before; apparently even he was not entirely impervious to such a triple concentrated dose of sexuality as that administered by the olive-tanned exterior of his hostess.

"I'm Grey Wyler," he said with commendable honesty which Simon regretted he was not in a position to emulate.

"And I am not William Bast," he said. "My name is Sebastian Tombs, and I've come as a substitute for Mr. Bast."

The lady's disturbed surprise was obvious but quickly controlled. "Substitute?"

Simon looked quite genuinely concerned and puzzled.

"Didn't you know? I understood that a cable was sent. . ."

She shook her head.

"There was no cable. . .that I know of. Is Mr. Bast ill?"

"Mr. Bast is dead."

This time Maria Corsina could afford to let her shock run its natural course.

"How terrible! I'm so sorry."

Simon's voice had a gloominess which suited his pseudonym.

"Yes. I think it would be better for everybody's sake if we didn't discuss it. Depressing, you know. Be a pity to put a cloud over people's fun. These things happen—and what can we do now?"

"It's true," she sighed.

"I hope you don't mind that I've come in his place, though," Mr. Tombs said modestly. "I was only one point behind him in our contest, actually, so we thought it would be all right if I took his place on the team."

Maria Corsina's smile flickered back to life.

"Of course."

She touched his hand reassuringly, and Jenny's eyes seethed.

"You're more than welcome, Mr. Tombs. Please don't think of

yourself as a substitute. But since we did not know about you before, I shall look forward to finding out all about you."

—8—

Simon had just half an hour before lunch to take a look at his personal villa—which was elegantly and amply designed for the accommodation of at least two people—and to unpack his bag, which had been left off there by the time he walked over from the clubhouse.

An appetite encouraged by excitement and ocean air brought him back to the main building promptly at one o'clock, in time for him to see the majority of his fellow guests emerging by twos and threes after him from the jungle which hid their cottages. On the whole they were a decent-looking lot, mostly in their twenties or thirties, and though they spoke a variety of tongues any marked differences in national costume which might have existed when they arrived had disappeared in favor of shorts or slacks and sport shirts.

Jenny joined him as he was proceeding through the central lobby to the dining room's entrance, which was next to the yet inoperative reception desk. The restaurant was a large rectangular space with windows on the ocean side tinted blue against the glare. The interior decoration and furnishings had not been completed. A half finished mural on the inner wall dealt with Greek heroes and the Trojan horse. In place of the conventional smaller tables which undoubtedly would fill the room when the resort was opened to the public, there were three long ones arranged in a U formation, with the settings arranged for four on either side of each table.

Maria Corsina, along with a grey-haired man and six younger people, was sitting at the bottom of the U. Wyler was sitting at one of the other two tables, and Simon felt that was as good a reason as any to choose the remaining one. He and Jenny found places in the center of one side, the other seats were soon taken, and as red-jacketed negro waiters began serving the soup a young American with a broad face and a crew cut, who was sitting opposite Jenny, initiated introductions.

"I'm Joe Halston," he said, stretching his hand across the table to Simon. "I guess you folks are from London—last ones to get here."

"Right," said Simon. "I'm Sebastian Tombs. This is Jenny Turner."

A dark, hirsute Frenchman on one side of Halston introduced himself politely, then lowered his beard to the immediate vicinity of his soup and spent the rest of the meal eating. A belligerent Egyptian of uncertain age on the other side of Halston told them his incomprehensible name and spent the rest of the meal talking. The slender, timid, almost frightened-looking middle aged man on Simon's left seemed pleased to fulfill his social obligations with no more than a tepid handshake and the words, "Professor Santori," and to let the Egyptian take over with a lecture on the basic inferiority of Western civilization to the enlightened Middle East.

Simon managed to pacify himself for some time with excellent Bahamian boiled fish and a cool and delicious dry white wine which perfectly balanced the red-peppery broth. When he was at last at the point of making some unkind pro-colonial remarks Maria Corsina stood up and asked for attention.

"This is the first time all of you prizewinners have been together as a group," she began, "so I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the management of East Island Villas, to welcome you to this lovely island. We would like to do everything possible to make your stay a pleasant one."

She continued speaking for several minutes on matters such as the availability of sports equipment, outboard motor boats, and laundry services. Then she turned to the grey-haired, sharp-faced man seated beside her.

"And now," she said, "I would like to introduce you to a gentleman who is associated with the organization which contributed so much to bringing you here—the International Foundation for the Advancement of Psychology. He is a psychiatrist, and appropriately enough he is Viennese. He will say a few words. Dr. Paul Edelhof."

Dr. Edelhof was a wiry little man wearing a short-sleeved shirt stencilled with what seemed to be representations of rainbowhued squid suffocating in a morass of salad. The only thing about his person which could in any way compete with that shirt was his nose, whose magnificent convexity would have been worthy of the imperial eagle of his homeland.

After the usual pleasantries, spoken in a nervous but strong voice, almost without accent, he got down to business.

"Now I must warn you," he said amiably, cocking his head and giving a sly smile as he raised one finger, "that you have not been given this fine trip entirely for nothing. You extraor-

dinary people, having proven your competitive abilities, represent a kind of elite. The high selectivity of the Death Game brings together here a group more talented in certain ways than any other similar number of people in the world. Therefore, to those who interest themselves in human ability and psychology, you represent a valuable sample for observation. And that is all we ask of you—that you do not object, as you enjoy your happy holiday here, if I and a few of my colleagues watch from the sidelines, so to speak.”

Edelhof took a sip of water from his glass and touched his forehead with a handkerchief.

“Also, if you will permit it, we will from time to time ask a few questions or administer a very brief test.”

He introduced two men as his assistants. One was the Professor Santori seated next to the Saint, and the other, a Doctor Phillips, was strategically located at the third table. It was clear that the observation of the guests mentioned by Edelhof was already well under way.

“A final word,” Edelhof continued. “Often people with unusual abilities find that in spite of their talents they have difficulty gaining the respect and financial rewards which are due them. Perhaps this is due to circumstances, to unfairness on the part of superiors, to shyness or uncertainty, or to a simple lack of knowledge as to how to proceed.”

The psychiatrist’s manner was more intense now, and his bony fingers pressed hard onto the tablecloth as he leaned forward and seemed to fix the whole audience collectively with penetrating black eyes.

“If you are such a person, if you would like to seek counsel on means of putting your powers to profitable use, I cannot urge you too strongly to see me or one of my colleagues for a private interview. I feel sure we can give you helpful guidance which may make a great deal of difference to your future. And with that I thank you for putting up with a boring speech and wish you a most pleasant holiday.”

He sat down amid applause, and any quizzical expressions which had appeared on faces in his audience during the last of his remarks disappeared as baked Alaska was served by the waiters in their resplendent red jackets.

The Egyptian managed to suppress—until he had finished his own serving—his outrage at a civilization which, surrounded by starving victims of its imperialism, could produce warm browned

meringue on solidly frozen ice cream. And by that time the Saint was already excusing himself from the table. Jenny, who showed more and more signs of devotedly dogging his every step, left her dessert half finished in order to come with him. She was not overjoyed when Maria Corsina, smiling pleasantly, stopped them at the door.

"I hope you enjoyed your lunch," she said.

"Very nice," Simon replied. "If you keep up to that standard I may never want to leave."

"As I said—if there's anything I can do to make you happier, don't hesitate to tell me."

"We won't," Jenny said, managing to sound both sweet and murderous at the same time.

She took Simon's arm, but before she could apply any guiding pressure Maria Corsina went on speaking.

"I hate very much to interfere with your plans, but Dr. Edelfhof would like to see you if you don't mind."

"Of course not."

The eagle-beaked psychiatrist was already coming toward him through the departing groups of diners.

"Ah, Mr. Tombs," he said, shaking hands. "And Miss Turner, isn't it? How do you do?"

"Very well, thank you," said Simon.

Edelfhof's face became tinged with respectful sadness.

"I am glad you are here, but sorry about the tragic circumstances."

"Such things happen," Simon responded, as Maria left to speak with the headwaiter.

"True," Edelfhof responded, brightening up. "Very true. We must not weep over spilled milk." He became abruptly more business-like. "There is just one thing. Since your coming was unexpected, we have no information at all about you. In order for our observations to be effective, and simply for the records of the Foundation, we require a certain amount of background. The dossiers of the other guests were all forwarded in advance by their faculty sponsors. We're especially interested in the results of certain tests which I'm sure were administered to you at the university. Also a small amount of personal information."

"Of course," Simon said.

"I hope you won't mind then if I ask you to take a pair of tests here, even though you have already done them."

"Not at all. I'd be delighted to do something to repay you for your lavish hospitality."

"Not mine," Edelhof said modestly. "You must thank. . ."

He stopped as if something had derailed his thoughts in mid-sentence.

"Whom?" asked the Saint.

"The Foundation," Edelhof replied lamely.

"It would be a little easier to thank an individual."

Edelhof, over the hump, gave a relieved laugh.

"Then I accept for the Foundation."

"Good. And I accept the challenge of the tests." He looked around. "Would you like me to. . ."

"Please. We can get it out of the way immediately. If the young lady will excuse us. . ."

Simon turned to Jenny.

"After that long trip, a little siesta would do you good," he said. "I'll meet you on the beach later and we can go skin diving."

"The tests won't take more than an hour and a half," offered the psychiatrist.

"Then I'll see you by the equipment locker around four," Simon said. "All right?"

"All right," Jenny agreed reluctantly, and she went on into the lobby as Simon followed Edelhof past the blue-tinted windows to a door at the opposite end of the dining room.

"You enjoy the Death Game, Mr. Tombs?"

"It fascinates me. In fact, I found it so intriguing that when I was involved in it I lost interest in everything else."

Had Edelhof been a dog, his ears would have perked up a good inch.

"Is that so?" he asked, opening the door toward which he had led Simon. "It's good to have enthusiasm."

They entered a hallway lined with closed doors on either side.

"In fact," Simon said in a lower voice, with a mixture of diffidence and great seriousness, "I'd like to speak with you about. . . the guidance you mentioned."

"Ah," said Edelhof, bringing down the volume of his voice to match the Saint's. "That is fine. The world has places for men of exceptional abilities, if only the proper contacts are made." He opened one of the doors on the left. "But before we discuss that, it's best that you complete these little formalities." He stood in the doorway before letting Simon in. "I might say, however, before

giving you any help we must request complete discretion on your part. We can be of no service to you unless we feel assured that all that passes between us will be kept in strictest confidence. Any discussion, even with your closest friends, would necessitate an abrupt end. . .to our negotiations."

"I understand," the Saint said very solemnly.

Edelhof stood aside to let him go through the door.

"I hope so. Now. This will eventually be an office for resort personnel, but for the moment I have managed to confiscate it. Have a seat at the desk, please, and I shall give you the tests."

The paneled room offered a sparkling view of the sea across the marina, where the white forty-five foot cruiser Simon had seen from the limousine still rode at its moorings, fishing outriggers swaying like long antennae across the chain of smaller islands which stretched away toward the southeastern horizon. The room itself was furnished only with a desk and chair, a mirror built into one wall, a filing cabinet which Edelhof unlocked and relocked in the process of taking out the test booklets, and a ship-to-shore radio on a small table beside the window.

"Beautiful boat," Simon said, sitting down in the swivel chair as Edelhof had indicated. "Yours?"

"Oh," said the doctor with a smile, turning up his eyes and making a deprecating gesture with his hand. "Oh, no. It belongs to the owner. Now, if you will just. . ."

"Is he here?"

Edelhof was putting the two booklets on the desk, along with a pen.

"Who?" he asked.

"The owner. I wondered if he lived here—or on the boat."

"No. Now. If you will please answer all the questions, I'll come back when you've finished. The first is a standard aptitude test. The second is more specialized."

"Specialized?" Simon asked innocently.

"You have seen it before, I'm sure. It's the one especially fitted to players of the Death Game."

Simon opened the booklet and glanced at the first questions.

"I remember this one. Very interesting."

"I'm glad you found it so."

A moment later Edelhof was gone, and Simon devoted himself to answering multiple choice questions concerning the relative heat of his interest in art galleries and boxing matches, talking to girls and walking alone, going to parties and reading books. And while

he was at it, would he prefer a book about love or a book about war? Did he feel embarrassed or pleased when people asked him for advice? Would it irritate him to have to give up plans of his own to help a friend whose car had broken down—none, a little, some, considerably, very much?

It did not take a great deal of thought to determine which answers to which questions would make the most favorable impression on Timonaides' consulting psychologists. On the other hand, Simon had to take into account the devious nature of the minds of the test's creators, who would try to introduce subtle safeguards against deliberate slanting. But it was not very difficult to detect those safeguards either, and when he had finished the first test, the Saint felt certain that any psychiatrist worth even half his fees would discern in Mr. Sebastian Tombs clear signs of the incipient killer.

Turning to view the bright sea through the window for a minute before going on to the second test, Simon noticed the cruiser which had been moored to the dock heading southeast about two hundred yards from shore. He remembered then having heard, on the periphery of his consciousness, an engine cough into life just a few minutes before, while he was engrossed in the final questions of the test. Almost idly, he drew a mental line from his location through the boat, and projected it straight on to the first of the islands, about a mile away. He noted, not so idly, that the boat continued directly on course, as if his imaginary line held it magnetized.

Finally the craft was an indistinct dot on the white feather of its wake, and it still showed no signs of deviating to port or starboard. The phenomenon seemed worth remembering, and Simon fixed in his mind the location of the island which seemed to be the boat's destination. Naturally, there might be no significance at all in what he had seen, but just in case the boat was not out for a pleasure ride or a fishing expedition, the observation might prove worthwhile.

As he went to work on the second booklet, the Saint realized that it was not so much a test as a questionnaire. There were a few initial queries about personal statistics, hobbies, and ambitions. But the "test" questions which followed were designed to draw forth indirectly information which would probably have been refused if requested outright. The written responses to imaginary situations described in the quiz, when interpreted by a skilled analyst, could give deep insight into the subject's attachments, loyalties, hos-

tility toward authority, greed, respect for law and truth, and so on and on.

It was simple for Simon to form a clear mental picture of the kind of individual Timonaides' would wish to recruit, and then to answer the questions accordingly. He was most impressed with the gall it took to design and administer such a test when he reached the final question—which was no more than an overt version of several asked in different forms already.

Would you play the Death Game with actual murder as the objective for a) 500 b) 1000 c) 5000 d) 10,000 or more e) no amount of money or other reward, however great? (In answering this question, try to pretend that it is not hypothetical, and take careful stock of your true reactions before giving a reply.)

With no hesitation, Simon answered "10,000 or more," circled "more," and signed the name of Sebastian Tombs at the bottom of that final sheet.

Almost as if by magic—or more likely by virtue of a two-way mirror—Dr. Edelhof knocked at the door and stepped smiling into the office.

"Finished?" He looked at his wrist watch. "Just as we calculated. You have plenty of time to meet your young lady friend before she becomes impatient."

Simon stretched in the chair and then got up and went to the door. He nodded toward the completed tests, which Edelhof was returning to the filing cabinet.

"Let me know if I passed, will you?"

"It is not a question of passing or failing, of course, but we shall speak about this as soon as I have evaluated the answers—which will take longer than you took to write them. In the meantime, enjoy yourself."

—9—

It was ten minutes until four. Simon hurried to his villa, changed into a bathing suit, and walked back down to the beach side of the clubhouse. Near the door of the equipment room Jenny was waiting, wearing a yellow bikini which left bare ample portions of her already pink-tinged anatomy.

"I hope dinner will be half as well cooked as you are," Simon said cheerfully.

Jenny had been idly watching water skiers skimming the glassy sea behind one of the outboards mentioned by Maria Corsina in

her speech at lunch, and she jumped with surprise at the sound of Simon's voice.

"I'm so glad to see you," she said concernedly, after a deep breath. "What happened?"

"Nothing much. I took the tests."

"What were they? I thought I'd die when he said he was sure you'd taken them before."

Simon described the tests to her.

"Sound familiar?" he asked.

"Yes. Both of those. I had a lot of fun with them."

"What do you mean, fun?"

"I never take that brain-picking stuff seriously. I just make up some personality and answer for it."

"I wondered what a nice girl like you was doing in a place like this. You probably made up one that was just what Manders was looking for."

"I don't even remember."

"What about that question on committing murder for different amounts of money?"

She shook her head.

"I said I wouldn't do it for anything. After all, I couldn't be too obvious or Dr. Manders would have known I was spoofing and asked me to take the silly thing over again. Doesn't that disprove your theory about why they brought us here? I mean, I said no."

"I imagine very few people said yes, but that doesn't mean people like Manders and Edelhof couldn't detect an almost-unconscious willingness to cooperate under the right circumstances."

"How creepy can you get?" Jenny kicked petulantly at the sand with her bare toes. "We could have such a lovely time here if we didn't have to worry about all this nasty business."

He slapped her on the bottom.

"Very well, Jenny, my dear, let's start with that lovely time right now."

She flashed him a grateful smile and a minute later they were on their way down to the water, hand in hand, with snorkels, flippers, and masks.

"I can't get over the way they leave stuff lying around here," she said. "Even the boats. You just take them. No checking out. Nobody's even watching."

"Don't bet on that last," he said, "but I doubt if they're watching to see you don't make off with any of their sports gear. All

that generosity gives you a taste of *la dolce vita* you'll enjoy if you go over to that Other Side I was talking about in London. Makes you more amenable to reason when the recruiting officer comes round for his private chat. Right?"

They were at the water's edge, putting on the flippers and masks. Jenny looked at him reproachfully.

"I thought we weren't going to think about that nasty stuff."

"That's all. Besides, where could anybody go with these bulky things? There doesn't seem to be another human habitation for miles around. Unless. . ."

"Unless what?"

Simon was looking out toward the islands.

"I noticed that cruiser heading out there," he said.

"Oh! I meant to tell you. I saw it leaving, and guess who was on it?"

"Zsa Zsa Gabor?"

"Lady Dracula—Maria Concertina or whatever her name is. All by herself with a big purse and a couple of black boys to run the boat."

"All sorts of possibilities there, wouldn't you agree?" Simon said thoughtfully. "I even flatter myself that she may have been carrying a report about me, complete with photographs probably."

"Carrying a report where?"

"To the big boss—Timonaides himself, maybe." Simon nodded without pointing. "See that largest island there? As far as I could tell, that's where the boat went—which may be an indication of something, but I promised not to discuss these problems any more."

Without warning, he grabbed her hand and towed her into the water. For the next hour they glided like the fish they observed through a medium that seemed clearer than air. It was only when the sun was low on the western horizon that Simon's attention was brought back to his real reason for coming to this part of the world. He and Jenny, following a school of parrot fish, were at least a hundred yards down the beach from the clubhouse when they heard the rumble of an engine in the water and looked up to see the white cruiser returning to the marina. As soon as its stern was made fast by the crewman, Maria Corsina jumped lightly onto the dock, greeted some watching guests, and hurried to the building.

"The return of the Bride of Dracula," Jenny said. "I wonder what she was doing?"

"Gathering conchs for our chowder? Or maybe oysters for the stuffing when she tries to cook my goose."

"Simon," Jenny asked fearfully, "what if they have found out who you really are?"

He shrugged as he led the way back toward the beach, his mask and snorkel in hand.

"A man like Timonaides would have contacts in London who could easily find out I was around when Bast was murdered and Manders was arrested. With an organization like that involved, Sebastian Tombs couldn't expect to last long."

Jenny shuddered and looked at him imploringly.

"Let's run away. Please. I couldn't stand it if anything happened to you."

He put a reassuring arm around her dripping shoulders as they trudged along the beach toward the clubhouse.

"I said Sebastian Tombs couldn't expect to last long. Simon Templar expects to survive indefinitely."

She nuzzled her face against his arm.

"He'd better," she said.

"Don't worry about it. If there's one thing I'd guarantee to give any man the will to live, it's you in a bikini."

When they were about halfway back to the area of the villas, Maria Corsina came out of the clubhouse, looked up and down the beach, spotted them, and waved an arm above her head.

"I think she wants me," Simon said.

"Well, she's not going to get you," Jenny responded, with flattering determination.

"Mr. Tombs," the hostess called.

"We're on our way."

They made their way up the sand and a few moments later joined her near the pool, from which a last trio of swimmers emerged and walked through the twilight toward the cottages.

"It's about dinner tonight, Mr. Tombs."

Maria Corsina paused and looked at Jenny, with the obvious implication that Jenny should politely excuse herself and leave. Jenny just looked back without moving, so the other woman continued.

"The owner of East Island Villas, Mr. Timonaides, who very graciously donated the use of his property for this group, would like to entertain the guests at his own home. He prefers small gatherings, so he plans to have three of you out each night. You happen to have been asked for tonight." She looked at Jenny

again. "Since there are not enough ladies to go around, there is not one invited every day."

"I'm delighted to accept," Simon said. "May I ask who else is going this time?"

"Your friend Mr. Wyler and one of the Americans—Mr. Halston."

"Couldn't you change it and let me go?" Jenny asked impulsively. "I'm sure Grey Wyler wouldn't mind."

"I am sorry, but once things are arranged, Mr. Timonaides dislikes changes. I'm sure you'll enjoy being with new people when your turn comes."

"When does the car leave?" Simon asked with purposeful innocence.

There was always a possibility, he thought, that his real identity had not been confirmed, and the more unobservant and unconcerned he could seem, the better his chances of continuing the masquerade.

"You will go by boat," Maria Corsina explained.

"Boat?"

"Mr. Timonaides lives on an island. The cruiser will leave at seven."

"Fine. Thank you very much."

He and Jenny started across the lawn, and Maria Corsina called after him.

"Oh, Mr. Tombs, it might be good to wear a coat and tie. Mr. Timonaides is a formal man."

"He sounds interesting. I'm looking forward to meeting him."

"I'm sure he's looking forward to meeting you."

When the Saint and Jenny entered the thick plantings around the villas she stopped and whispered to him.

"Simon, I think they know. It's stupid to walk right into a trap."

"Maybe it's not a trap," he said blandly. "Maybe they're just impressed with Mr. Tombs' potential as a recruit. I'm sure Grey Wyler must have made that impression. Could be the first night's guest of honor are the ones—or some of the ones—who answered 'yes' to that question about playing the Death Game for real."

"But what if they do know?"

"If they do know, I can think of about a hundred ways they could arrange my demise without the trouble of hauling me out to Timonaides' island. Or they could just think of some pretext to send me packing—like the suddenly discovered fact that un-

invited substitutes are against the rules at Death Game conclaves."

They walked toward Jenny's cottage in the thickening darkness.

"But I can think of just as many reasons why they'd take you out there if they *did* plan to get rid of you," Jenny said.

"Well don't enumerate them, please. You'll take the keen edge off my appetite. Besides, if it is a trap, it won't be the first time some spider has invited me into his web expecting to eat me up, and ended up getting eaten himself."

They were at her door. Jenny sighed miserably.

"I guess there's nothing I can do, then."

Simon took her chin in the fingers of his right hand and kissed her softly on the lips.

"Just be a good girl," he said, "and have a nice evening."

"I won't!" she said as he walked away. "And I won't go to sleep until you're back here safely."

Although a night breeze was kicking the sea into a light chop by seven o'clock, the trip to the island was smooth and uneventful. The negro captain set a course straight for the distant cluster of lights which were the only illumination in the darkness ahead, and his mate brought up a round of iced rum drinks from below. Simon and his fellow passengers settled into comfortable chairs on the after deck, and Halston said rather predictably, "This is the life, huh?"

"Sure is," the Saint said, stretching his legs, swirling his drink in its glass, and taking a long swallow.

Wyler, also predictably, was silently contemptuous. He managed to look over the craft as if he would love to own it and at the same time hated it because it belonged to somebody else. Halston, looking thick-necked and uncomfortable in his suit and tie like an athlete dressed up to receive an award, was a more simple type. Almost everything impressed him and he was quick to admit it.

"Great drinks, too," he said, blinking his small, close-set eyes. "Man, what I wouldn't give to have an outfit like this."

"Maybe you will someday," the Saint said. "Maybe we all will," he watched the faces of his two companions and felt satisfied that their perceptible but suppressed reactions meant they had probably had individual heart-to-heart chats with Dr. Edelhof about their futures. Just how much Edelhof would have told them was a matter of speculation, but he would have spoken to them more freely than he had to Simon because their identities would have been unquestionable and their past records on hand. But Edelhof also would have strongly cautioned each one—as he had Simon—not

to tell anything to anybody. Halston looked inquiringly at the Saint and Wyler, licked his lips, and controlled his natural garrulousness with a big swallow of his drink.

A few minutes later the boat approached the island and circled to the eastern side, which, because of the proximity of smaller islands, undoubtedly offered the most shelter from rough seas. The inhabited island itself was more or less round, about a quarter of a mile in diameter, and seemed to be fenced and brightly lighted around its whole circumference.

The cruiser pulled slowly around a jetty and up to a dock protected by concrete supplements to a small natural indentation in the shore. A colored man who had been lounging outside the locked gate spoke into a metal box affixed to one of the light poles and then came to help dock the boat.

"Here dey come, gentlemens," he said rather vaguely as the passengers stepped ashore.

A second later Simon saw that he was referring to a pair of electric golf carts which were being driven by negroes down an asphalt-paved path to the other side of the gate. The watchman who had announced the arrival of the carts unlocked the gate and watched as the guests climbed on—Simon getting into one, Wyler and Halston sharing the other. Then the watchman locked the gate again, and the carts purred slowly in single file through a cultivated jungle even thicker and more fully developed than the recently planted one at East Island Villas.

After two minutes or so the path curved, revealing a large red brick house straight ahead. The carts maneuvered up to an open, flagstone terrace and stopped. Standing backlit in the central doorway of the house was a man of moderate height and a silhouette which suggested a standoff between solid strength and corpulence.

"Gentlemen," he said in a smooth low-pitched voice, stepping forward into the outdoor floodlights which made day of the area immediately surrounding the house. "Welcome to my home."

The golf carts were driven quietly away around the building as Simon, Wyler, and Halston went to introduce themselves and shake hands with their host, who concluded the formalities with the simple statement, "And I, of course, am Timonaides."

He spoke English with careful, almost overly precise pronunciation, explaining as he showed them into his huge living room that he spoke several languages but thought it best to make each evening's entertainment monolingual if possible.

"You've got a point there," Joe Halston said with hearty approval, taking in the room's antique statuary, vases, and elegant furniture with the head-swivelling enthusiasm of a tourist just set loose on the Acropolis.

Simon was more interested for the moment in the appearance of Timonaides, whom he had seen only in photographs, usually in more glamorous company than a delegation of collegians. His face tended to heaviness, especially in the vicinity of his fleshy lips, but his dark eyes were alert and intelligent. Though he was at an age when most men have greying hair, the color was a healthy brown, and in spite of some thinning the oily waves were sufficient to give almost youthful coverage. Pink-cheek, well-manicured, and wearing a dove-gray, perfectly tailored suit and blue silk tie, Kuros Timonaides exuded the aura of a wealthy man.

"Have seats," he said, as a white-jacketed colored man came into the room. "Make yourselves comfortable and Charles will take your orders for drinks. I trust the trip over to my island was pleasant."

"That's a great boat you've got there," Halston said. "Really great."

That initial interchange set the tone for the early part of the evening. Nothing remotely like Death Game business was discussed during drinks or the meal which followed. For awhile they talked about Timonaides' island, problems of building in a remote area, and the difficulties of maintenance in a salty and humid atmosphere. Even Wyler proved that he could shed some of his arrogance when granted audience with a sufficiently eminent personage. He joined in the small talk, and when the group had moved into the adjacent dining room and were eating at the massive carved wooden table, he complimented Timonaides on the turtle pie.

"I was about to apologize for this poor food. The fact that temporarily I am forced to depend on native help restricts the menu and lowers the quality. Ordinarily I could offer you much better. I have just come here, you see, and my chef is having his vacation before he flies to join me."

"You don't live here all the time?" Wyler asked.

"Oh, no. In general, I cruise around the Mediterranean in spring and summer, except for some time spent in places like London or Paris. In the hottest weather I move up into the Alps, and during the cold months I come here."

That opened the way for a whole new line of admiring ques-

tions from both Wyler and Halston. Simon contributed a few comments and began to wonder if this was just a routine entertainment and inspection—the big man looking over the prospective employees in small groups until a final decision was made. Nothing happened to change the Saint's impression until dessert and coffee were finished and the men had moved back into the living room for liqueur.

After a few more minutes of trivial conversation they were interrupted by the appearance of the negro in the white jacket.

"All finish, sah," he announced.

"Good, Charles. You may take everybody home then."

Charles disappeared, and soon afterwards there was a sound of scuffling feet, chatter, and laughter receding down the asphalt walk in front of the house. Timonaides explained that in these islands it was customary for servants not to live in, but instead to be brought to work in the morning and delivered to their homes at night. For that purpose he provided an old fishing boat and had appointed Charles the captain.

The Saint knew Timonaides was telling the truth about island practices in the transportation of hired help. What put him on alert was the fact that the servants had left almost immediately after dinner—and it was not an island custom to leave dirty china lying around the kitchen overnight. But then maybe the Greek's dishwashers were setting records for speed and efficiency: Simon could only wait and see whether or not Timonaides revealed some special reason for wanting privacy as soon as he could reasonably arrange it.

Simon did not have long to wait.

"Gentlemen," Timonaides said quietly, settling back in his chair and bringing the tips of his fingers together. "I think you know, in a general way, why you are here. Dr. Edelfhof has assured me of your sincerity. If you have doubts—any of you—and if you do not wish to go any further in your cooperation with me, for the great rewards I can offer, than I must ask you to leave now and wait on the boat which brought you. When I have said what I have to say next, it will be too late for changes of heart."

—10—

Timonaides' abrupt statement seemed to catch Wyler and Halston by surprise. For a long moment no one spoke. Then Halston took a deep breath.

"I'm with you all the way."

Wyler nodded agreement. Timonaides looked at Simon, who nodded also. The Greek got to his feet.

"Good," he said briskly. "And now. . .to show my own sincerity. . ."

He reached beneath his jacket and drew out a thick packet of Bahamian currency.

"Mr. Halston," he said, handing over the money.

He drew out another packet.

"Mr. Wyler."

Wyler's fingers trembled as he took the money, which the Saint estimated must amount to at least a thousand pounds.

"Mr. Templar."

At the sound of his real name, Simon could only settle back into his chair with an amused sigh and slight smile. Timonaides' hand, on its third trip to his inner pocket, had produced not a wad of bills but a large automatic.

"Mr. Halston," Timonaides said quietly, "would you please hand these to Mr. Templar?"

Halston, taking two photographs from Timonaides, looked at Simon with somewhat bovine confusion.

"Mr. Templar?" he said.

"That is Mr. Templar," The Greek said impatiently, wiggling the nose of his pistol in the direction it was already pointing.

Simon calculated with a certain amount of satisfaction that Joe Halston's stint with Poseidon Enterprises would be useful—for Poseidon Enterprises—but short-lived. He would be a good tool for work on simple problems, but on his first encounter with real complexities he would probably fail and be forced into early, absolute, and permanent retirement.

The Saint took the photographs, one of which was a copy of a passport photograph he had had taken three years before. The other was a Polaroid print of him sitting at Edelhof's desk filling out one of the tests. He looked at the pictures admiringly.

"Fine looking chap," he said. "Who is he?"

Admittedly, it was rather difficult for Timonaides to come back with a snappy answer to that, but he did as well as he could.

"It's the former Sebastian Tombs," he said. "Soon to be the former Simon Templar."

"So it is," the Saint said. He went on chattily. "I can't say I wouldn't have preferred getting money like the other fellows, but I do appreciate the pictures." He was holding the photographs

side by side for comparison. "Most people say I get handsomer every year, and I have to admit. . ."

Timonaides cut him off.

"If I were you, I would begin using the past tense, Mr. Templar, because my new associates here are about to kill you."

Wyler's lips were compressed, his fingers tightly gripping the arms of his chair. Simon concluded that he had not been told of his assignment in advance, but that it came to him as no tremendous surprise. Halston, on the other hand, was openly stunned.

"You mean. . .we really are?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Halston," the Greek replied. "You are going to have a chance to prove your ability—in a real Death Game. Mr. Templar here—possibly known to you as the Saint—is an impostor whose continued existence would present the greatest threat to my organization, which now includes you. First, search him."

Halston's search yielded nothing but a handkerchief and some pound notes. The Saint had foreseen possible complications in bringing a weapon to the Villas, and since he was using an assumed name he had left even his wallet, with all identifying cards and papers, in a locker at the Freeport air terminal.

"That's all," the student said, handing Timonaides the bills, which he inconspicuously pocketed.

"I'm curious, Kuros, to know where you got this," Simon said, holding up the passport photograph.

"From my files," the Greek answered with obvious satisfaction. "Originally, of course, from the passport photographer who took it. Can you think of a better source than passport photographers for clear pictures of almost everyone who counts—even those who shy from seeing themselves in newspapers and magazines? In this house I have such a quantity of photographs and other information that you would be amazed."

"Nothing about you would amaze me," the Saint said coolly. "Sicken me, yes, but not amaze me."

Timonaides' grip on his automatic tightened.

"That will be enough talk. Now, if Mr. Wyler—who incidentally confirmed your real identity to Dr. Edelfof late this afternoon as a sign of his good faith—and Mr. Halston will. . ."

There was a buzz from an intercom box on a table beside the armchair where Timonaides had been sitting.

"The watchman at the gate," he explained, keeping his automatic aimed at Simon as he spoke into the box, "I told you not

to. . . Yes? Send her away immediately. Oh, Well. Very good, have the boys from the boat bring her up here then."

Simon, whose instinct told him it would be best to display no interest in the watchman's call, had already begun speaking to Wyler and Halston.

"Let me tell you about the man you're working for—and especially about his extensive files. He got his start in Greece during the war, during the German occupation. Somehow he managed to be a member of the resistance and at the same time end up rich on Nazi money at the expense of a few dozen dead patriots. That must have been where he learned the saleable value of information—and that the potential victim might pay even more not to be turned in than the authorities would to get him. Then, after the war. . ."

"Shut up," barked Timonaides.

"Ashamed of that part of your career?" Simon asked mildly. "I'll admit that as much as I despise the kind of blackmail you're engaging in now, I prefer it to. . ."

Timonaides' first violent reaction had been controlled, and the natural pinkness, which for an instant had drained away, returned to his face.

"Do not talk any more, Mr. Templar," he said.

Simon sensed that until he was in a better position to defend himself he would be wise to obey the order. Timonaides turned to Wyler and Halston.

"Don't worry yourselves about Mr. Templar's words. You will learn what you need to know of my operations. Rest assured that I am no common gangster, but a businessman. It is not my fault if the laws of the jungle still govern man's competitive activities, no matter how much he tries to cover them up with pretty words. Only the stupid masses believe in such fairy tales. . .which suits the purposes of superior people very well."

There were sounds of footsteps from the terrace, and Timonaides went to the door and opened it.

"Let her go," he said to the men outside, not allowing them to see his gun, "and get back to the boat. You can sleep awhile if you like. We shall be doing a little hunting."

Jenny Turner, her short yellow-flowered summer dress looking strangely inappropriate, stepped into the room.

"It suits my purposes," Timonaides said precisely, in place of greeting her, "for the servants to know that I keep rabbits on the island in case I want a little sport. It explains the sounds of

shots. This is the first time, however, that a rabbit had come to my island of its own free will." He gestured with the gun. "If you will please go stand by your friend Mr. Templar." As Jenny moved, Timonaides looked at Simon. "She came to rescue you."

"I had to come," she said, "when I heard them saying they'd found out who you really were, and..."

"Heard who?" Simon asked, starting to stand up as she came over to his chair.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Templar," Timonaides said.

"Maria Corsina and Edelfhof were talking," Jenny said. "They didn't know I followed them down the hall toward their offices, and..."

"And so," Timonaides took up the narrative, "your young friend here confiscated a boat and came to help you."

"I never thought the whole island out here would have a fence around it," she said. "I thought I could sneak in."

Timonaides half smiled and shook his head.

"And just what did you think you'd do when you got in?"

"I...I'm not sure. Lots of things. It depended on..."

"Well," the Greek interrupted, "fortunately, you did not have to face that problem." He turned to Simon again. "She tried to tell the watchman some ridiculous story about a message she was bringing. I communicate by radio with the shore, of course, and the watchman always knows about legitimate visitors in advance. So..." He shook his head again. "I'm afraid the sides in our Death Game are going to be equal. Two against two."

Jenny, who had looked frightened already, turned pale.

"Death Game?"

Timonaides nodded.

"Mr. Halston and Mr. Wyler are going to be the hunters. You and Mr. Templar will be the victims. The hunters will be armed and the victims will not. But for the sake of fairness, we will let our rabbits have a three minute head start."

Halston licked his lips nervously.

"A girl?" he asked.

"Girls die as easily as men," Timonaides said.

Jenny turned her stare on Wyler.

"Grey...you wouldn't really..."

Wyler met her eyes for a minute, then nodded as he looked away.

"Easy there," Simon said to her in a soothing voice. "I think

it's very sporting of Mr. Timonaides to give us a start. Let's save our breath for that."

Timonaides pressed a button on his intercom set.

"I don't want you getting hit by stray bullets," he said into the box. "Be sure the gate is locked, and then go get in the boat with the other boys. All three of you stay below decks, and don't come out until I personally come there and tell you to. Do you understand?"

A pause.

"And don't get into the champagne. I hope you do understand. If you come out of the sleeping cabin before I tell you, you will be fired—and worse than that."

Timonaides turned away from the intercom.

"That will take care of witnesses. Now, Mr. Templar, you may go, and I suggest that you and your ally move as fast as you can while I am giving weapons to my friends here. I must admit I am anxious to see if they do as brilliantly in real life as they have done in games."

"Let's go, Jenny," Simon said, taking her firmly by the hand and leading her toward the door.

"And Mr. Templar," Timonaides said, "if you have any ideas about climbing the fence, forget them. The upper strands are electrified."

"Must take quite a generator to do that," Simon said.

Timonaides smiled.

"It does—and you can forget any ideas you may have about that, too, because it is safely located in the cellar of this house. You can't get at it from the outside."

The Saint nodded.

"Thanks for saving us the trouble of looking for it.

The Greek glanced at his watch.

"I'm afraid you will not have much time to look for anything. Half a minute is gone already."

Simon sprinted across the terrace and along the asphalt path, with Jenny close behind him.

"What'll we do?" she gasped.

"I saw something like a tool shed along here on the way up. There. This way."

They left the path, hurried around a clump of banana trees, and came on a small wooden shed. The door was held with only a sliding bolt. Simon yanked it open and began searching through the implements which were hung on the walls or were leaning in

the corners. He handed out a two-pronged pitchfork with a long handle.

"Primitive, but a perfectly respectable weapon," he said.

Within seconds he had tossed her a ball of strong twine and brought out a large metal tank with a hose attached.

"What's that?" Jenny asked.

"Some kind of pressure-spray—for spraying trees. It feels good and full."

Simon aimed the hose away from them and squeezed the lever on the nozzle. A concentrated blast of foul-smelling spray carried for a range of ten feet or more.

"They'll be on their way now," he said. "Follow me."

Carrying the pitchfork and spray device, he led her quickly and quietly along a tiny, winding, unpaved path into the most densely overgrown area he could find in that part of the grounds. It was comfortably dark there; the bright lights of the fence line and the immediate vicinity of the house scarcely penetrated the tangle of shrubs, bamboo, fragrant-flowered oleander bushes, and larger trees.

"Won't they find us here?" Jenny asked hopelessly. "And we can't just keep running."

"I don't intend to sit here and do nothing but wait," the Saint said. "We're going to take the initiative."

"How?"

"By using the only advantage we have—aside from our superior brains and moral character: the fact that they don't know where we are."

He was already tying the free end of the twine to the base of a tree, about six inches off the ground.

"I can hear them on the main path," Jenny whispered.

"When they leave it, they'll probably split up. In any case, they'll be following little narrow paths like the one that leads through this thicket. They'd be stupid to go crashing through the undergrowth in hopes of stumbling over us. They'll be listening and looking, feeling confident because we're supposedly unarmed and they've got means of blasting us out of the bushes without even getting their trousers wrinkled."

Simon had finished stretching the twine across the path and tying the balled end to a second tree. Steps sounded on the asphalt path about fifty feet away, moving very slowly from the direction of the house toward the docks.

"That's only one of them," the Saint whispered. "Their first mistake. Shows what overconfidence can do."

"They've a right to be overconfident," Jenny murmured. "But I still just can't believe they'd really kill us."

"You'll soon have a chance to find out. I'll go a little way up this path toward the paved one, then make some noise and run back like the devil. You stay here hiding on this side with the pitchfork. I'll jump to the other side. If he falls over the string, we've got him. If he comes around either side, one of us will at least have a chance to get him."

"What if he...shoots at you?"

"He will eventually anyhow. We may as well get it over with. His chances of hitting a running target in the dark are about one in a million."

They listened. The hesitant footsteps on the asphalt were nearer.

"Now," the Saint said, and he crept up the unpaved path, leaving Jenny behind.

When he had gone some twenty feet toward the asphalt path he rounded a curve and spoke in a very loud and theatrical whisper.

"Is that you, Jenny?"

In answer, he heard the blast of a gun, and a bullet sang through the twigs and leaves not far above his head. Whirling, he raced back down the small path as another shot barked out and footsteps pounded behind him. There was no time even for him to pick up the spray apparatus. He was scarcely hidden opposite Jenny when Joe Halston, his bullish form easily identifiable, came thudding around the nearest turn.

Just when it seemed he would surely trip over the tightly stretched twine, he stopped, listening, aware that his prey was no longer fleeing ahead of him. Breathing hard, he pulled a flashlight from his trousers pocket and aimed it up the path.

"Did you see them?" called Wyler's voice from far on the other side of that end of the grounds.

"One," Halston shouted. "I think he's hidden in here somewhere."

The Saint's muscles tensed as the flashlight beam swung toward his side of the path. But it stopped suddenly and moved to Halston's feet. Obviously he had just discovered the string.

"Okay," he said in a low voice. "I know you're in there."

And the beam moved back toward Simon's hiding place.

The Saint's impression of the next two or three seconds was

confused. There was a sudden rushing sound, like wind in leaves, and the light dropped as Halston cried out and staggered back. Simon instinctively seized his opportunity, without waiting to ask what he owed it to. He dove from the bushes, catching his hunter behind the knees with the full weight and force of his movement. Halston sprawled on his face, but before the Saint could administer a conclusive karate chop to the back of the thick neck he heard a crack like a stick hitting a stone and looked up to see that Jenny had just caressed Halston's skull with a downward sweep of her pitchfork handle. Wyler was getting closer, calling for Halston.

"I just couldn't stick it in him," Jenny whispered humbly.

"I think you've done enough," Simon said, turning off the flashlight. "What was that first thing that happened?"

"I pulled back a branch while you were up the path—and when I saw he wasn't going to fall over the string I let it go in his face."

Wyler had come as far as the asphalt path now, calling fruitlessly.

"Hide," Simon whispered to Jenny. "We'll just wait here this time." He was feeling among the leaves. "Where's that gun he was carrying?"

"I can't see," Jenny whispered.

Simon pushed her quickly back into the bushes.

"I think he's heard us," he said, abandoning his search for Halston's gun. He picked up the flashlight and moved into the undergrowth at the other side of the path.

As he went, he could hear Wyler approaching cautiously, following the same route Halston had taken. Simon threw the flashlight low along the path in the opposite direction so that it bounced and skidded and possibly sounded like someone taking flight.

Wyler, however, was not so impetuous as his fallen partner. His steps quickened, but he did not run headlong down the path. Knowing that his prey might be armed now, since Halston no longer answered his calls, he moved quietly and showed no light. Then he came around the turn which brought him into Simon's and Jenny's view, and after another few cautious steps saw the motionless body lying in the path ten feet ahead of him.

His first reaction was to crouch low and dart behind a tree at the side of the path. For a long time he stayed there, apparently listening.

Then, for some reason, Jenny moved slightly in her hiding place and caused a rustle of branches. Grey fired in that direction, waited, fired again. Getting no answering shot, he was bold enough to step back onto the path and come quickly forward.

That was when Simon pushed the lever of the spray tank hose and sent a whitish blast of spray directly into Wyler's face. He cried out, stumbling, blinded, wincing and clawing at his eyes with one hand as the stream blasted him again. But the other hand still desperately held the gun, and he fired aimlessly into the ground or the tops of the trees.

The Saint heaved the spray tank, and it caught Wyler across the midsection, sending him sprawling backwards into the bushes. Simon was on him in a second, wrenching the pistol from his hand, and then with the greatest zest and satisfaction planting a fist several times in the center of his foam-drenched face. Wyler's nose, undoubtedly, would be much less suitable for arrogant upturning in the future than it had been in the past, but for some time he would not be aware of that fact, nor of anything else.

"Jenny!" Simon called in a low voice. "Are you all right?"

"No," came the weak reply.

She was sagging against a tree, holding one hand at her throat, and the Saint rushed to her.

"Did he hit you?" he asked, slipping his arms around her for support.

"No," she whispered, clinging to him, "but I'm sure not all right. I just. . . don't think I like this kind of game."

Simon laughed.

"Cheer up, girl. We made it. Now let's go tell Timonaides how much fun we had and thank him for his hospitality."

—11—

First they tied Wyler and Halston hand and foot. Both were still unconscious and had every appearance of intending to stay in that condition for a long while, but to be on the safe side the Saint carried Wyler—the less heavy of the two—about fifty feet along the way to Timonaides' house and dumped him in the bushes where he and Halston could not conveniently collaborate in getting untied when they woke up.

"Do we have to go back to that house?" Jenny pled. "Couldn't we just concentrate on getting out of this place?"

"Maybe you should stay here while I go to the house. It would be safer."

"No," she shivered, taking his arm as he walked on. "I'm too scared. What'll we do? Just knock on the door and say 'Too bad, Kuros old boy, you lose.'"

"Sounds like a pretty good plan," Simon said. "And just about as specific as anything I've come up with."

He took her stealthily along side paths toward the glaring lights of the house. When they were at the edge of the clearing, beyond which there was no more cover, they heard Timonaides' voice.

"Wyler? Halston? Has anything happened?"

The Saint and Jenny could see him now, standing just outside the door, the room light behind him turned out. Simon got a firm grip on Wyler's revolver, which he had reloaded with a clip taken from the previous user's pocket, and then he moved boldly into the light, aiming the weapon at Timonaides.

At that range of fifty feet or more the pistol had little sure value except as a bluff, but Simon hoped that the Greek, taken by surprise, would crumble without too much thought about problems of ballistics.

"Put up your hands and come this way," the Saint called, but as he had feared, Timonaides was not so easily intimidated.

With a crouching motion he was inside the door, and instantly the dull glint of a rifle barrel appeared.

"Drop the gun, Templar!" came Timonaides' voice.

The Saint had prudently gone no more than two or three feet from the cover of trees and shrubs. He quickly sidestepped and heard the futile crack of the rifle as he dashed into the bushes.

"You might as well give up," Timonaides called. "We'll have you soon anyway."

"Come out or we'll come after you," the Saint replied with more taunting bravado than strict honesty.

"This place is a fortress," Timonaides said. "You couldn't get in with a cannon."

With that, he slammed the door and there was no more sight or sound of him.

"What'll we do now?" asked Jenny. "Make a battering ram?"

"I imagine he's telling the truth," Simon answered. "It would take more than a battering ram to get in there, and I'm sure that even our combined charm wouldn't persuade him to come out voluntarily."

"You mean we can go now?" she asked hopefully.

"We can try. Timonaides is probably on his radio to shore right now, telling Edelhof to send reinforcements. I have to admit I can visualize the general embarrassment with quite a bit of relish."

They hurried through the trees, and then took the asphalt path down to the dock.

"Let's hope the boys have obeyed orders and stayed below decks," Simon said.

"I think they'd be frightened not to."

"They seem to have been."

There was no one in sight on the dock or the upper decks of the cruiser. Simon inspected the lock that held the gate.

"I think a shot or two should take care of that," he said. "Now boys, just be good and keep your heads down, no matter how close that rabbit hunt comes."

He pushed Jenny back, fired twice, and shoved the gate open. There was no response from the boat.

"Won't he call them or something?" Jenny whispered as Simon moved out onto the dock.

"I don't think he could, because there's no reason why they should have the ship-to-shore on." He paused as they reached the place where the boat was moored. "Now, you just stay out of the way, and when I've got things under control hop aboard and we'll take off."

Simon stepped quietly onto the deck and went to the open hatchway which led down to the sleeping quarters and galley. He detected the smell of strong tobacco smoke, the radio music of a steel band, and the murmur of voices—probably subdued by the proximity of gunfire.

The Saint deliberately made a sound with his foot.

"Mistah Timonaides?" said a voice in the cabin.

He stepped down another step.

"Mistah Timonaides? Dat you, sah?"

Simon stuck his head inside the cabin, and showed them a friendly smile and his pistol.

"No, it's not Mr. Timonaides, but I'll do till he comes along. Just quietly put your hands on top of your heads, lock your fingers tightly, and don't let go until I tell you to."

Two of the men had been lounging on bunks, but were already sitting bolt upright when Simon gave his order. The third, the watchman, was on his feet. They obeyed, linking their hands on

top of their heads and following him in single file as he backed onto the deck.

"We ain' supposed to come up, sah. Mistah Timonaides, he say we..."

"I'm sure my pistol is just as worth paying attention to as Mr. Timonaides, at least for the moment. Come on, now, and no fast moves."

When they were neatly arranged in a row on the afterdeck, he called to Jenny.

"Look what I found: See-No-Evil, Hear-No-Evil, Speak-No-Evil."

Jenny did not seem responsive to humor, so he turned back to the three colored men.

"Now, gatekeeper, go sit on the stern facing the water. Hang your feet over the edge and keep your hands back where I can see them."

The watchman did as he was told.

"You gone hurt us?" he inquired meekly.

"Not a bit if you do as I tell you. Just stay there. Now, mate, get ready to cast off. Captain, start the engines. I can keep my gun on all of you from here, so be quick and efficient about it."

Within a new seconds the engine was rumbling and exhaust smoke was bubbling from the stern. The mate cast off the lines as Jenny jumped aboard.

"Good," Simon called to the captain. "Take her out." He turned toward the mate. "You—go sit by the watchman, and dangle your toes over just the way he is."

By the time the mate was perched on the stern, the boat was clear of the jetty and heading slowly into open water.

"Now, captain, go join your friends."

The boat held its course more or less, as the captain left the wheel and went to the stern.

"Now, Jenny," the Saint said, "you go be the pilot for a minute."

"How?"

"Just steer—like a car."

Jenny ran to take the wheel.

"Where do I go?" she begged nervously.

"We'll head south—to Nassau."

"Which way is that?"

"Never mind. Just don't run into anything till I take over."

Simon went to the three men arrayed with their backs to him along the stern.

"You boys know how to swim?" he asked sociably.

"Yassuh," the watchman said cautiously.

"That's good."

The Saint placed his foot gently in the small of the watchman's back and launched him smoothly into space. Almost before his splash had reached the ears of the captain and mate, they had joined him in quick succession. Simon could see them swimming back toward the island. Then he went to take the wheel from Jenny, who sank down into one of the comfortable chairs with which the pilothouse was furnished and flopped back her head in a near faint.

"Are we really going to Nassau?" she breathed.

"No, but we'll head that way with all our lights on, and the boys we just left behind will tell Timonaides what we said. Whether he'll believe it or not is another thing, but it won't hurt for him to hear about it. I wouldn't be surprised if he's watching us right now from some rooftop eyrie. When we're disappearing toward Nassau I'll cut all the lights and we'll circle back toward Freeport."

The engines were at full power now, and Simon headed south by the compass. If any ocean-borne pursuit from East Island Villas had been organized it was too late to catch up, particularly since the only boats available were too light and small for open seas.

"Freeport?" Jenny asked.

She was obviously still in a daze.

"You remember Freeport," Simon said with an amused smile. "Where your plane landed on Grand Bahama. We'll take a plane out of there first thing in the morning. There's not much we can do back at the Villas, especially since we wouldn't have any idea who—if anybody—we could trust. And by this time Timonaides has certainly roused them by radio. I think we'll enjoy the remainder of our holiday much more someplace else."

"We're not going back to the Villas at all?" she asked stupidly.

"If you think I'm going back there and capture a gang of about twenty people with the aid of one hand gun and a kinky girl, you've got a mistaken idea of my heroism. I'm brave, but not crazy."

Jenny's eyes popped wider open.

"But my clothes are all back there!"

The Saint groaned.

"You almost tempt me to make trite comments about the female mind. Give it a little thought, and you'll agree that your life is worth more than a closet full of dresses. I'll take you on a shopping spree as soon as we get to the states."

Jenny looked at him with exasperation.

"They took my money," she said.

"They took mine too," said the Saint, "but Grey Wyler and Halston had quite a bit."

He showed it to her. Suddenly she laughed, a little hysterically, then got to her feet and hugged him as he stood at the wheel.

"I like you," she said.

"I like you too," he answered, "but there's not much I can do about it for the moment. Why don't you go down to the galley and get us some of that champagne the hired hands weren't supposed to get into?"

"What a super idea! I'll be back in a jiffy."

She returned with a bottle of Bollinger on ice and told him there was lots of food below.

"Fine. Fix us a midnight snack."

By the time she brought a platter of caviar, pâté, boned pheasant, crackers, and cheeses, the lights of Timonaides' personal island were only a starlike glimmer in the distance astern.

"We've gone far enough on our diversionary course," Simon said. "He'll never know where we've gone from here."

He cut off all the running lights, brought the boat about in a wide turn, and set the controls on automatic for a course which would bring them back to the coast of Grand Bahama Island fifteen or twenty miles west of their earlier departure point. With no further immediate need to hold the wheel, he opened the champagne and filled the glasses. The glow of the compass light and the depth indicator, along with the bright moonlight outside provided illumination enough after their eyes had adjusted to it.

"Nothing like not getting killed to give you an appetite, is there?" commented the Saint, munching a caviar-covered cracker which Jenny had popped into his mouth.

"It's a wonderful feeling," she said. "Just being alive. I'm just sorry that..."

"What?"

"That we didn't get Timonaides."

Simon grinned and finished his first glass of champagne.

"You sound like a real pro," he said. "You're sorry we didn't

shoot him, I suppose, and it is regrettable, but I think we're best off not getting involved with executing people."

He poured another round of the icy wine.

"We've pretty well fouled up his operation," he said. "Exposing this Death Game business to the light is equivalent to ending its usefulness for him. And also for Wyler and Halston. They probably wouldn't dare show their faces where we might see them, so Timonaides will most likely shunt them off to some obscure place, possibly try to get some mileage out of them for his money, and then get rid of them. They'd be potentially embarrassing relics of a scheme that failed—and he can't afford those kinds of living liabilities."

"But he won't even go to jail for what he's done," Jenny said.

"He'd done a lot worse before we ever met him. A man like that has a positive knack for staying out of jail—or else he never stays out of jail long enough to become a man like that." Simon had some *pâté*, keeping an eye out for other boats. He saw none. "Not that I wouldn't like to see a final solution to the Timonaides problem. I think, in fact, that I'll keep that possibility in the front of my mind till something's been done about it. In the meanwhile, he'll stew enough. There's Manders, who'll implicate him in a murder. And one of the first things I'll do when we get to the mainland is put in a call to Inspector Teal and let him know about this end of Timonaides' operation. Remember, Timonaides isn't the kind of man who can drop discreetly out of sight very easily. He's guaranteed that by being so fond of life among the Jet Set. He'll have to fight these things in the open."

"Tough," said Jenny.

They spent most of the ride back to the coast of Grand Bahama rehashing the events of the evening. When they came within a mile or so of the lights of Freeport, Simon took the wheel again and headed east, parallel to the shore, turning on the running lights.

"I'll pull in till the depth indicator shows we can anchor. In a couple of hours we can go nearer Freeport and head this thing out to sea on automatic pilot in case Timonaides has reported a stolen boat to the police, while we go ashore in the dinghy. The early plane for Miami leaves at five-thirty. I think it's safer for us to take that than wait around till full daylight."

Jenny had collected the glasses and scraps of their snack on the tray. She stopped and looked at Simon.

"That still leaves us quite a lot of time out here, doesn't it?"

The Saint grinned.

"You're so fond of games—would you like to play cribbage?"

THE GOLENIEWSKI CASE

The young in heart—the eternally young in heart, rather—will no doubt accept the premise of veteran newspaperman Guy Richards is his curious IMPERIAL AGENT: THE GOLENIEWSKI-ROMANOV CASE, published last year by Devin Adair, that the Polish intelligence officer, who defected to the West in 1960, is in reality Alexei, son of Czar Nicholas II, assassinated with the rest of his family at Ekaterinburg, the night of July 16th, 1918.

We are told that this assassination was a hoax, that the Imperial Family escaped abroad, and that the Emperor, who did not die until 1952, worked closely with Marshal Joseph Pilsudski until the old Marshal's death. Both father and son were in Poland throughout the German occupation. "Only a few trusted friends attended the" (Czar's) "funeral and among them were representatives of the triumvirate in the 'Secret Circle', the upper policy-making Russian patriotic society which guides many organizations in the anti-Bolshevik underground, including the White Guard." (p. 89). Beginning in the late '50's, Goleniewski, simultaneously a member of the triumvirate of this 'Secret Circle' and increasingly prominent in Polish Intelligence (he had joined the Polish Army), was responsible, so we are told, for the unmasking in the West of Russian agents such as Gordon Lonsdale, George Blake and Colonel Wennerström.

Lt. Col. Goleniewski the defector appears to have been one matter—his services were recognized; Lt. Col. Goleniewski who insisted that he was in reality the son of the Czar of All the Russias was another matter. The poor man had obviously had a breakdown. His claims, to quote the author once more, "provided an unexpected weapon for those who were trying desperately to head him off at the pass to Congress". (p. 267) The author suggests, in a manner reminiscent of other statements we have all heard in the past, that "the ordinarily amorphous state of the CIA makes it highly susceptible to the many manipulations of the many coteries of foreigners and foreign-born Americans on its payroll." (p. 269). (As a foreign-born American, I find the implications of this fascinating. . . .) We are told that these people have, for reasons of their own, failed to release to him documentation which he had submitted in support of his claims. He is therefore left with a curious group of people who "believe" in him, including, for one brief moment, Mrs. Eugenia Smith, purportedly the *real* Anastasia.

H.S.S.

spy
story

by Robert L. Fish

When I was working for the C.I.A. one of my contacts was a man named XR1235J7—who for purposes of secrecy we referred to by his real name—and I used to meet him in the last booth of a quiet little bar behind the billiard parlor in a small town on the Italian border. I was always surprised to find him there, since for reasons of security our organization did not permit us to arrange prior appointments, and it was only after our fourth encounter that I discovered he had, sometime in the past, caught one of his shoe-laces in a crack in the bench, and had been unable to work it loose.

In any event, this particular day when I slipped into the booth and accepted my usual *Gin Au Lait*, he was fairly seething with information.

"Mussolini!" he whispered tensely. I stared about the room; there was no one of

Captain Jose Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liason officer between the Brazilian police and Interpol, has long been one of our favorite people. Bob Fish, chronicler of the Da Silva saga, has paused from time to time, in this magazine, to chuckle with us in these vignettes, reflecting a much discussed trend in the genre, echoing the dreams—of some.... H.S.S.

that name visible that I could see.

"No, no!" he said, his eyes gleaming. "He is not here. It is only that I have it on unimpeachable evidence that he is, in reality, an agent for our side!"

I stared at him, amazed. "Mussolini? On our side?"

"Of course!" he said, and leaned closer. "Have you heard the latest? He is making the trains run on time!"

I nodded. I had, indeed, heard the rumor. "But...?"

"Don't you see?" In his frenzy at my obtuseness he almost kicked his shoe-lace free. "The confusion will be terrific! It is the greatest single act of sabotage in the entire history of our profession!"

I'm afraid this passed me by. "How do you figure this?" I asked.

"Listen!" he said. "No Italian has been on time for his train in over one hundred years. If the train comes on time, and the passengers are late..." He spread his hands expressively. "Don't you see?"

I saw it vaguely, but it still did not seem conclusive. However, he was not finished. He lowered his voice and bent forward again. "And the swamps. They are being drained, you know."

"And this is sabotage?"

"Naturally!" In his excitement he inadvertently drank my drink. He wiped his lips and continued. "You are, of course, familiar with the campaign for increased population in Italy?"

"Of course," I answered. We had a file of secret reports on this very subject back in Washington, and in addition it had been in all the local newspapers. "More people mean more labor, mean more soldiers, mean more—"

"And yet," he interrupted triumphantly, "he drains the swamps!"

I was sure there was a connection, but equally sure I had missed it. "Let me have your angle on this," I finally said. "Run it through the decoder and let me see it compute."

"The Italian *sleeps!*" he said. "Mama mia, how he sleeps! But when there are mosquitoes, he can't sleep." He raised his shoulders. "No swamps, no mosquitoes—what can it be except sabotage?"

I saw his point. However, in all fairness I felt bound to inform him of something.

"I'm afraid you've been in this bar too long," I said. "Mussolini has been dead for over twenty years. The war

has been over for some time now."

"Dead!" He stared at me, but I could see that his brain was working feverishly.

"Yes," I told him. "Democracy has returned to Italy."

"Then I can go home again!" he murmured, and with an almost superhuman effort, tore his shoe-lace free. "When is the next train?" he asked eagerly.

I consulted my time-table.

"It was supposed to come through here about half an hour ago," I replied.

"Fine!" he said happily. "There is just time for one last drink, and a leisurely stroll to the station. Will you join me?"

I was forced to decline. I should have enjoyed staying, but my own train had been due an hour and ten minutes before, and I did not want to cut it too fine...

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the
moors
murders

by Miriam Allen deFord

Multiple murders are far from uncommon—there have been at least four striking instances of them in this country within the past year. Murder for the thrill of killing is as old as human nature. What differentiates the Moors Murders in England from the common run of other wanton and motiveless cases of the destruction of human life is the character and personality of the two perpetrators set against the particular period in which these young people were born and have grown up. Sick eras produce sick people.

Strictly speaking, the main crime for which Ian Brady and Myra Hindley are now serving life sentences was not a Moors Murder at all, though Brady had planned to bury the corpse of Edward Evans in the Pennine Moors, near the graves of his other victims, if he had not been forestalled by the panic-stricken appeal to the police by his *soi-disant* brother-in-law,

The story of the Moors murders, in all its horror, is a phenomenon of our times. "People like Ian Brady," as the distinguished author points out, "have existed in all times and all places." True. But we must face the reality that "what developed his potentialities and brought them to fruition was the world into which he was born." This world. Our world. H.S.S.

David Smith—himself perhaps an accomplice and fundamentally a victim also of Brady's corrupting influence. Evans was killed in the house in Hattersley, near Manchester, in which Brady lived with his mistress, Myra Hindley, and her grandmother, Mrs. Maybury. The two other known victims, 12-year-old John Kilbride and 10-year-old Lesley Ann Downey, probably also were killed elsewhere and then buried a few hundred feet apart in the wild and desolate moors which were the guilty couple's "home away from home" where they spent much of their leisure time from their office jobs, sometimes all night long.

Brady himself is almost a case history in alienated youth. The illegitimate son of a waitress in Glasgow, his father unknown, he was reared by a foster mother in the Gorbals slums. She was kind and motherly and treated him well. He was a bright child who did well at school, but already the aberrant streak in him was manifest; he tortured animals, bullied his schoolmates, and as a child of 11 he was already obsessed with Nazism, with the Storm Troopers as his ideals. Also, he had started his career as a thief and

housebreaker, his first arrest and probation coming at 13, in 1951. He left school at 14 and went to work as a butcher's assistant, and after two more arrests and probation periods the Glasgow authorities decided he was beyond his foster mother's control and sent him south to Manchester to his mother, who had married and moved there. He was not yet 15.

To his thieving propensities and his delight in Nazism he had by now added an obsessive preoccupation with torture and sexual perversion; he had discovered deSade. To his companions he was known as "Dracula." He could not change his nature, but at first he seems to have made some effort toward normality; he changed his name to his stepfather's and went to work. But soon he was back in his old habits, and in 1955 he was sent to Borstal (the boys' reform school) for three years. Eight months after his release he got a job as an invoice clerk at a small chemical works in Gorton, another Manchester suburb. (He was a very satisfactory employee.) Two years later, he met there a new stenographer named Myra Hindley.

Psychopaths frequently have superior mentality; Bra-

dy reminds one constantly of Richard Loeb. He was good at his job, his interests were intellectual, but he was utterly anti-social. He worshipped naked power and made no secret of his leanings. It was his misfortune that he was born in the wrong country—he would have gone far under Hitler. As it was, his only outlet was the corruption of and hatred and contempt for those inferiors, all other human beings. A generation earlier he would have been a disciple of a misunderstood version of the philosophy of Nietzsche.

This was the man with whom a wilful, undisciplined girl fell so madly in love that she remade herself into his image, became his devoted slave, followed him into murder, and proudly proclaimed in the witness box that she still loved him—while he did not even glance at her. So far as a psychopath can care for anyone except himself she did become Brady's absorbing interest; she was his creature.

Myra Hindley is four years Brady's junior. When she was four years old her sister Maureen was born, and her working mother handed her over to her own mother, Mrs. Maybury, to rear: the two lived near each other.

Myra grew up a tomboy, a poor student, but essentially very much like other girls in a poor industrial neighborhood. What she most admired was strength. Brady was far from strong physically, but emotionally he fulfilled her dreams. She threw over a fiance and devoted herself to winning Brady's attention. It took her a long time. But after her grandmother moved to Hattersley, Brady moved in too (ostensibly he was still living with his mother and stepfather), and the two became inseparable.

No consideration of the two principals in this case would be complete without some reference to David Smith, who married Maureen Hindley when he was 16 and she was 17, and thus became Myra's brother-in-law. Whether Smith actually took part in the murder of Edward Evans is open to question; he turned Queen's evidence and was free from prosecution. He probably brought Lesley Ann Downey to the house where she met her death—it is unlikely that there was any truth in Brady's assertion that he took her away again, alive. He is weak and vicious, with an easy acceptance of criminality, but he has none of the driving force of Ian Brady. When they

planned a robbery together, Smith wanted blank cartridges in the guns. Brady would never have panicked, as Smith did, after the murder of Evans. By the time of the trial he had recovered his aplomb; he was brash and impudent on the stand, acknowledging proudly that he was being paid £1000 by a newspaper for his story—"Money is gorgeous stuff." His pregnant young wife, Myra's sister, was a mere bystander. Once she and Myra were close friends; they are no longer on speaking terms.

The first known murder was that of 12-year old John Kilbride, who disappeared from a movie on November 23, 1963, and whose body was dug up on the moor, close to the grave of Lesley Ann Downey, and identified by the clothing. (Brady is still being questioned about the disappearances of other young people in this part of the North of England during the past few years. He had boasted to Smith that he had committed "three or four" murders and would be committing another soon. But the moors are vast, and if Brady had not photographed Myra, with her dog, staring at the spot they frequented where Lesley Ann lay buried,

these two might never have been discovered, either.)

The boy had been sexually abused before his death. It was impossible to tell just how he had been killed, but in all probability—and in the case of the little girl also—he was suffocated. Smith certainly had no connection with this murder, and neither did Myra Hindley, though she was convicted of "harboring" Brady knowing that he had killed John Kilbride.

There was much more circumstantial evidence in the murder of Lesley Ann. Among Brady's chief hobbies was photography, including pornographic photography. There is no doubt that the child, who had gone to a local fair with sixpence to spend, was picked up by somebody—probably Smith—and persuaded to go with him to Myra's grandmother's house to have her picture taken. (They were complete strangers.) She would have been promised some small sum, perhaps was flattered to be told that she was pretty enough to be wanted as a subject, and went innocently to a scene of horror that makes this one of the unpleasantest murders on record.

Most of the English newspapers forebore to publish

all of the heartbreaking tape recording which Brady and Myra callously set going to preserve Lesley Ann's dreadful experience. The jury and the auditors in court heard her screams and protests, her pitiful plea that she must get back home in time for tea, her vain appeals. She had been stripped naked and either raped or otherwise abused. Her captors took photographs in obscene poses, which were with the tape in a suitcase they had packed with this and other incriminating material and checked. When she kept on screaming she got on Myra's nerves; she slapped the girl and then they stuffed her mouth with rags to gag her. To finish off the recording in style they tuned in to a radio broadcast of Christmas music—it was Boxing Day, the day after Christmas in 1964. She was buried as she died, naked. When a neighbor's girl they made a protegee of, read aloud the newspaper account of a reward offered for Lesley Ann's recovery by her distraught mother, Myra made a flip-pant remark and laughed.

The murder of Edward Evans was of a very different nature. Brady remarked to Smith that this one was "out of turn" and didn't

count. Evans, only 17, was an overt homosexual. Brady had seen him once before in a "drag club" in Manchester; Ian used to visit such places "for fun," to laugh at the habits. In the course of his indoctrination of David Smith—they were planning a hold-up at the time—he thought David should have some personal experience in crime; for a start, how about "rolling a queer"? "The point was that if anything did go wrong, this person was unlikely to complain to the police, so there was no risk."

On the evening of October 6, 1965, Ian and Myra drove to Gorton for some wine and then on to the Central Station at Manchester; Brady couldn't drive and Myra always drove them in her own car. There Brady saw Evans and decided to take him home with them, ostensibly for a drink. Why he thought a young apprentice engineer would have any money worth stealing is a problem; another version of his story is that this was just practice for Smith, in preparation for the robbery next Saturday.

So Smith had to be brought into the picture. It was past midnight by now and presumably David was asleep at his nearby home with Maureen. Brady sent

Myra to his house with a supposed message for Maureen from their mother; then she asked Smith to "walk her home" and pick up some wine bottles they had for him. Smith, who had been undressing to go to bed, did as she asked, and she left him standing inside the front door while she went "to get the bottles." His story is that he heard thumping sounds and Myra called, "Dave, come and help me." He went into the room and found a young man unknown to him writhing and screaming on the floor while Brady kept hitting him with a hatchet.

Brady had not waited for Smith's arrival. There is evidence that while Myra was gone he and Evans had had intimate relations, though Brady denied it, but just what precipitated his attack on Evans is unknown. From that point on, with Myra in and out of the room, there is no doubt that Brady kept slashing at Evans with the hatchet until the youth collapsed—Brady said Smith helped him by hitting Evans with his stick, Smith says he simply stood and watched, horrified. Finally, to stop his "gurgling," Brady strangled Evans with a cord.

Blood was everywhere, and they all three set to with

cloths and mops to clean up. Then they tied the corpse in a polythene sheet and blankets. Their first idea was to carry it out between them, drive to the moor, and bury the victim at once, but they were afraid of a trail of blood, so they carried him to an upstairs bedroom—where the police found him. (They also found a cryptic "plan" for disposing of a murder victim among Brady's belongings.)

One may ask, where was Mrs. Maybury, the 77-year-old grandmother, during all this? She had been visiting Myra's uncle over Christmas, and Myra had refused to drive her home that night on the grounds that the roads were too bad.

All this practical demonstration had been too much for David Smith. He got himself home somehow, washed, vomited, and tried to sleep but couldn't, so he woke Maureen and told her what had happened. By this time they were both terrified. They armed themselves for protection with a knife and a screwdriver and, since they had no telephone, went to a nearby booth, where they phoned the police. It was the beginning of the end for Ian Brady and Myra Hindley.

The preliminary hearing

was held in December, the trial in April and May of 1966. The judge was Justice Fenton Atkinson; the case was prosecuted, with two assistants, by Sir Elwyn Jones, Q.C., Attorney General; Brady's chief counsel was Emlyn Hooson, Q.C., Liberal M.P. for Montgomery, and Hindley's was Geoffrey Heilpern, Recorder of Salford. (During the trial Heilpern's sister-in-law was murdered in her dress shop in London by someone unknown.) Four of the 12 first picked for the jury were women, but they were all challenged by the defense and the jury was all male. No photographs were allowed, and the names of children who testified in the Kilbride and Downey cases were not published.

The jury took two hours and 14 minutes to convict Brady of all three murders and Hindley of the Downey and Evans murders and of harboring Brady in the Kilbride case. (For this last she received seven years.) This was the first important murder trial after the abolition of capital punishment in Britain; both defendants received concurrent life sentences on the murder charges.

Brady is in Durham Gaol, in solitary confinement at his own request; Myra Hin-

dley, whose appeal was rejected, is in Holloway. (Her appeal was based on the fact that she was not given a separate trial. Brady did not appeal.) She took the rejection unemotionally, as both took their sentences; it was noted that the synthetic blonde Myra has by now become a brunette. (An odd reflection is that Brady, slender and dark-haired, would never be noticed in a crowd; Hindley, with her wedge-shaped jaw and cavernous eyes, is much nearer the Lombrosan picture of a born criminal, though in actuality it is Brady who is the born criminal. If such a thing exists, and if they had never met there is no likelihood that Myra would ever have deviated from the conventional norm.)

So what is one to make of this sorry case? Has it any relevance to our troubled and chaotic time? Among the books which were Brady's Bibles, besides the works of deSade and Hitler's "Mein Kampf", were volumes about Goering and Eichmann and descriptions of Nazi genocide; there were also books with such titles as "Kiss of the Whip," "Pleasures of the Torture Chamber," "The History of Torture and Cruelty," and "Corporal Punishment

through the Ages." As David Ware remarked in *Punch*, "the pages devoted to Sade are the best thumbed. . . in the Reading Room of the British Museum." Doubtless some of the crowd who shrieked "Kill them!" as Brady and Hindley were taken to prison have been among those readers—but they have committed no murders. The Moors Murders are no argument for censorship; despite the complacency with which one London newspaper stated that the books the two read and passed on to Smith were "the drugs" that "poisoned their minds," Anthony Boucher has commented that this is the first sadistic murder on record in which there was any evidence that the murderer had ever actually read deSade!

People like Ian Brady have existed in all times and all places. What developed his evil potentialities and brought them to fruition was the world into which he was born. This is a sick world in a sick age. There is hope for humanity's recovery, but there is no use in pretending that all is well with us. Perhaps if it were made possible for *no* child to be born unwanted, there would be fewer like Brady. But *any* child born in an urban slum

has a tremendous handicap to start with. Just because he had so good a mind and so frustrated a personality, Ian Brady seized on his one means of fulfilment—the relentless pursuit of individual power and domination. In a healthy civilization, his bent would have been recognized early and he would have had assistance toward and opportunity for socially desirable ways to prove his superiority. We threw him away, after we had let him corrupt and ruin at least two other human beings.

A statement by the managing director of Madame Tussaud's Waxworks throws inadvertently a flood of light on the thin veneer of our normality. Brady and Hindley will not appear in the Chamber of Horrors, he says; in fact, the Chamber is now complete. "However nasty the murderers were, they were at least executed, which gave them a touch of glamor." While murder, either private or by the State, is popularly considered glamorous, we cannot call ourselves civilized, or justify amazement and revulsion at the emergence of an Ian Brady.

As Pamela Hansford Johnson said, "A wound in the flesh of society. . . (has) cracked open."

treacherous
triangle

by Wenzell Brown

I'd used a strip of celluloid to enter the flat and I'd been standing just inside the door for the better part of two minutes, alert to any signs of danger. But the only sounds were the drumming of the shower in the room beyond and, from outside, the soft slur of Cantonese voices and the occasional slapping of a rickshaw coolie's feet on the paved Kowloon street.

There was only one place in the room where danger might lurk. That was behind a wide three-panelled black lacquer screen, decorated in gold and mother-of-pearl. I approached it gingerly until I could see that it concealed nothing but a carved teakwood box. I sighed and relaxed. And that was a mistake.

The voice at my back had a reedy undertone. "I'm holding a gun on you. Spread your arms out straight at your sides. Quick."

"The symbol of Triad is a triangle, the three sides of which stand for earth, man and heaven." And for Mike Stranger, in Hong Kong on business for Triple V, Triad could also stand for—death.... Wenzell Brown is the author of more than thirty novels, many dealing with the unrest in our cities which, as I've said before, I feel should be required reading for those who want to know not only the headlines, but rather why people do the things they do. Like James Jaycox Bayne....

H.S.S.

I didn't argue but stretched out my arms and turned slowly. The girl across the room was naked except for a towel held loosely in front of her and the miniature pearl-handled revolver clutched in her hand. I looked at the weapon, a .25, deadly enough at close range but scarcely a threat at this distance. From there my gaze travelled up over the flat stomach, the firm pear-shaped breasts that might have been cast of bronze, the delicate column of a throat and a face that had the exquisite perfection of a temple goddess.

The gun jerked forward. "Who are you? What do you want?"

I took a step out of the shadow. "Norma, don't you recognize me?"

"Mike! Mike Stranger! Is it really you?" She dropped the towel, raced across the room and flung herself into my arms. I drew her close and kissed her on the lips. My hands slid along her back, the flesh still cool and moist from the shower, until they reached the swelling line of her buttocks. My breath was coming fast and there was a weakness in my knees that shouldn't have been there because, after all, I was in Hong Kong as an agent of Triple V, on a mis-

sion of death, not of love.

Norma drew back a bit and her lovely almond eyes were puzzled. "Mike, why didn't they tell me it was you who was coming? They only said to expect someone."

I looked down at her without answering. Four years ago we'd worked together cracking a ring smuggling Communist agents into San Francisco but I'd never quite trusted her, never been sure that she wasn't a double agent. What was more, Jope, my boss at Triple V, felt the same way. Before I'd left America he'd warned me. "Don't take anything for granted, Mike. We think she's on the level. But keep on your toes all the time."

Easy enough to say but not so easy to live by with the naked girl so close and the distant memories so strong. I pulled her against me roughly. Fear flickered in her eyes; then she laughed. For the moment, I couldn't care less whether she was friend or enemy. She was simply Norma Chu and the hunger that had been building up within me ever since I'd learned that I was to work with her again, sent tongues of flame through my loins. My head sank low and I crushed her mouth with my

lips. Her teeth were small and sharp and her tongue flicked against mine.

I picked her up and she lay quiet until I had carried her into the next room and dropped her onto the wide low bed. But as I fell down beside her she began to struggle. Her hands raked at my chest, the curved nails like those of an angry kitten. I could feel the hot spurt of blood as I cursed and held her down. She writhed, striking up at me with her knee. Her head twisted back and forth and her body arched. We were engaged in a strange savage battle that was sharp and heady, spiced by suspicion and the edge of hate, so that everything was driven from my mind except the need to possess her.

When it was over she cuddled close to me, her head pillowed on my shoulder. I let her sleep while I lay still, staring up at the ceiling that was stippled with mid-afternoon light and thinking of the task that lay ahead of me. Triple V is a hush-hush outfit. On the books it doesn't exist at all. It came to being in the early days of World War II when government agencies were hamstrung in acting against enemies in neutral countries for fear of violations of interna-

tional law. But there were private citizens who could act on their own and take the consequences if they were caught. The cold war made the work of Triple V more essential than ever. It became a corps of American business men, independently financed, who were the nation's eyes and ears in the farflung places of the world. Most of them were called on to take chances only rarely. Violence was left to a tiny group of professionals, specialists in sabotage, arson, intimidation and sometimes murder. I was one of their number.

I was here in Hong Kong to kill a man. I knew his name. It was James Jaycox Bayne, though he had always been called Jake. I knew a little of his history, too. He was the son of a New York City dentist. Jake's boyhood had been marked by erratic brilliance and flashes of violence. Despite his spotty record, he had been admitted to Columbia University. Here he was a straight A student and a constant troublemaker. In his second year, he had been arrested for assaulting a fellow student with a deadly weapon, in this case a switchblade. He had skipped bail and the next that was heard of him, he was behind

the Bamboo Curtain. Unlike other American renegades, he had required no brain-washing. He had taken to the Chinese Communist way of life like a duck to water and in twelve years had risen high in the party ranks.

During my briefing in New York I had seen a picture of him taken during his student days. His was an unremarkable face. Straight black hair. Dark eyes with long narrow lids. High cheek bones. A sulky mouth. You had to do a double take to recognize the fanaticism and the cruelty beneath the bland exterior.

Bayne was in Hong Kong. This much I'd been told. Norma was to give me more exact details. I looked down at the sleeping girl, curled up like a kitten. I'd violated one of the cardinal rules of Triple V by becoming emotionally involved while on a job. I'd been swept off my feet by a passion I should have held at bay. I'd been reckless but I guessed that it was too early for danger yet. From now on, I promised myself, I would be more cautious. Contact with a known agent, especially one of such dubious loyalties as Norma, placed me in the center of whatever intrigue was afoot.

I'd arrived in Hong Kong

nearly four days ago. Since then I'd been doing the tourist bit, complete with flowered Hawaiian shirt, Panama hat and a camera over my shoulder. I'd never been in the Colony before and that was one reason I'd be chosen for this assignment. It's surprising how much you can learn about a city in a few days if you're trained for it. First of all, Hong Kong possesses a breathtaking beauty, especially at night when the lights of the winding roads that lead up to the majestic Peak stand out like strands of glowing pearls against a dark throat, while the clustered neon signs at the base of the mountain reel and cavort with the glitter of red magic. The moonlight spills across the bay to silhouette the high graceful sails of the junks, to etch the sampans in bold relief and trace the moving shadows of the walla-wallas.

Hong Kong is beautiful but it is corrupt, too. The city is all things to all men: a tourist paradise, a hotbed of espionage and corruption, a listening post to Red China, a land where some men grow rich over night but where thousands sleep in streets skillfully blocked off from tourists' eyes.

In Hong Kong vice comes

packaged at bargain prices, a man's allegiance is always in doubt and treachery is taken as a matter of course. Nominally Hong Kong is governed by the British, but there is scarcely a facet of the Crown Colony's life which is not dominated by an organization known as Triad.

The symbol of Triad is a triangle, the three sides of which stand for earth, man and heaven. Originating in Fukien Province in the Seventeenth Century, Triad was composed of Buddhist priests who dedicated their lives to the overthrow of the Ch'ing rulers who had come out of Manchuria and were regarded as foreign invaders. They gathered in Siu Lam Monastery where they were trained as assassins. In the course of time the religious and patriotic fervor was forgotten. What remained was a gang of thugs, skilled in mayhem, slaughter, smuggling and diverse crimes. They became overlords of China's underworld and eventually established their base in Hong Kong. Triad remained non-political, specializing in prostitution, drugs, black market operations, smuggling, the protection racket and an incredible assortment of financial chicanery.

The Central Council of Triad allots geographic territory and specific areas of crime to five subdivisions known as Pangs, each of which is characterized by a color: White, black, green, red and yellow. The Hong Kong police estimate that there are 20,000 members of Triad. An uneasy peace exists between the officials and the underworld. The police content themselves with occasional skirmishes against the more blatant groups within the Pangs, for they know it is hopeless to attempt to topple over Triad itself. In return Triad is discrete. It rarely interferes with tourists or the legitimate business of foreigners and it has always refused to act as a cat's-paw for the Communists.

But recently conflict had arisen within the ranks of Triad. Mao Tse-tung had been shrewd enough to recognize that control of Triad meant control of Hong Kong. Mao maneuvered a sixth Pang. Blue Pang developed into a group of political assassins and trouble-makers and, to give the Pang a quasi-western look, the man Mao had chosen as its titular head was James Jaycox Bayne. Triad wanted Bayne out of the way and so did

the British officials but neither dared to invite the wrath of Red China. Bayne's killer had to be one of his own countrymen and the quarrel must appear to be personal. I was the guy selected for the job, and the girl lying beside me was the bait.

Norma was still sleeping. I got up, padded to the bathroom and stood for a minute beneath the cold spray of the shower. I toweled myself in the doorway, my senses alert once more, sorting out sounds, questing for danger. Slurred voices, slapping feet, the trundling wheels of a rickshaw, the clatter of pots and pans from somewhere below, the muted traffic of Nathan Road five blocks away, all merged into a rhythmic Oriental pattern. But there was one sound that was alien, that did not blend into the easy flowing rhythm. A board creaked on the landing outside the flat as though someone, tired of waiting, had shifted his weight.

My gaze veered to Norma. She was sitting up, her small firm breasts delightfully naked, a ridge of sweat lining the delicately tinted skin of her shoulder. She held out her arms and spoke in soft Cantonese. The words I

could not understand but the gestures were unmistakable, inviting. Even while she spoke, the settling of wood in the corridor sounded louder than before and was followed by swift, almost inaudible steps on the stairs.

I moved fast, racing across the room and flinging the door open. Already the man was more than midway down the flight of stairs. All I could see was his black hair, the pajama-like blue uniform of the coolie and his hunched shoulders. He hurried on without turning. I stifled my instinct to follow. I was in singlet and slacks, my feet still bare. Anyway I had more to lose than gain by a confrontation. I would announce my suspicions and, at best, I would identify a watcher who could be easily replaced.

Reluctantly I retreated to the flat and peered out the window. The man stepped from the doorway. He hugged the walls of the buildings, walking quickly but without obvious haste. He turned right at the next corner, looking straight ahead, not permitting me as much as a glimpse of his profile.

A metallic click at my back spun me about. Norma held a .357 Smith and Wesson Magnum, dangling it

loosely by the trigger guard. She straightened it and the muzzle pointed directly at my chest. For a moment I was sure that she was going to shoot and I braced myself for the red blaze of pain.

Norma's face did not change expression. She took a step closer and laid the gun on the rattan table. She spoke in a flat voice. "It's yours, Mike. For this job you'll need a man-sized gun."

I grinned sheepishly and reached for the revolver. It was on the heavy side but beautifully balanced, the duplicate of a weapon I'd used before. I knew it was specially tooled for rough-and-tumble action. It had a tremendous kick and savage killing power and its muzzle velocity was 1400 feet per second. I pressed the retaining catch forward to force the cylinder down. The ejecting rod eased out a spent shell. I jerked my head up, suspicion of Norma flared strong within me once more.

She had shrugged into a silk kimono. Now her back was turned and she was at the chiffonier. She pulled open a drawer as I came up in back of her and her fingers dipped beneath a neat pile of underclothes. Four spare rounds for the gun rested in her palm.

I gripped her by the shoulders. "Where did you get the Magnum?"

Her face took on a sullen cast that made us strangers. "A man brought it."

"What man?"

"I don't know. I'd never seen him before. He said the gun was for you."

"Did he use my name?"

"Of course not, Mike. I never dreamed it was you who was coming. He said it was for the man from Triple V."

"The gun's been fired. Who did it?"

"I don't know. It's just as it came. Now let me go, Mike. You're hurting me."

I wanted to believe in her but I couldn't. Not when misplaced trust could be fatal. Who was the man who had been lurking in the hallway? Had he followed me or was he spying on Norma? Or was he someone who was working with her? I remembered how she had raised her voice when it was obvious I had heard a noise on the landing. The words of apparent endearment had been spoken in Cantonese. I had no way of knowing their meaning. Could they have conveyed a warning to the listener outside?

Questioning Norma along

these lines would be a waste of time. I knew from past experience she would tell me exactly what she wanted me to know: no more, no less. I could see my own suspicions reflected in her almond eyes and I couldn't blame her. It was part of the deadly game we played that no one dared to trust another.

Anyway I was grateful for the Magnum. I'd been advised not to try to smuggle such an obvious weapon through customs and I'd felt almost naked with only the baby Beretta tucked in its skin-like sheath beneath my arm. I finished dressing, aware of the girl's non-committal gaze. An hour ago we had been lovers but already the act had become a dim memory out of the remote past. I thrust the Magnum into the unbelted top of my trousers and felt reassured by its weight.

I crossed to her, put my palm under her chin, forced her head up and kissed her. As I drew up, mischief flooded back into her eyes.

She said, "That's better, Mike. For a while you looked so grim. Why? Was it the man in the hall?"

"In part."

"I've found him there before. I don't know who he is but probably he's a spy from

Blue Pang or one of the rival branches of Triad. Anyone who works for Jake Bayne must expect surveillance."

I gave a start at mention of Blue Pang. It was the first time the melodramatic name had been mentioned in the open. "You're working for Bayne?"

"Indirectly. I'm an entertainer at the Laughing Dragon. It's one of Bayne's more or less legitimate enterprises."

"How close is the watch?"

"I don't know. Sporadic, I should think."

I stepped close to her and whispered. "Could the apartment be bugged?"

She was reaching for the lacquered cigarette box. Her hand stopped in mid-motion and a tremor snaked up her arm. Obviously the idea was new to her and frightening. She couldn't possibly be a good enough actress otherwise. I knew that she, like myself, was thinking over our conversation and how it might damn us both.

I didn't say anything. I spent the next forty minutes going through the apartment with a fine tooth comb. I'm trained to discover bugs but I didn't turn up a thing. I gave a sigh of relief but still I realized that they might have been too clever for me.

This was a place for cautious speech.

When I had finished, I looked out onto the broad street. Already evening was setting in and a pale lavender haze was filtering down through the trees. I had a feeling that I shouldn't leave Norma alone, but that was absurd. I couldn't play nursemaid to her at all times. Besides she'd proved often enough that she was capable of taking care of herself. I reflected sourly that she would probably be glad to see me go. It would give her a chance to report to her associates in Blue Pang and square herself if any doubts had been raised concerning her loyalty.

"Dinner tonight?" I couldn't keep the curtness out of my voice.

"All right. But it will have to be late. My last turn at the Laughing Dragon is at midnight. You can pick me up afterward. Do you know where it is?"

I nodded and stood looking down at her, feeling there was something I ought to say, but not knowing what it was.

As soon as I was out on the street the rickshaw coolies gathered around, their bodies looking fragile despite their heavy-muscled legs. I

was tempted to hire one to take me back to the Ming Ling Hotel but I remembered Jope's warning. The rickshaw pullers are organized by Triad. What is more, a rickshaw in the hands of a trained coolie can be a lethal weapon. A sudden heaving back of the shafts can send a passenger hurtling backwards to land on his head with a crash that can smash his skull or break his neck.

I walked on into the haze that was turning from lavender to gray. The streets which had seemed friendly earlier now appeared to me like a hostile maze with a possible booby trap in each recessed doorway, each barred window and overhanging balcony. I wondered if Norma were watching me and the thought brought me no comfort. A raised hand or a pointed finger could be the signal that ordained my death.

I was glad to reach the rush and bustle of Nathan Road. Here there was the whir of buses and taxis, the flicker of neons and the noisy shuffle of feet, some bare, some in clogs and some in European style shoes. A stir of breeze brought a hint of coolness and I decided to walk the fifteen blocks to the hotel. I started off brisk-

ly, an ear cocked for any step that might match my own. I varied my pace, stopping here and there to examine the displays in shop windows until I was satisfied that no one had taken up my trail. Then I relaxed and let myself drift with the crowd.

My room at the Ming Ling had been reserved for me through Triple V. The lobby was perversely European and third rate, right down to the rattan chairs, the potted palms and the scarred reception desk. Even the slim clerk in his black alpaca jacket seemed typical at first sight. Only when he turned did I see the deceptively impassive Oriental face and the eyes that seemed too large and misshapen behind the thick lenses of his tortoise-shell rimmed glasses.

The key which he handed me was big and old-fashioned, attached to a plastic plaque. The clerk's gaze seemed to rest on me a moment too long. I was tempted to give him the preliminary signals exchanged between Triple V agents who are unknown to each other, but decided against it. If Joep had wanted me to make contact, he would have told me so and, if by chance, the clerk was an enemy, I might be revealing my hand.

The gilded lift wheezed laboriously as it climbed to the fourth floor under the guidance of a miniature, white-coated, white-gloved operator who didn't look as though he could possibly be older than twelve. As I stepped out onto the frayed strip of coconut matting that served as a carpet, I was thinking of Norma and the passion which had led me to throw away caution at a time when I might have needed it most. It was my preoccupation with this one lapse of judgment that led me into a second error.

When I'm on a job, it's elementary to check before entering a room; to listen outside for the stirring of a sound or its abrupt cessation. But I'd spent four days in this room without danger. Moreover, I was trying to prove to myself that my suspicions of Norma were on the theatrical side, prompted by jagged nerves rather than reason. So I unlocked the door and walked straight into a trap.

As I reached for the light switch, fingers gripped my wrist hard. I reacted by instinct, relaxing my hand, shifting my weight, waiting for the forward thrust that would give me the leverage to throw my adversary over

my shoulder and slam him against the wall. It should have been easy but he knew judo too. His fingers meshed in mine and bent them back, so that with the slightest pressure they would snap.

I froze. The man in the darkness chuckled. "Smart boy! You know when you're licked. Not that any karate tricks would do you any good. There's two guns at your back. Don't take my word for it. I'll ease off so that you can take a look-see for yourself."

In the murky light I could see nothing of the man's features but he was tall and rangy with a look of lithe strength. His accent was easily recognizable as American, from the West Coast. I didn't try to fight but swiveled around. He was quite right. Two men, obviously Chinese, had me covered from different angles. There could be no mistaking the revolvers in their hands or the bulges of the silencers.

I said, "Who are you? What do you want?"

Again there was a deep-throated chuckle. "The very questions we came to ask you."

"My name's Mike Stranger. I'm a tourist hoping to pick up a few art treasures on the side."

"It's a good cover but it won't wash. Secret compartments in your luggage, no less. A make-up kit. A fountain pen that squirts tear gas. You're really hamming it up, boy. You're a rank amateur."

I shrugged. "Okay, I was planning on a little smuggling. But there's no crime in planning and now you've called my bluff, the deal's off. What are you—tax men, customs, port officials?"

"Climb off it, Stranger. You may be naive but you're not that dumb."

I spread my hands. "If you don't believe me, what do you want me to say?"

He laughed and spoke to the room in general, "Cute, ain't he?" The two men with the guns said nothing and their weapons did not waver.

A slash at my arm, just above the elbow, swung me back to the tall man. He pulled the blow but even so the nerves in my arm went numb. I still had to play it innocent. I said, "Hey, why so rough? Any way I can help you I will."

"First let's have a good look at your face." As he spoke, the powerful beam of a flashlight cut across my eyes. "Okay. In the future we'll know you. That is if you've got any future. Now

listen, clown. We know you work for some two-bit outfit called Triple V, a bunch of amateurs who've got a few breaks because they've never come up against real pros. Next, let me give you a piece of valuable advice. Get out of Hong Kong on the first plane you can catch. Forget all about Triad, like you never heard of it."

"And the alternative?"

The harsh accent softened to a drawl. "A mutilated corpse can be a nuisance, especially if it's that of an American. Questions get asked. Sometimes the police huff and puff a bit and we have to pay off along the line. That's our problem, Stranger. Are you going to be more nuisance to us alive or dead? It's up to you to supply the answer."

I stared from the big man to the two Chinese. What would be the exit line? They wouldn't dare let me raise an immediate alarm. They'd have to tie me up, knock me out or, in spite of what had been said, kill me. The American had already appropriated the Smith and Wesson and dropped it negligently in a chair. What would they expect of me if I was really frightened off? They wouldn't believe me if I agreed to leave too quickly. They'd ex-

pect bluster, a futile display of defiance. So that's what they'd get.

My voice rose shrilly, as though I were on the edge of hysteria. "All right, you're so big and brave, what about letting me see your face? You've seen mine. What about sending your goons away and having a fair fight, man to man?"

His laughter was contemptuous. "You really are cute, Stanger. A cross between Don Quixote and a Boy Scout. The next thing you'll be demanding sixteen-ounce gloves. When are you going to catch wise to yourself? This is no game."

I lunged at him, an awkward downward lunge, like that of a clumsy football player. He avoided me easily but my rush had carried me past him, so that he was between me and the line of fire of the men with the guns. His fingers tangled in my hair and he jerked me up. I gave a grunt of pain as his fist slammed into the cage of my ribs. I clawed at him futilely and heard his guffaw in my ear. I crumpled up, my body limp against his.

He caught my arm and pulled it behind me. He wasn't bothering any longer about the fine points of judo or karate. He'd decided I

didn't warrant such care. Instead he was using the tactics of a barroom bouncer giving a drunk the bum's rush. He was forcing me toward the window. I let out a groan and he laughed. Probably he didn't intend to push me out, just to scare me. But the window was a threat, with nothing to break the fall to the concrete roadway four stories below.

I stumbled and he jerked me up again. Pain screamed along the muscles of my shoulder.

He said, "The window, Stranger. You're going out."

"No—no." I made a show of bracing my feet. His knee drove up viciously to the base of my spine. I squirmed to one side and caught the blow on my hip. Then my own shoe with its metal inlay at the tip came slashing down, searing his leg and raking the inside of his ankle. His grip loosened and I thrust back with all my weight, ramming my elbow into his solar plexis, so that he fell toward me, covering me from the shots of the two men behind.

His hands were fumbling at my neck, groping for a strangle-hold. But I was inside his grip and his own weight helped. He shot up over my shoulder, his legs

flailing at the air. He went through the window backward, with a shattering of glass and a splintering of wood. I heard his howl as he fell but I didn't hear him land. I was too busy. Even as he hurtled past me, I was falling and rolling for the protection of the bed.

A bullet whizzed close by me, like an angry hornet, and buried itself in the mattress near my head. I had the Beretta out but before I could release the safety, two more bullets spanged into the bed and one of them ricocheted off, ridging my left shoulder with fire.

The men were no more than shadows in the dark room. Then the door was pushed open and my assailants were in flight. Momentarily they were limned against the lighted rectangle of the door. I raised my gun, propping it on the sideboard of the bed, but I didn't shoot. I didn't need to. The men were still silhouetted in the light when two shots brought them down.

I lay still and the silence seemed to grow. Then from the street below came a keening wail and the babble of Chinese voices. In my mind's eye I saw the crowd gathering around the sprawled body. I cut out the sounds of

the street and concentrated on those closer at hand. There came a tapping, light and musical, but easily recognizable as the signal code of Triple V.

A voice with a slight Oriental lisp spoke from just outside the door. "I'm coming in, Mr. Stranger. I am a friend. Don't shoot."

"I'll not shoot. But you'll be covered."

A slight figure passed through the rectangle of light and disappeared in the blackness to the left of the door. There was a click and the overhead lights snapped on.

The man who faced me was the desk clerk whom I had last seen in the lobby. That seemed a long time ago but a glance at my wrist-watch told me that it was only twelve minutes.

I said, "Who are you?"

"My name is Wu. That is enough for the present."

"If you come from—"

He interrupted my words with a soft hiss. "Mr. Stranger, we have no time for discussion. Please to follow me."

He stepped almost daintily over the bodies, one of which was spread-eagled across the sill. I followed him. I'd distrusted him in the lobby and I still distrusted him, despite the signals, but there was

nothing else to do. The cage of the lift was open and waiting for us. The miniature operator stood motionless, his hands on the controls. I hesitated. From the floors below came a high-pitched clamor broken by a raucous shout of authority.

Wu spoke with soft urgency. "Please to hurry."

I moved inside and almost instantly the cage shot upward with a speed that took me by surprise. We were deposited in an elaborate foyer, without windows and with a single door painted red. Wu pounded a gold knocker in the shape of a dragon's head. Eyes surveyed us briefly from a Judas hole before the door slid inward.

A man in a white jacket and black pajama-like trousers appeared. Wu spoke to him in swift Cantonese and he bowed an invitation for us to enter. As I passed through the door I noticed that its bamboo front was reinforced with steel and the lock was a Vipoint Durex, virtually impossible to burglarize. The hallway led to a big square room, two walls of which were completely glass. I gasped at the magnificent view of the harbor and the long snake-like line of the Pearl River to which

an early moon gave a glowing patina.

I stepped toward the window but caution made me stop. As though reading my thoughts, Wu said, "You need not worry, Mr. Stranger. The windows are one-way glass. Bullet-proof—too."

The room was lovely, filled with a combination of old and new: Ming vases, ancient hand-carved jade decorations and modern Swedish furniture. Wu smiled. "You are our honored guest here."

I looked about. The penthouse covered the raised section of the roof and I suspected that there was no exit except by means of the foyer and lift. I raised an eyebrow at Wu. "Guest or prisoner? Which is it?"

Wu frowned. "You are unduly suspicious, Mr. Stranger. You may stay here as long as you remain in Hong Kong or you may go at any time—as soon as the police leave."

"They'll be looking for me. My papers are in the room, to say nothing of my luggage. There's no denying the man went out of my window."

"You underestimate us. By the time the police see the room, there'll be nothing to

connect it with you. Not even a fingerprint."

"But—"

"Please, Mr. Stranger. No more questions now. I am needed down below. But first you are wounded. You will need a change of clothing. Would you like a doctor?"

I was becoming increasingly aware of a flame of pain across my left shoulder. I crossed to a mirror. The bullet had slit my shirt and the tear was mottled with blood that had trickled downward in irregular streaks.

I probed the wound. "It's not deep. It can wait."

Wu nodded approval. "Perhaps it would be better. We wish to attract no undue attention to the penthouse at present by unnecessary comings and goings." His eyes slewed to the servant who had remained in the doorway. "Besides, T'sang is an expert at many things, including first aid. Now, if you will excuse me, I shall go."

I strode into a bathroom and ripped off my shirt which started the wound to flow again. T'sang's reflection loomed in the mirror beside me. He said gravely, "If master will permit?"

"Right. But what about a stiff whiskey and soda before we start?"

He padded off and returned in an incredibly short time with a carafe of Scotch, ice in a glass and a syphon of soda. When I had swallowed a drink, he led me to one of the penthouse's twin bedrooms and made signs for me to lie down.

He swabbed the wound and it hurt like hell; then the stinging was replaced by a soothing coolness. His fingers, when he applied the tape and bandage, were so gentle that I could hardly feel them. I lay still when he had finished and drifted off to sleep.

I awakened hours later to the awareness of someone standing at the foot of the bed. I rolled into a sitting position and looked up at Wu. His expression was one of self-satisfaction. He said in his prissy, slightly accented English, "I thought you would like to know that the coast is clear. That is the correct colloquial phrase, is it not, Mr. Stranger?"

"I hope you've applied it correctly," I growled.

"The police have gone. Your name did not come up in the investigation. Is that satisfactory?"

My attempt to shrug ended in a grimace of pain. "Three corpses, one of them thrown out a window. For a

man of your capacities that shouldn't be hard to explain."

"How right you are! It was as easy as falling off—" he hesitated and added, "a fallen tree."

"The correct expression is falling off a log."

"Thank you, Mr. Stranger."

"Now perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me this story which satisfied the police."

"But, of course. You see the dead American was one, John Snead, who has been—" again he hesitated, searching for the right cliché and producing it—"a thorn in the flesh of the Hong Kong Police."

"How so?"

"Snead was a small time gangster. Originally he was a sailor, who skipped ship and has been associating with criminal elements."

"Triad?" I asked bluntly.

Wu's eyes became more expressionless than ever. "Not Triad," he said carefully. "But one of its less savory offshoots." A sudden earnestness showed in the supercilious voice. "Mr. Stranger, have you ever heard of Blue Pang?"

I hoped I didn't show my mounting excitement. I repeated the name negligently.

"Blue Pang, it's a branch of Triad, isn't it?"

There was something like anger in Wu's answer. "Not a branch. More like a splinter group vying for power." He broke off abruptly, as though he had said too much. I sensed that it was wise to change the subject.

"If I didn't throw Snead through the window, who did?"

Again Wu's manner was suave. "But no one. It was an accident. Snead and his underlings were caught red-handed robbing the rooms of the hotel. When we shot his men, Snead panicked and dashed into a dark empty room. He must have become confused and crashed through the window."

"Do you think you can make that story stick?"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Stranger."

Half an hour before midnight I left the Star Ferry on the Victoria side. The Laughing Dragon was not hard to find. It was a roof garden atop a six story building just off Queen's Road. The ground floor entrance was marked by a dragon in writhing neon that was gimmicked to sounds of laughter which cackled through the street. Glass display cases **framed** pictures of several

pretty girls and invited one to dance to the music of Manuel Torres and his Macao Troubadors.

A lift deposited me in the upper foyer of the night club. As I stepped out, I heard the throbbing, wailing notes of a marimba played with a strange Oriental lilt. The reeds swung into a jagged, high-pitched rhythm. The drums growled a threatening jungle beat. A Chinese lute wrought a monotonous dirge-like background for music that belonged to neither the East nor the West but was sheer honkytonk, aimed at the hips and the shoulders.

The wide roof garden was dark except for a few paper lanterns suspended from the ceiling and a spotlight flickering over the players. A major-domo appeared out of nowhere and escorted me to a miniature table by a wall. I was playing the tourist bit so I ordered a Singapore gin sling, which I felt was expected of me. Besides I'd developed a liking for them over the last few days.

I was glad that my back was toward the wall. The somber shadows provided a shroud against all movement. I remembered the silencers on the guns of Snead's men. If I was on anyone's death list, this would be an ideal

spot to get me. A shot would be completely drowned in the savage beat of the drums.

I looked around. The men were mostly Europeans with Chinese girls. Near at hand was a table of tourists from the cruise ship in the harbor. A fat woman leered at me and started to rise. Her husband gave her a resounding whack across the buttocks. She squealed and collapsed back in her chair.

No one else seemed interested in me but one couple drew my attention. The girl was Chinese, plump and pretty. Her companion was seated at an angle to me so that I could only see his face in profile. His hair was stiff, straight and black. He had jutting brows, craggy cheek bones, a nose that was aquiline and a jaw that was long and narrow. Neither of them spoke and there was a tension about them that suggested they were not here for pleasure but on some dangerous errand.

My gaze veered to the bandstand where a tom-tom beat out a sluggish threatening note. From the ceiling a light blinked. The Chinese lanterns dimmed and the lights on the stand were reduced to a baby spot. The spot moved backward to pick out the figure of a girl. She

weaved forward until a circle of yellow light held her in its lambent embrace.

My breath sucked in. I could hardly believe that this was Norma. Jet black hair was piled high on her head and skillful makeup had lengthened the lines of her jaw and her almond-shaped eyes. The spot hollowed out her cheeks, emphasized the sleekness of her throat and gave a metallic sheen to her skin. Her yellow gown had the glint of newly minted gold. The shining cloth snugged her breasts and fitted about her waist like a glove. The skirt flared to conceal the stilted shoes that added inches to her height.

The room had grown quiet with a vibrant expectancy. A piano played rippling chords that rose higher and higher and, somewhere out of sight, temple bells interjected the golden clarity of their single tone.

Norma began to sing. She had a small voice but true and clear, the notes like tiny mallets striking against golden chimes. The words were Chinese and, as far as I was concerned, in comprehensible. Then something strange was happening. The syllables lengthened and became sticky. Norma was writhing, moaning. The drums came up

in back of her and the reeds picked up a tortured rhythm, high, shrill and broken.

Norma's voice became a tortured scream and her hands rose to her throat, the bent fingers like talons. Her face was distorted as though with pain. She lowered her arms slowly, gripping the cloth that covered her breasts, pushing it down until she stood, proud and defiant, naked to the waist. I could feel the shock hit the room. It was as though an ancient goddess had sprung to life and offered an invitation to participate in long forgotten fertility rites.

The spot blinked out. From the piano came rough jangling chords. A trumpet sprayed black velvet notes across the room. The lanterns spilled a pale white glare. Norma was gone and Manuel Torres was leading the way into *Como Mujer*. The whole thing had happened so fast that there was no time for applause. Maybe the others, like myself, were not quite sure of the reality of what they had seen and heard.

Ten minutes later Norma joined me. No one seemed to recognize her as she threaded her way toward my table. She'd removed her wig and **her** makeup and changed

into a cheongsam of midnight blue. Without her stilted shoes she appeared pathetically small.

She slid down beside me and took my hand. "Mike, I'm so glad—" Her voice broke off and a gray pallor showed beneath the bronzed skin. Her eyes slitted and she looked down but I had already seen the direction of her glance. She'd spotted the young man with the craggy brows whose profile I had studied.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He has a dozen names but mostly they call him Paco. He's an assassin for Blue Pang. Mike, we've got to get out of here quick."

Even as she spoke the man turned. His profile had not warned me of the brutality of the dark eyes and the fish-like mouth.

He pushed back his chair. At the same moment I glimpsed, out of the corner of my eye, the fat woman tourist advancing toward our table. She must have recognized Norma for both of her arms were outstretched and her lips were slack in a drunken smile.

The lights went out again. The trumpet gave a white-hot blast and the drums speeded up their tempo. Norma bent toward me.

"Come with me, Mike. There's a back way out."

Already I'd dropped to my hands and knees and was rolling, carrying Norma with me. We hit the wall and I crouched, waiting, my Smith and Wesson ready. Blurred shadows told me that a figure was close to the table. Probably Paco with a knife or gun. Then I heard a pop, no louder than the cork of a champagne bottle. The scream, high-pitched in terror, came a moment later. It was broken off by a crash, a body falling and dragging a table to the floor. A babble of voices rose shriller and shriller until the room was a madhouse of sound. The beam of a flashlight broke the darkness. It traveled along the bosom of the woman tourist lying on the floor. When it reached her face, it revealed a bloody cyclops eye just above the bridge of her nose.

Norma was tugging at my sleeve. I swung about and let her lead me through the maze of tables. She whispered, "Here," and some smooth fabric brushed my face. A door opened to the stale warm air of a landing.

The lights came on with a dazzling glare; not just the lanterns but the overheads as well. I looked over my

shoulder. The club was in pandemonium. Paco was not far from the table we had left but, through some trick of light, I could see every detail of his face. The cavernous eyes beneath the craggy brows caught the glitter of the lights. He looked straight at me. He raised his arm as though to point and his mouth opened.

I went through the door and slammed it shut. A feeble light glowed on each landing, enough to cast treacherous shadows over the narrow concrete steps which spiraled downward. Norma was halfway to the lower landing. She called, "Mike, for God's sake, hurry."

Above me the door through which we'd just passed banged open. I went for my gun but it was two young Americans with Chinese girls. One of them saw me and yelled, "Hey, what gives here?"

I didn't answer. Norma had taken off her slippers and hiked up her cheongsam to make better time. From above came the sounds of a scuffle, a harsh voice that might have been Paco's and the protests of the Americans.

The stairs spiraled down and down, offering protection of a sort against the possibility of Paco's fire. The

exit on the ground floor led into a narrow alley. Opposite us was the kitchen of a restaurant and a litter of refuse cans. Norma put on her shoes and once more we were running.

The shot seemed to come from nowhere, slapping the wall of the restaurant, then ricocheting against the near wall, and finally skittering at an angle along the gravel walk. The second bullet came a moment later. Maybe there were others. We didn't stick around to see.

Once we reached the street, we headed away from the Laughing Dragon, zigzagging, climbing all the time, for most of the streets of Hong Kong lead upward to the Peak. Despite the lateness of the hour, women cooked soup in the street, squatting by their braziers; old men crooned to themselves and nearly naked children peered from the doorways. Even as we fled, we realized that we were leaving a wide open trail. The city, swollen with refugees, offered no privacy except within the walled gardens of the very rich.

We were heading toward the Peak, where the homes of the English were clustered, with their spacious grounds, their sunken gates

and recessed doorways. Most of the gates were locked but I found one where the padlock had not caught. I unwound the chain and we stood listening for long minutes. There were no shuffling footsteps, no sounds of surreptitious pursuit. Far away a lute wailed, a baby cried and a voice was raised in sharp challenge. We slipped in through the gate and I wound the chain around the wrought-iron grillwork and jambled the padlock home.

The towering house cut out the gleam of the moon. We found still darker shadows beneath the boughs of a casuarina tree. I pulled Norma down beside me. Her hands were cold and when I held her close, I could feel the tremors of fear which she tried to hide.

I kissed her lips. "We'll be safe here. For awhile at least."

"You don't understand, Mike. There are so many of them, so terribly many."

"Perhaps it's not as bad as you think. Blue Pang is the enemy, not the whole of Triad."

"Even so—" She let the words trail off.

I held her but all the time I was listening and so was she. When the sounds of danger came we acted instinc-

tively, rolling away from each other, flattening out on the ground. I held my Magnum in front of me, balancing it against a low retaining wall. I had not realized that Norma had a gun, too, until I saw the glint in her hand. This was not the pearl-handled revolver of the afternoon. It was snub-nosed and looked powerful. For a moment it occurred to me that if she were playing a double game, she could find no better opportunity to shoot me. I thrust my doubts aside and concentrated on the gate.

The warning that had alerted us was the slap of bare feet on tarmac. The sounds stopped as someone tried the gate in the house below. Then the footsteps came on in a fast running trot, not one pair but two, not quite synchronizing, one racing slightly behind the other like hunting hounds.

The lead man came to the gate and clutched it, peering in. The moonlight picked out a thin figure in a coolie hat, a loose shirt and ragged shorts. He clung there like a prisoner, twisting at the lock. The other man waited behind him, staring up and down the roadway. I lay still, my hand on the trigger. Despite the darkness I could not believe myself invisible.

Beside me Norma stirred slightly. The rustle of her cheongsam was like the whisper of leaves. It seemed to me that it must be heard. The man at the gate strained backward as though about to climb the grille but his companion touched his arm and he turned away. More feet echoed along the road, higher up. A single shouted syllable echoed harshly in the night. The men raced upward to join the others.

Norma let out her breath and my own cramped muscles relaxed. I touched her and she nuzzled her lips against my neck. I rolled on my side and she came into my arms. I cradled her there and after awhile she slept.

A feathery touch of dawn brushed the sky when I awakened her. She lay still as a frightened bird, then her hand raised up and caressed my cheek.

"We must go. Soon people will be stirring. We mustn't be found here."

"Where?"

"Back to Kowloon. Once we're in the Ming Ling, we should be safe enough."

"But how can we go? I don't think the ferry's running yet. Even if it is, the dock will be staked out."

"Isn't there any other way?"

"A walla walla perhaps. You know the little motor boats that take late couples to the mainland or soldiers to Stonecutters Island."

"Where can we find one?"

Norma considered. "There's a wharf where they tie up but that will be watched, too. Wait, there's an old man called Leung who brings his boat around to Wah Sai Deo. He sleeps in it beside the jetty."

"Is it far?"

"Two miles perhaps. But it is mostly downhill."

We walked along boldly, soon leaving the big houses behind and slanting through streets already astir with early morning sounds. We found the jetty without trouble and woke the old man curled in the bottom of his boat. Not to arouse suspicion we dickered over the price, though I couldn't have cared less.

The old man moved forward, his cotton shirt open, his fragile ribs straining against scant flesh. The engine sputtered to life with a series of crackles and pops that broke the gray morning stillness like firecrackers. Norma spoke to Leung in Cantonese. He shook his head and she spoke more sharply.

She opened her purse and thrust a bill into his hand. He nodded grumpily. The walla walla nudged away from the wharf and skimmed out over the gray-green water.

Norma came and crouched beside me on the wicker seat. "There are steps by the godowns, the big warehouses on the Kowloon side. I told him to take us there. It's the least likely place to be watched."

"Why did he object?"

"It's private property. He doesn't want trouble." She laughed. "What about you, Mike? Are you afraid of being arrested for trespass?"

I grinned but I wasn't happy. In the day we could be seen by any watcher. What's more we were coming in at an oblique angle that would make it easy to intercept us.

As we darted out into the open water, I shot a glance at Norma. Her face had a gray cast and her mouth drooped with weariness. Her cheongsam was coated with dirt. She didn't look much like the glamorous strip-teaser of the night but there was something infinitely more appealing about her.

We were more than half-way across when danger rushed at us out of nowhere.

The powerful launch must have been hidden in the lee of a junk. It came swirling across the bay, slicing through the water, churning up twin arches of spray.

The launch bore down on us as though to ram us. Leung swung the walla walla to one side. The launch rushed past our bow and we rolled and heaved in its wake. Three men lined the railing of its deck, one of them viewing us through field glasses. They knew who we were now. Next time they'd take more positive action. I'd recognized one of the men. He was Paco.

The launch circled about us, foam spuming high. It slowed a bit and the man in the center cupped his lips with his hands and shouted. The roar of the motor and the rush of waves drowned out the words but obviously he was ordering us to lay to. I knelt and balanced my Magnum on the rail. I felt the gun buck in my hand though its sound was lost in the engine's throb.

In the thrashing water it was impossible to aim. It was only a fluke that the bullet starred a window behind the men. Paco brought up a rifle but the man beside him slapped it away.

We were close to shore

now and Leung was clever. He'd threaded his way between two rows of sampans riding at anchor. By the time we left the sampans' shelter, a concrete retaining wall lay ahead of us and the high docks where the freighters unloaded goods for the go-downs.

The launch had swerved wide, keeping well away from the sampans and coming in slow. I wondered if they'd try to crush us against the wall but I didn't think so. A miscalculation could spell disaster.

We were edging in close. I saw the sharp angles of inset steps that led to the concrete apron with its railroad tracks. Leung throttled the engine. Norma leapt for the stairs, stumbled and fell to one knee. Before she could rise I was beside her, pulling her up. She hung back, her face a mask of pain but I was relentless. We'd have only minutes at best before the men on the launch were at our backs and, in the open, our guns would be useless against their rifles.

Norma sobbed but she was game. She came scrambling after me. The early morning sun turned the vast concrete apron into a desert of white sand. Beyond rose the huge whitewashed warehouses

that were repositories for the Colony's food. I grabbed Norma's wrist and ran for the protection of the nearest of them. Norma stumbled but I wouldn't let her fall. Her cheongsam was ripped at the knee and stained with blood.

We saw an open door and, at the same time, we heard a roar and the scuffle of feet at our back. We were only a few feet from the door when a guard appeared. His hip holster was empty, his gun in his hand. I skidded to a stop, fearing he might shoot in the mistaken need for self-defense. Behind us a gun barked. The bullet whined past my ear and buried itself in the guard's chest. He gave a grunt, tottered, slid along the wall and collapsed.

I reached for Norma's hand and leapt up the steps. Bullets smashed into the frame of the door and caromed along the cement floor. I slammed the door shut and snapped the latch. The interior of the godown was black and icy cold from air conditioning. The stench of salt cabbage was all-pervading. Cardboard cases and wooden crates were piled in irregular rows. There were plenty of places to hide but I didn't dare test them. If we re-

mained inside we would be trapped.

We kept moving along a dark aisle. Far ahead of us we could see a tiny red light and we headed for it. Wood crashed and splintered as the door I'd latched was shattered. Voices snarled and feet gritted on cement.

Then lights came on, dazzling in their brilliance. I drew Norma behind a pack of cases. I could see an exit door beneath the red light and whispered to Norma to run for it. I could hear our pursuers fanning out, moving slowly. I could sense the fear in them. We might be laying in wait behind any of a hundred objects.

Norma's feet were almost silent as she ran for the door. Her hand had touched its knob before she was sighted. A man rushed toward her shouting. I came out quick and snapped off a shot. I was lucky. I saw him stagger and, as I whirled about, I heard his rifle drop. I zigzagged to the door which Norma had left open and jumped into the sunlight.

Norma was racing ahead of me. Another godown loomed to the right but she chose the protection of a one-story cement building that housed washrooms. I loped after her,

expecting the thud of a bullet in my back at any instant. She rounded the corner and kept on running. I saw what she had in mind now. Edging the waterfront was a line of miniature railroad cars on a narrow-gauge spur. If we could keep the washrooms between us and the men behind, we might still escape.

Norma was a few feet ahead of me when she crumpled. I knelt beside her. Her breath was coming in painful gasps and tears were trickling down her cheeks. She was clutching her ankle.

"I can't go on, Mike. Don't wait for me. I'll be all right."

It was a lie, no matter how bravely she told it. She'd seen too much. If they caught her, they'd never let her live.

I gave her a quick kiss, then I was rushing back to the corner of the low building. I was facing the bay and I had one quick look at the soaring peak beyond, the neons febrile in the washed-out morning light, the jammed up houses and towering buildings. It seemed as though a thousand eyes must be watching but my judgment, told me this was not true. The compound which enclosed the godowns was a

world of its own, fenced in with high wire.

As I neared the corner, I heard the pounding of footsteps. At least I had the advantage of surprise. We had run before and a pursuer would not suspect an ambush. I had my Smith and Wesson out. With luck I'd have one free shot. I balanced it in my hand and saw the blur of movement as Paco rushed toward me. I fired. There was the sharp metallic click of the hammer and that was all.

I could see the astonishment on Paco's cavernous face. He had discarded the rifle and his weapon was an ugly Luger. Its twin barrels looked enormous as they rose toward me. His finger grew white on the trigger. The blast deafened me and I was unable to tell if I'd been hit. I dove hard and low in a tackle that carried him off his feet and slammed him hard into the cement.

He was fast. His boot lashed out at my groin as I jackknifed to my feet. Then he was up in a crouch. He groped blindly for his gun, not daring to take his eyes off me.

I watched without moving, waiting for the shift of his eyes to strike. He gave up the idea of the gun and lung-

ed at me. He raised his arm and his flattened hand snaked at me in a chopping blow aimed at the bridge of my nose. It was a blow that would have killed if it had landed, but my own chop just below the elbow sent his arm high and left his body vulnerable.

When you're up against an experienced karate fighter, you keep your distance, feint and watch for an opening. But there was no time for that. Somewhere within the compound was a second killer with a gun. By now Paco would know I was no novice, so I did the thing he'd least expect. I rushed in, slamming my left fist into his stomach and following through with a right hook to the jaw. He reached for my wrist as he fell and I rammed my knee into his chest so hard I could hear the snap of bone. He sprawled on the concrete and scrambled for the Luger a few feet away. I stamped hard on his hand. His scream was high-pitched, shrill as a woman's.

I bent for the gun and the movement saved my life. A bullet nicked the wall where my head had been.

A voice drawled, "Take it easy, boy. Stand up slowly, hands clasped at the back of your neck. Do as you're told

and there's a chance just a chance, that you may live."

I obeyed. I think I knew who he was before I saw his face. He was the man whose picture I'd studied in New York, the man whom I'd been sent to kill. The years had etched lines in the dark saturnine face and developed black pouches beneath the molasses colored eyes. The hair was flecked with gray at the temples and there was an unexpected ruthlessness and unrelenting force within him. But there could be no mistake. This was James Jaycox Bayne.

Like Paco, Bayne had abandoned his rifle for an automatic. Death could be only seconds away. All I could hope for was a little borrowed time.

"You can't kill me here," I blurted out. "There would be a hundred witnesses." I jerked my head vaguely toward the island.

Bayne's laughter held real merriment. "Do you really think that concerns me? No Chinese would dare to identify the leader of Blue Pang. And if a European did, it wouldn't matter. You're a trespasser here while I've legitimate interests in the go-downs. There's a dead watchman, too. You'll be found

clutching the rifle that shot him."

His eyes slid past me and a smile curved his sensuous lips. He said, "Hello, Norma. You've done well. You've stayed with him as I told you."

Norma spoke faintly. "It wasn't easy. He's tougher than he looks."

I wanted to turn but I forced my eyes straight ahead. Bayne was watching me, mockery in his expression. "So you're the best that Triple V has to offer. We spotted you within an hour of your arrival. There was never a time when we couldn't have picked you off."

"Snead tried. So did Paco. What did it buy them?"

Bayne laughed again. "As far as Snead goes, I owe you a vote of thanks. He was unreliable and had the habit of taking things in his own hands. Paco was expendable too. A hophead's more trouble than he's worth." He shrugged. "I wish there was more time for a chat. You might even prove a useful agent for Blue Pang, but I doubt if I could win you over. Anyway—"

The horn of a ferry blanked out the words. Then something was happening that I didn't understand. Bayne took a step away from me

and clutched at his heart. Blood spurted from between his fingers.

I slewed around and saw that he was walking toward Norma. There was a gun in her hand and I realized that she must have fired the shot. She backed away and pulled the trigger twice. Bayne sighed and fell slowly, dropping to his knees, then falling full length, his face twisting to one side.

I bent over him to make sure that he was dead. Then I straightened up and looked about. A solitary figure was watching us. I guessed that he was a watchman but, whoever he was, he kept his distance.

Norma was tugging at my arm. "Mike, we've got to get out of here." She took a painful step and sagged against me. I gathered her up in my arms and was surprised by her lightness.

She pointed. "There's a door that leads out to Sebastian Place." Beyond the narrow passageway between two godowns I could make out a mesh-wire gate. I walked toward it and no one stopped me. Outside two rickshaw coolies spotted us and came rolling in, half-circling us. I lifted Norma into one rickshaw and climbed into the other.

By the time we reached the marquee of the Ming Ling, Norma's ankle was swollen to twice its normal size. I carried her into the lobby. Wu looked up placidly as though he saw nothing amiss.

T'sang was waiting for us at the penthouse door. I gulped whiskey and soda while he bound Norma's ankle. Then I stumbled into the other bedroom, peeled off my clothing and fell onto the bed.

It was mid afternoon when I awoke to find Wu seated beside me. I shaved, showered and put on fresh clothing. When I had finished, I strode through the penthouse looking for Norma. There was no sign of her.

I stopped in front of Wu, glaring at him. "Where is she?"

He hitched a shoulder. "She is gone. I did not ask where."

My clenched fists swung at my sides. "If you've harmed her, by God, I'll kill you."

"For an experienced agent, you are very emotional, Mr. Stranger. I assure you she is safe. She is with Triple V's local agents. They wish to question her."

I veered away from him and stared out the huge picture window. Wu followed

me. "Your visit in Hong Kong has been most effective. Now your mission is accomplished."

"So?"

"I have an airline ticket for you to San Francisco. The flight leaves in exactly one hour and ten minutes. A bullet-proof car will take you to Kai Tak Airfield and a bodyguard of Triad's best men will remain with you until the plane takes off.

"Triad! How can I trust Triad?"

"Jake Bayne is dead. Most of the leaders of Blue Pang have been eliminated. Triad is grateful. There will be a fitting bonus for your work."

Should I tell Wu it was Norma, not myself who had fired the fatal shots? I decided against it. Already she was in too much danger.

The trip to the airport was lonely. No one at the Ming Ling bothered to say good-bye, not even Wu. I rode in the back seat of a Cadillac behind bullet proof glass. Beside the chauffeur was a guard. I didn't leave the car till the last possible moment. At every step I was aware of men who moved with me. I didn't know whether they were friends or enemies, so I looked straight ahead.

As we circled over Hong

Kong, I strained forward for a last look at its matchless beauty. Then as we headed across the huge expanse of featureless water, I settled back and closed my eyes. It was always like this at the end of an assignment. You didn't look back and you were alone, as featureless as the ocean below.

There was a stir in the seat beside me, which had been empty. I opened my eyes and couldn't believe what I saw. Norma sat there,

her lips puckered up for a kiss.

I held her tight and laughter tinkled in my ear.

For whom had she worked? Triple V? Triad? Blue Pang? Perhaps she was a triple agent. I'd never know and I didn't care much. Like myself, she belonged to the fraternity of hired killers. We were two of a kind. All that mattered was that I wouldn't be alone. Not for awhile at least. Not until we reached San Francisco.

NEXT MONTH

VENDETTA

A New Story by *JAMES MICHAEL ULLMAN*

TO AVOID CONVICTION

A New Story by *AVRAM DAVIDSON*

THE FLYING SAUCER OF TAYLOR COUNTY

The story behind those headlines—

by *AL MOFFETT*

and

THE DIZZY DAUGHTER

ANOTHER BRAND NEW SAINT NOVEL

appearing exclusively in—

the September 1967 issue, *THE SAINT MAGAZINE*



mary—

mary—

by Baynard Kendrick

DESPITE the fact that the leading lady had enacted her role more than a thousand times, and had achieved record runs in both New York and London, it wasn't a particularly good show. Its success, like so many other things in theatrical history, was purely accidental.

Set in one of those English estates, called Trenchard Manor, fallen upon evil days, the plot was a complex conglomeration of wills and mortgages. One of the most minor characters, added in for comic relief, was a literal-minded caricature of a peer of the realm, yclept by the author, Lord Dundreary, furnished complete with side-whiskers and a habit of pronouncing "w" for "r."

This completely phony jackanapes, who laughed idiotically and puzzled his empty head with "widdles," might never have made a mark on theatrical history

The death of Lincoln is a part of our memories as a people. Much has been written during these past hundred years, both about the murdered man and about the murderer, and about the heartache those moments brought both to the Lincoln family and to the nation. Baynard Kendrick pays tribute to the gentle man whose destiny it was to die in this fashion, in this sensitive story of what could have been the President's last thoughts.... The author, a founder and former President of the Mystery Writers of America, is of course best known for his Duncan Maclain novels.

except for the fact that the original role was created by no less an artist than E. A. Sothern. In his entrance on opening night, Sothern stumbled over a tear in the carpet, recovered himself with a skip and a hop, and was greeted with howls of laughter.

That skip and a hop, repeated nightly as the character's natural gait, his inane appearance and his literal interpretation of every remark, made the part so popular that it grew until it became the most important in the play. The show was revived many times under the title of "Lord Dundreary." The long side-whiskers Sothern wore on stage became known as "dundrearies," and E. A. Sothern became one of the most famous actors in America.

Yet, at this benefit performance, it wasn't sheer boredom with the fatuous antics of the actor playing Lord Dundreary that caused a man in the audience to let his attention wander from the action back of the footlights and become fixed on the portly figure and placid face of the woman sitting in the left side aisle seat of the third row. One of the characters in the play was a milkmaid, an eventual heir-

ess, whom the hero had fallen for. Her name was Mary Meredith. What had diverted him was a feeling that he had suddenly become surrounded by Marys. His wife, sitting beside him, was named Mary. There was a second one in the play. Now, unless he had been deceived by the dim lights of the theatre, and a lapse of thirty years, a third Mary who had greatly affected his entire life was seated there in the third row.

True or false it opened the door to an interesting line of introspection. There was one thing he was certain of—he had never been much of a ladies' man. There hadn't been enough women in his life so that he was ever likely to forget the only one who had ever flatly rejected his proposal, although, he was forced to admit his offer of marriage had been made, more or less, on the rebound while he was still filled with grief over the death of his twenty-two year old fiancée just a year before.

The sudden death of that first great love had nearly flipped him completely. He was just twenty-six, a serious-minded type with a tendency toward melancholy. The loss of his loved one had filled him with forebod-

ing. He had taken it as an omen that there would be nothing but tragedy in the years of his life that lay ahead. For weeks he had wandered around muttering to himself, very close to the verge of a complete nervous breakdown, a condition not particularly helped by a steady diet of strong brandy.

Maybe he hadn't snapped out of it entirely, but his friends were deserting him, one by one, for more pleasant company and his loneliness was overwhelming. Without actually realizing it, he was desperate for someone to love. It certainly wasn't out of line that he should have shown a growing interest in that Mary on the aisle (if it really were she) when she had come to visit her married sister, a Mrs. Bennett Able, and made quite a splash in the little town.

Her name was Mary Owens. She had come up north from Green County, Kentucky, which as it happened was the state where he was born. He could remember that he had fallen for her on their very first meeting. She was amiable and intelligent, and had a sense of humor quite as keen as his own. Although she was slightly on the buxom side, he considered that a

minor drawback. He had found her, for the moment, every bit as attractive as the actress who was, tonight, playing the part of Mary Meredith, the beautiful milkmaid in the show.

There was another parallel to the theatrical milkmaid, who was due to inherit a bundle of stage money. The Owens of Kentucky were a wealthy family, and their daughter, Mary, would undoubtedly one day be heiress to a considerable fortune. In all fairness to himself, he didn't believe that had been much of a factor in seeking her hand in marriage.

He tried to turn his attention away from her and concentrate on the show, but it wouldn't work. He had the orderly mind of a lawyer. It offended him that somehow he had telescoped the time elements involved in that abortive romance of nearly thirty years before.

Let's see, now. His first encounter with Mary Owens had been when he was twenty-four. There certainly had been no thoughts of marriage then for he was already enamored of the auburn haired girl who had died the following year so shortly after their engagement. Then had followed those terrible months while he struggled on

the brink and tried to forget with the brandy, haunting the hilltop where they had sat together and returning aimlessly time and again to look at her grave in the burying ground.

God, how tragic things were to a youth in his twenties! How keen the pain! It was lucky that one recuperated so quickly, even if the wound left an everlasting scar. Figuring it out on that basis, he must have been twenty-seven when he made his proposals of marriage and was turned down. Well, there was a saying that the devil looks after his own. He had never been much of a churchgoer but at that age he had considered himself a young gentleman of high ideals, an upstanding figure of unimpeachable honor, whereas now, in the retrospect of maturity it was easy enough to recognize that Mary Owens must have seen him for what he was—a pompous, penniless, egotistical young fool.

Even worse than that, he'd been stupid. He hadn't been satisfied with getting himself on the hook by carrying on an open courtship and thinking of matrimony when he was scarcely able to support himself at the time Mrs. Abell had brought her sister back to town. No, that

wasn't enough. Instead of thanking his lucky stars when sister Mary departed for Kentucky again, and he'd had a few months to think things over, he'd written her a couple of "Dear Mary," letters hoping to break off with her entirely.

It was ironical to think how many clients he had advised since that time to say anything they wanted to, but never put it in writing. Those "Dear Mary," letters had backfired on him badly. They must have been very ambiguous for before he knew it the corpulent Mary was back again with her sister, Mrs. Abell.

He was really in for it now. This time he knew he would have to propose for it was the only gentlemanly thing to do, and whatever the cost he must never give her a chance to say that he was lacking in manners and good breeding. That he had finally gotten free of the whole tangled mess was no fault of his own. He had certainly been no gentleman, and less than discreet, when in another letter written a year later to a very close friend, he had set all the sordid details down.

That letter was a beaut! He could even remember passages which might have

come out of *Godey's Lady's Book*. He wondered idly if that letter was still in existence after twenty-seven years. He hoped not, for thinking back, it made him feel like a clown.

Although I had seen her before, she did not look as my imagination had pictured her, he had written. I knew she was oversize, but she now appeared a fair match for Falstaff. I knew she was called an "old maid," and I felt no doubt of the truth of at least half of the appellation, but now, when I beheld her, I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother; and this, not from withered features—for her skin was too full of fat to permit of its contracting into wrinkles—but from her want of teeth, weatherbeaten appearance in general, and from a kind of notion that ran in my head that nothing could have commenced at the size of infancy and reached her present bulk in less than thirty-five or forty years; and, in short, I was not at all pleased with her. (That understatement stood out like a gem in that letter so filled with hyperbole!)

But what could I do? I had told her sister that I would take her for better or for worse, and I made a

point of honor and conscience in all things to stick to my word, especially if others had been induced to act on it, which in this case I had no doubt they had, for I was now fairly convinced that no other man on earth would have her, and hence the conclusion that they were bent on holding me to my bargain.

Strange how youthful idiocies could be carved into your brain like epitaphs on a tombstone and return to haunt you for a lifetime once you had taken pen in hand and committed them to paper.

At once I determined to consider her my wife, and this done, all my powers of discovery were put to work in search of perfections in her which might be fairly set off against her defects. I tried to imagine her handsome, which, but for her unfortunate corpulency, actually was true. Exclusive of this, no woman that I have ever seen has a finer face. I also tried to convince myself that the mind was much more to be valued than the person, and in this she was not inferior, as I could discover, to any with whom I had been acquainted.

It must have been more than mere coincidence that had caused him to write

those high-flown words about "mind over matter" on April 1st—All Fools' Day—shortly after his twenty-ninth birthday. He must have known full well that he was propounding a spurious line of argument, designed for no source had he dragged up other purpose than to firm up his own indecision. In the very next paragraph he had started to rip it to pieces:

All this while, although I was fixed "firm as the surge-repelling rock" in my resolution, I found that I was continually repenting the rashness which had led me to make it. (From what source, had he dragged up that "firm as the surge-repelling rock" bit? A poem or a hymn? Shades of James Fenimore Cooper! Such fustian writing made his skin crawl.) Through life I have been in no bondage, either real or imaginary, from the thralldom of which I so much desired to be free... I now spent my time in planning how I might get along in life after my contemplated change of circumstances should have taken place, and how I might procrastinate the evil day for a time, which I really dreaded as much, perhaps more, than an Irishman does the halter.

Odd, that he should have used that simile of an Irishman dreading the halter. It had taken the "luck of the Irish" and more to get him completely out of that "scrape"—as he had called it—with no violation of word, honor, or conscience. His eidetic memory could still recall every word of the neat summation set forth in that self-revelatory missive, which had demonstrated how callow he was by its very prolixity:

After I had delayed the matter as long as I thought I could in honor do... I concluded I might as well bring it to a consummation without further delay, and so I mustered my resolution and made the proposal to her direct; but, shocking to relate, she answered, No. At first I supposed she did it through an affectation of modesty, which I thought but ill became her under the peculiar circumstances of her case, but on my renewal of the charge I found she repelled it with greater firmness than before. I tried it again and again, but with the same success, or rather with the same want of success.

I finally was forced to give it up, at which I very unexpectedly found myself mortified almost beyond endur-

ance. I was mortified, it seemed to me, in a hundred different ways. My vanity was deeply wounded by the reflection that I had so long been too stupid to discover her intentions, and at the same time never doubting that I understood them perfectly; and also that she, whom I had taught myself to believe that nobody else would have, had actually rejected me with all my fancied greatness. And, to cap the whole, I then for the first time began to suspect that I was really a little in love with her. But let it all go! I'll try and outlive it. Others have been made fools of by the girls, but this with truth can never be said of me. I most emphatically, in this instance, made a fool of myself. I have now come to the conclusion never again to think of marrying, and for this reason—I can never be satisfied with any one who would be blockhead enough to have me.

There must have been some terrible truth buried deeply in that last sentence: *I have now come to the conclusion never again to think of marrying, and for this reason—I can never be satisfied with any one who would be blockhead enough to have me.*

Small wonder that it was engraved in letters of fire in his brain. It had nearly cost him the Mary beside him, his wife of twenty-three years and the mother of his sons. She had been blockhead enough to have him. Was it truthful to say that he had never been satisfied with her?

Like Mary Owens, she had also come to visit her sister, who had lovingly said of her: "Mary had clear blue eyes, long lashes, light brown hair with a glint of bronze, and a lovely complexion. Her figure was beautiful, and no Old Master ever modeled a more perfect arm and hand." Sisterly exaggeration, maybe, but even the sister's husband had said: "Mary could make a Bishop forget his prayers." That, of course, was twenty-five years ago. Now, with the portliness of middle age, she could fairly rival the Mary who had turned him down. He reached out his hand and gently touched her gown.

She, at least, had thought him a gentleman and believed that his "fancied greatness" was not entirely a product of his egotistical mind. Although he was ten years older, she hadn't hesitated to accept his offer of marriage when she was just

twenty-one.

Then for two years what had he done?

Still frightened by that single rejection by the other Mary, he had acted the part of a pusillanimous poltroon. He had concocted endless reasons why marriage would not be good for him, or for her. He had resorted again to his "Dear Mary," letters, attempting to break off all ties between them, and nearly succeeded.

There had been a tearful reconciliation. He had taken her into his arms and kissed her. For a second time the engagement was on. Then his own silly doubts had communicated themselves to her. She had decided, and not without some justification, that he had only returned because he couldn't resist the appeal of a woman's grief. She had nobly decided to release him forever.

Again it was off. So there would be no wedding. Off and on, until finally he had broken down completely, a victim of his own emotional weakness. He had taken to his bed, miserably sick. Only one friend, and his doctor saw him. Six days later he was up and around, due, it was said, to the strong brandy which the frustrated doctor had prescribed in

large quantities. He was never quite his old time self again.

So, with all his vacillating, he had not gained courage enough to stand up at the altar with the Mary beside him until he reached the age of thirty-three. Six miserable years lost out of his life all due to the fact that another Mary had summarily turned him down.

Surely that was an exhibition of vacuity that could rival any of the antics of that bewhiskered buffoon, Lord Dundreary, in the play. Right now, like his ludicrous Lordship, he was busy mixing fact with fancy and puzzling his head with "wildies."

Was that placid woman who had caught his eye actually the same Mary Owens who had jilted him, returned for the moment to haunt him again? She might well be. If she was, then her thoughts must have traveled with his on that lengthy journey back through the past, riding side by side on the same reminiscent train. Certainly she was just as real a person as Mary, his wife, who was sitting beside him, and not like Mary Meredith, the milkmaid, the child of a playwright's fertile imagination.

Still, his thoughts that

night must always be a matter of pure conjecture and something the world might speculate about forever. Indeed, Mary Owens, who had turned him down was very real, as was Mary Todd, his wife of twenty-three years who sat beside him. Mary—Mary—Isn't it remotely possible that the name of Mary Meredith, the milkmaid, had jogged his memory and started him thinking of one, or both, of those very real Marys?

No one, of course, can know for sure the trend of his thoughts when that bullet fired by John Wilkes Booth crashed into the head of Abraham Lincoln and stopped forever the working of his brain.

Editorial Footnote:

The foregoing story, as you have now realized, is far from being all fiction. In case you should be wondering how much is fact, the author writes:

"It actually took only five

different launchings before I hit on the idea of throwing the spotlight on the little known history of the play, which I happened to see in New York as late as 1908 with E.H. Sothern (son of E.A.) playing the then title role 'Lord Dundreary'. Age does have some compensations, although for the moment they escape me!

"The two 'Dear Mary' letters to Mary Owens, mentioned but not quoted, were written from Springfield on May 7, 1837, and August 16, 1837, with the salutation of 'Friend Mary'. These are masterpieces of temporizing, and are given in full in THE LINCOLN READER (Rutgers University Press, 1947).

"The letter quoted in part verbatim was dated April 1st, 1838, and was written from Springfield to Mrs. Orville H. Browning. The original is now in the Congressional Library, Washington, D.C. It is also given in full in THE LINCOLN READER."

You are cordially invited to meet

Mr. Simon Templar

on NBC-TV Network, in color,

Sunday evenings at 10 p.m. (Eastern Time)

(Check with your local TV station for the time in your area.)

ALL BRAND NEW ADVENTURES OF *THE SAINT*

*what's
new
in
crime*

by Stefan Santesson

I am afraid I have mixed reactions to George Baxt's extremely interesting SWING LOW, SWEET HARRIET (Simon & Schuster, \$3.95). Mr. Baxt's previous novel, A QUEER KIND OF DEATH (also S&S), was itself a rather disturbing departure for this field in that he dealt with the bittersweet relationships of a number of people whose importance as a group, in some sections of our present-day society, cannot be underestimated—and cannot be denied. Or ignored. The affairs of some of these people are again dealt with in the course of this rather wicked story of a group of movie-greats of the '30's who are trying for a comeback... SWING LOW, SWEET HARRIET, is good. There's no denying this. But I am inclined to personally question the validity, if not the propriety, of this sort of social reportage—in this field.

The writer, whose anthology, THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, was published by Award Books last year, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, editor, Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the 1963 Critic's Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.

Which leads us, in a sense, to the subject of Mr. Shell Scott, who could never be accused of being interested in anything but, shall we say, the bare facts. . . . Richard S. Prather's *GAT HEAT* (Trident, \$3.95), the latest exploit of the wellnigh indestructible private eye, may however distress some of you. I am afraid that we get the impression, admittedly for the first time, that Mr. Scott has lost some of his admirable zest for life, and that he no longer approaches his research with the single-minded objectivity which so many of us have admired (or envied) in the past. Mr. Scott seems to be tired—his reactions are not as predictable as in the past—but this is perhaps understandable.

By way of contrast, Donald Lam continues to be brash and Bertha Cool's eyes continue to glitter satisfactorily in A.A. Fair's *TRAPS NEED FRESH BAIT* (Morrow, \$3.95), Erle Stanley Gardner's latest and thoroughly enjoyable contribution to the Lam-Cool saga.

Jeremy York's *DEATH TO MY KILLER* (Macmillan, \$3.95), published some time ago, is an interesting example of John Creasey's ability, in these Jeremy York

novels, to set himself into the mind and heart of his characters, and to make you live with them, moment by moment, day by day, as the climax nears—in this case as a crippled man, still young, gambles his life on the outcome.

I hope you have long ago read Henry Klinger's *LUST FOR MURDER* (Trident, \$3.95), which I thoroughly recommend. Shomri Shomar, Isreali detective, is one of the few original new characters to appear in this field for many a year. I look forward to his return.

Aaron Marc Stein's *DEADLY DELIGHT* (Doubleday, \$3.95) should make some of you want to retrace Matt Erridge's wanderings in Istanbul, though perhaps less dramatically. Mr. Stein's background is, as always, superb.

If you've enjoyed Michael Avallone's *INTREX* stories in this magazine (one more, set in Vietnam, will appear soon), I hope you read his *THE GIRL FROM U.N.-C.L.E.* novels, *THE BIRDS OF A FEATHER AFFAIR* and more recently *THE BLAZING AFFAIR* (both New American Library, 50

cents), both novels based on the NBC-TV network series. My personal reaction (but I suppose I am somewhat prejudiced) is that both novels were much more enjoyable than the TV-series.

I suspect a number of you must share the pleasure I anticipate each time a new Nigel Strangeways novel appears. It's hard to explain, particularly to a devotee of the less ratiocinative school of writing in this genre, but I hasten to reassure those whom this may alarm that this is a very personal reaction. Nicholas Blake's latest novel, *THE MORNING AFTER DEATH* (Harper & Row, \$4.95), brings him to these shores, exposing him to the very special world-within-a-world which is the campus of Cabot University, near Boston, which both murderer and murdered are part of. . . . Possibly too much so.

By way of contrast, Hampton Stone's novel about Assistant D.A. Jeremiah Gibson, *THE KID WAS LAST SEEN HANGING TEN* (Simon & Schuster, \$3.95), deals with the world of the skateboarders and surfriders, the youngsters who get their

thrills from LSD, marijuana, and beating up people for kicks. In other words, the people who are the raw material of the headlines we pretend do not concern us. . .

P.M. Hubbard's *THE TOWER* (Atheneum, \$4.50), is an excellent—and literate—suspense novel, Gothic in quality (without the connotation that this has come to have), which I think will interest many of you. The background will not seem quite real, when you live and work and breathe and expect to die in Megalopolis (or even in Suburbia, U.S.A.), but I assure you this is not so. The village of Coyle has its counterparts in many countries. Even in the shadows of the Great Society.

Anthony Firth's *TALL, BALDING, THIRTY-FIVE* (Harper & Row, \$4.50), while perhaps not, if the London Sunday Times reviewer will forgive me, "the wittiest and most original first crime story for a long time", is nevertheless thoroughly enjoyable. John George Penstemmon Limbo, Lork Killinchy, the reluctant hero of this comedy of counter espionage, is someone it's to be hoped we will meet again.

Siberia
9th December, 1980

lady

Memorandum

From: Elizabeth Carr, Litt. D.
To: Julian Spence, R.A.

in

the

moon

by Dorothy Thatcher

Your painting of my her-
baceous border is propped up
on this writing table. How
grateful I am for your gift.
It is my memory of earthly
beauty—and of sunshine,
wind and rain; bird-song at
morning and Autumn glory.
I shall never see again. What
a priceless brush you have,
Julian. A million shaded pet-
als seeming as a single
bloom; and that sea of leaves
—so miraculously translu-
cent.

Forgive the long silence—
largely explained by my brief
address. Already you will
have guessed its meaning and
my destination. When we
were young and you insisted
on hammering nails into a
rabbit hutch on Sundays, did
I ever tell you that you'd be
“put in the moon?” Perhaps

Mrs. Dorothy Thatcher, noted British orientalist, has appeared in the Christian Science Monitor here, and has written extensively on Far Eastern politics (she lived for many years in Malaya) for the British press. Her long-time interest in flying is reflected in her first venture into fiction. In which she raises a question which should concern us. While there is time.

not. But my grandmother certainly admonished me thus—when she caught me sewing on the Sabbath.

Being precocious I was undismayed. The lunar planet had a man's face in it, but such a big one that there was no room left—not even for a little pig-tailed blonde. Also, I looked up the satellite in an encyclopaedia; its distance from us was nearly 240,000 miles and I knew about flying machines and their limited performances. Later I learned to respect aeroplanes profoundly; not a really hair-raising incident in 200,000 miles of travel—by droning piston engine and screaming jet. Yet that moon shone nearer! Though by this time I'd lost the ability to mend the modern synthetic stocking on any day.

Even so, I never relished the high pressurization of a giant fuselage. Suffered from claustrophobia—just as I did in a hermetically sealed B.B.C. studio, or a long distance tube train. Remember? Nevertheless, I still volunteered to spend the rest of my natural life in an air-conditioned pyramid which will be part of the International Lunar Academy. Though here, at the Soviet acclimatization settlement, I'm suffering no discomfort.

Strange! It must be the finality of the undertaking; we are like Egyptian statesmen being entombed with their dead Pharaoh. Medically I have been passed fit for the task ahead; first woman librarian on the moon!

Sorry not to have let you into the secret before the universal press releases; this cloak and dagger guise ill-becomes your fondest friend, yet as a founder member of the *WORLD ORGANISATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HOMO SAPIENS ART*, my silence was imperative. We don't want some Raffles character pinching the Mona Lisa on her transit base.

Even so, you will prefer the story in my less sensational style. That the United States and Russia have been building on the moon is common knowledge; the true object of the exercise is not. At least, not until those banner headlines are printed in every living language. Imagine a few of the sceptical ones. *W.O.P.H.S.A.* has been dubbed "WHOPPERS" by critical columnists and there are those who will surely say: "At least—a land fit for whoppers to live in."

With the Sword of Damocles (i.e. BOMB) still hanging over mankind, *W.O.P.H.*,

S.A. was created by art-lovers to find a sanctuary for a proportion of the world's treasure. Alas, living creatures are far too numerous to be hidden from the holocaust—if and when it should come. Survivors will escape by the grace of God alone. Paintings, books, sculpture, the Bayeux Tapestry, and the Lindesfarne gospels — to name but a few—can be hidden for the new civilisations to come. I am only one of a world-wide committee of visionary eccentrics to clamour for an international stronghold.

Our original idea was for an interior mountain museum in the equable climate of the Himalayas—quickly ruled out by the march of Chinese Communism. Another suggestion—mine and quote “crackpot”—was a gigantic igloo in the Antarctic. This proposition became even more crackpot when the three world powers revealed that the BOMB had been developed to the extent of a blasting force capable of “pitching the globe clean off its axis.”

And all the while robot space ships were penetrating deeper and deeper into outer space in search of another planet able to support our human and animal life. But

if ever a new world arises, it will be from the ashes of earthly continents. The Ark rockets, laden with their “heaven-born” colonizers, will never be launched; there is about as much chance of finding extraterrestrial life as there is of proving spontaneous generation. Scientists who cannot produce the divine spark — that fertile sperm—or make seeds from which flowers will grow, seem blissfully confident of discovering another cellular star in the hundred billion of the Solar System. They need not be readily daunted, however; the firmament has a few billion more galaxies they can explore. Forgive my hobby-horse lecture, Julian, but I know you have ideas about a biography for me when I leave this world—which I'm about to do.

Thus was the moon despised and rejected. Like Mars, Venus and other near planets, it was written-off as sterile. Even song writers ceased to extol it; the poor wretch was “old hat”—not good enough even for a tumble in the hay. In order not to be laughed out of business, *W.O.P.H.S.A.*'s plan for a Lunar Academy had to be judged in camera—at least until it was accepted by “the powers” as a rational enter-

prise. Though the satellite is a sort of no-mans-land, and *W.O.P.H.S.A.* intends every country to have its own museum in due course, my committee was helpless without the goodwill of America and Russia. Naturally, we are a wealthy concern, and backed by the International Monetary Fund in Zurich, but we needed space engineers and craftsmen.

Rekindling passion for an old love is never easy. In Washington and Moscow, the President and I had to break down the argument of "good money being thrown after bad". We were told that millions of dollars—and roubles—had been expended on landing those first men on the moon. As if we didn't know, or that they disliked being there intensely. "On to Mars," they shouted, "and to Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune." More rockets into the blue and inestimable fortunes spent, but everywhere was either too hot or too cold. Yet the race continues until that "new heaven and new earth" is found and the Creator beaten as his own game. If more of this energy had been used for transforming the deserts of the East into waving cornfields, the need for *W.O.P.H.S.A.* would never have arisen.

Over and over again our President and I were given the vital statistics of the moon; we might have been school children. "Night, which lasts a fortnight, has a temperature of 200° below zero; noonday heat during the two weeks of daylight rose to 250° Fahrenheit. The satellite is devoid of atmosphere and water, and its arid, rocky, pot-hoped surface is constantly bombarded by volleys of meteorites."

"Nevertheless," admitted the Russian Minister for Space Research, "the erection of your oxygen-producing buildings is feasible, but impracticable. For more than a few hours stay, the occupants would have to be conditioned—and then acclimatized again each time they returned to Earth."

"Our curators and other helpers will not be returning," protested the President. "It will take thirty years to fully establish the Academy and many of the volunteers are far from young."

"Ah," said the Minister—facetiously. "Perhaps you are hoping that the rarified air of the vaults will increase your mortal span (were we vintage port?), but you would not be able to walk abroad without that cumbersome paraphernalia which

comic-strip artists invented. And since there can never be natural resources to exploit, the Lunar Academy would be an importing body only—dependent on its telluric reserves.”

“We will make a nice thing in gate money,” I argued.

The American reply to this was simply: “peanuts”.

Yet a final veto on our project was withheld on two counts. First as a face-saving gesture; the moon was given an almighty build-up, trips were actually booked for it, and underwriters had insured wealthy clients against hard landings—or no landings at all! Result—a damp squib. Second, our architects’ blueprint for the Lunar city. Like the little pigs in the Irish song, the pyramids had done it. The designs were perfect in detail—from the long exhibition galleries, living quarters for curators and maintenance staff; food storage, oxygen, electric and air-conditioning plant; hospitals, television equipment, furniture—everything including the dainty unicular railway for inter-pyramid communication.

There was a touch of magic in the fingers of our model makers; their exquisite miniature academy is at present on show in the Krem-

lin—enchanting old and young—like an expensive Hornby train set. Everything works or lights up—even bathroom equipment and those receptacles in the crematorium. Later the exhibit will go to the Grant Museum, thence to London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, and right round the world. The wonder of it all, Julian. Yet *W.O.P. H.S.A.* can take little credit for an idea as old as the written word itself. Did Rameses and his successors realise that by sealing up their treasures in an almost subterranean chamber they would be preserved for eternity?

Will our success be the same? Curators seem to think so; the cold, dry atmosphere produced by the oxygen plants should be equally effective, though we are not proposing to mummify anyone. But this above all, the possibility of total destruction of priceless antiquities has been averted. No country would surely seek to rocket-bomb the moon—the custodian of its own heritage; more particularly since the wealth is cherished by nationals who have dedicated themselves to the cause. Men and women of every creed and colour will live together as a family—yet never to see

the light of day again, or watch a child at play. Only unmarried people are to receive permanent appointment, Julian—catacombs are not for the young.

Stocks of dehydrated food will be kept and the refrigeration units will guarantee a certain amount of water, but these would serve no useful purpose if anything serious was to happen at the bases near Tomsk, Cape Kennedy and elsewhere. Like the Egyptian statesmen mentioned earlier, we would have to go on a diet of hemlock seeds!

Let us to happier thoughts. Unless there is a strike among the robots, we will receive letters and newspapers, as well as bodily nourishment. Also, there will be television via the artificial satellites. But the world wherein we were born will be seen as a whole only through a giant periscope—which we hope won't be bashed by a meteorite every time it is raised. Yet the distant seas will be dark and silent, and though I, personally, may spot Devonshire where you hermitate (forgive the coined word) and paint your wondrous rural scenes, I will not smell wet violets, or newly-mown grass—nor your cook's homemade bread. Never again

shall I sit by your studio fire, with rain belting against the high windows, and loppings from your apple trees making fragrant burning in the grate. You could send me some cider, however.

In case you forget to buy a special "Lunar Academy Edition" of some periodical, or fail to switch on T.V. at the right hour, I must tell you that the pyramids will have three-layer walls of steel plate, interlined with a sound-proof substance. The galleries are being panelled with Australian Jarrah, a lovely golden wood, and a gift from Canberra. Lighting—so important—is being presented by Britain; concealed "sunshine flood" to glow across egg-shell blue ceilings. Standing furniture will come from Sweden and curtain damasks from France. Indeed, every country is supplying a personal touch so that their exhibits will have a hint of home.

But how quiet it will be, Julian. We will not be able to hear the arrival and departure of space ships—a change from city life which had become intolerable to me. What with the distant roar of traffic and deafening noise of supersonic 'planes, there was no peace in my Highgate garden—or even indoors. If

only aerial liners could get up to their cruising height of 15 miles immediately on take off. This is no longer my worry—nor yours while you are in such a lovely back-water.

Sorry I can't write intelligently about weightlessness and how it was overcome for constructional purposes. I imagine it was like a game of bricks; the first air-conditioned cell was landed intact, and building went outwards instead of the other way round. As more pyramids are completed they will be connected to the others by an equally strong passage, so if the oxygen plant fails in one, refuge can be taken in another while maintenance men in Michelin tyre suits and diving helmets undertake repairs.

The landing pyramid for robots and space ships will be the largest of all, forming a clearing house for stores and treasure, work shops, huge water tanks etc. For a long time now ships have been nosing into this enormous hangar with the ease of the old "Queens" berthing at Southampton. Soon the P.T. man will be able to walk miles within the labyrinth. By the way, Egypt wanted to send the Sphinx—piecemeal, but we settled for a cinema!

Officially the two pyramids now open belong to Russia and America, but because each building takes awhile to erect, exhibits will be accepted from all over the world. No final decision has yet been made; these very big galleries may remain as international museums. I know we are to have the Norman Tapestry, the Dead Sea Scrolls and my beloved Lindisfarne gospels. The cradle of our civilization—the Fertile Crescent of the East—may never be re-created on Earth, but at least in the moon we shall have the collective evidence of it—from start to finish.

Do write, my dear. I won't ask you to leave your work and visit me; like me you have much to accomplish and time is no longer on our side. I shall remember you most of all as a young gallant—when hand in hand we explored Holy Island, or rode our bikes in the steps of St. Cuthbert—to Durham Cathedral. How we wished we could have seen that first shrine of his—the wattle church, fashioned to shield him from harrying Danes. You and I always wanted to go back in time; instead I'm going forward in space!

This rocket base is enormous—teaming with "Shape

of Things to Come" monstrosities. We moon people are not allowed out of doors because of the intense cold, but I can look out across the vast, snow-clad Steppes. Limitless whiteness with nothing to see at all. Yet I am content—quite fully acclimatized.

ELIZABETH.

REPORT FROM: MGLK
NQTLB 3649,45,88 + 32

Officer commanding the
217th Expedition

TO: Galactic Exploration
Headquarters

This document, apparently a primitive form of writing, which our facilities have not yet been able to translate, was one of those found in the crude caves of the single small satellite of the third planet of the star XZBF 4:76.4, together with a large number of elementary artifacts and many pictorial designs made by the creatures inhabiting them, who were apparently the sole survivors

of the radioactive holocaust which recently destroyed all life on the third planet. Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain a live specimen, since they all expired immediately we opened and entered their caves, being evidently unable to exist without the artificially pressurized gases with which the caves were charged.

It is respectfully recommended that the embalmed specimens which we are shipping back, and even many of their pictures and carvings, which are often recognizable attempts to portray others of their own species, should be exposed at first only to scientists of the VX + 9 Grade, since these creatures and their images are of such obscene and hideous appearance that some of the most hardened members of our crew were completely overcome with horror and revulsion when they first saw them.

THRILL TO THE SAINT

IN BRAND NEW STORIES

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*the
cork
tree
system*

by Fleming Lee

There's an interesting story about how I tried to become a con man and failed. Or both succeeded and failed, depending on how you look at the peculiar facts.

Of course nobody expects to become a confidence man. Children don't number it among their ambitions, and students don't tell their counselors that they intend to earn their way in the world by taking unfair advantage of human gullibility. But gullibility is a plentiful commodity, and it was one of the few things that seemed plentiful to me (along with wind, mosquitoes, and heat) when Kitty left me on the French Riviera, taking the traveller's checks and car with her.

Kitty was my rich wife, and two years of her small, soft body and big bank account had given me an entirely false sense of security. We had been openly bored with one another for some time, but it was still a shock

We do not at all mean to suggest that the Cork Tree System might perhaps work in the establishments, in the Caribbean, reportedly controlled by gentlemen whose reactions—and whose sense of humor—when faced by a situation such as this, might be somewhat limited. Like the younger M. Preticuiif...

when she actually took off. I had to ask myself even then, however, whether or not my genuine grief included a certain amount of mourning for those traveler's checks in large denominations.

So there I was taking a look at the situation. I occupied a rented villa with three more days paid up. I had plenty of clothes, and enough money to pay for two weeks' meals. And no job, of course.

There's a certain type of mind perpetually afflicted with despair which at the same time refuses to believe there must not be some brilliantly easy solution to everything. That's my kind of mind, and it explains why I had spent my life wandering up rocky sideroads and twisting paths, hoping to emerge suddenly at the highest plateau, from which I would look down and watch everybody else trudging up the main thoroughfare far, far below. Maybe it explains why I married Kitty, and why I had no job. And also why my thirty-three years of wasted time, left a great deal to be desired in the way of immediate utility: I could have told you anything you wanted to know about the communication of bees, the life of Mesmer, the history of the

Arabian horse in America, or number magic. But of anything society might have been willing to pay me for, I was dismally lacking.

Late in the afternoon following the day Kitty left, I walked down the steep hill from the villa to the center of the small town, which consisted of a crescent of hotels, restaurants, and shops crowded along the shore of one of those innumerable ink-blue inlets that indent the coast of southern France. Sunset made the long clouds orange, and palm trees rustled in a light breeze. I could smell thyme, garlic, hot olive oil, and it seemed unlikely that even I could starve in such pleasant surroundings.

A travelling carnival had set up alongside the yacht basin, and against the silent background of swaying masts were strings of lights, a double row of tents, and the big, metallic arms of an octopus ride. I walked slowly through and was impressed at the eagerness with which the customers—mostly laborers, many high-cheeked, gaunt Algerians—were dumping their money on risks for worthless ceramic animals, bits of plastic, cheap crackers and mints. They tossed hoops at wine bottles, clutched fistfulls of raffle tickets,

and anxiously watched the turning of great painted wheels. And if for ten francs they finally won a two franc bottle of wine they were as delighted as if someone had given it to them free.

At the end of the midway my attention was all immediately absorbed by a beautiful blond woman who stood on a platform and performed miracles with silver rings. Pushing closer, I saw that she was not really beautiful at all anymore, but was a middle aged, plain woman who could also perform miracles with lipstick and powder. It didn't matter, though, because she presided like Fortuna over the whole canvas lane. The flashing rings flew in her hands, one moment joined, the next moment inexplicably free, seeming to materialize from air and then to vanish. I knew I could buy the explanation, and even the rings themselves, at some shop that also peddled sneezing powder and imitation ink spots. But I didn't want to know that. I wanted to believe that magic was as possible and near as that fake beauty in a carnival side-show.

And it was when my stare was led up by the gleaming arcs of the rings that something caught my eyes and

pulled them on above the flashing rings and the dark forests of masts to the hill on the other side of the boat anchorage. There a lighted sign said quietly, CASINO.

I became aware that my left hand was clutching the coins in my pocket, and that suddenly the pieces of metal had taken on a new promise, as if some of the miracle of the rings had been transferred to them. The coins were no longer just there, finite, doomed to slow disappearance; a kind of magic could reverse the process and make them multiply into a fortune.

So I left the carnival, confidently ate Coquille St. Jacques and steak, and walked around the waterfront to the casino. I'd never been in such a place before, and my knowledge of roulette was limited to what I'd learned from Hollywood movies. A highly uniformed doorman admitted me to the huge room where, beneath red ceilings and gilt ornaments, were the instruments of my salvation—the turning wheels. Each table was the center of a dismayingly heavy press of people, but never outside of church have I heard so little sound from any group.

Though roulette is euphemistically called a game, its rules could be mastered by a

normal cow in forty seconds. Figuring that for a beginner intuition was the best substitute for experience, I spent about half my cash on chips and lost most of them very quickly. I tried the number twenty for awhile, then switched to red and black, where a few wins gave me hope but not many chips. Not only was the magic gone, but also most of my money. I began to feel faintly sick. And yet with one lucky choice I could win it all back. I started betting on twenty again, determined to stick with it till it came up or I lost my chips.

When I was down to three of the little discs I decided to skip betting a turn or two, just to increase my chances. Of course on the next spin the little white ball rattled around and around the varnished wood, tripped over the metal studs, and bounced into the slot marked "20".

With indescribable gloom, I dropped my remaining chips on twenty, lost them, and left the building feeling poor in spirit as well as in wallet.

That was the brief and unsuccessful career as a gambler which led to my somewhat more productive career as a confidence man.

The next morning, after

fixing myself coffee, I sat on the balcony of the villa and thought about things. Below me was the fine prospect of fiercely blue water, wooded hillside, red tile housetops, and other people working. The last, some men laying the foundations of a building down the street, was like a somber prevision of my own possible fate.

No more balconies for you, my friend. No more Coquilles St. Jacques and steak.

Leaving the balcony I went downstairs and walked out across the sloping, shady grounds of the house, thinking that nature might give me some inspiration. It was my grandmother, I guess, who put such ideas in my head. She also used to tell me to trust my intuitions and I'd come out all right somehow. I needed some intuitions now if I ever did. Long-stemmed mimosa bushes bloomed pink and white around me, and bright green pine cones glittered with crystals of sap. And the center of it was a big cork tree whose thick-barked branches angled up to challenge the height of the pines and cool the dry earth for yards around. The rugged, cracked coating of cork was a novelty to me, and I tried its tough sponginess with my fingers.

Then I noticed that the meandering cracks of the cork-bark were crowded with a traffic of ants, like super-highways on a vacation weekend. As far as I could see up the trunk and along the limbs, the rushing columns continued. I suppose the juice of the tree was food for them.

I was always intrigued by the rigid brilliance of insect societies, and I might use scientific curiosity as an excuse for having climbed the cork tree. But I think it was really disgust with my adult life that made me want to return to childhood. Just the acts of catching a branch and swinging up my legs were enough to make years disappear and give me an entire new perspective. I didn't stop until I reached a perch among the highest, most chilling flexible branches, where every breeze made me catch my breath.

The ants were even there, and hurried along their roadway without any attention to me: I watched them, and for a timeless moment my willingness to leave my own world seemed rewarded by a complete freedom from my own size and limited senses: I heard ant-sounds and the tumult of a thousand feet in deep, grey-green canyons of

cork. I was near the wind, the cells of leaves, and the moist inner life of the tree.

It was that moment that brought the numbers into my head. I seemed to come back from the secret depths of the tree trunk with the sequences of figures as my prize.

I knew I had something and had to be careful not to lose it. I slid down and dropped from the tree with a feeling of urgent excitement, probably inadvertently killing a few of the helpful ants on my way. Because immediately after the numbers themselves came the whole plan, the way I would use the numbers, and I somehow knew I couldn't fail.

So all afternoon I worked. Finding a victim would be easy. I had seen him in a dozen different faces the night before--strained, frightened, hopeful, searching, ready to turn to anything for help. I might have felt guilty over what I proposed to do, but I was too busy writing columns of figures, filling in the complex sequences, manufacturing indexed codes, weaving patterns of numbers as the carnival woman had woven her silver rings. I mentioned earlier that I knew something about number magic, and once I had been granted (I couldn't help

thinking of it that way) the basic idea in the cork tree, the rest was easy. In fact I was astonished at the ease with which I invented new and nonsensical relationships between numbers. They flowed from my pen like water from Moses' rock.

I was apprehensive, though, because it was a one-time thing, and if I slipped up somewhere I would be not only penniless but possibly floating face down in the Mediterranean; people don't like being relieved of their money for worthless goods. Of course I was liable to lose several customers while waiting for a lucky streak at the wheel to convince them, but that was to be expected. I was much more worried about the getaway.

The carnival had vanished from the earth, and the waterfront seemed lonely and dark. I grew more apprehensive as I walked, and I'll admit that my hand trembled as I took my admission card and went through the swinging doors. It hadn't been a part of my plan to head straight for the casino bar, but I did. A cognac helped. I checked my tie in the big mirror, turned around on the stool, and began the process which might be entitled, if there were handbooks for

such things, *Looking For The Sucker*.

Among the profusion of bodies and heads surrounding the tables, one particularly large body caught my attention. The fat gentleman had just seen a stack of his hundred franc chips fall under the croupier's rake, and he was in the process of leaping up from his chair, turning back, and croaking at the turner of the wheel: "Again! You're a real artist with that thing!"

I moved quickly to the next stool, so that the only available places at the bar were on either side of me, and tried to develop an expression of mysterious intelligence combined with naive honesty. It was evident from the fat man's rage that this must have been the culmination of large losses, but it was also evident that he had plenty more to lose. As he spread his hands on the bar and allowed his thighs to sag over the stool to my left, I saw that his white sausage fingers were decorated with enough gems to fit out a moderately sized chandelier.

He gulped something sticky from a small glass, and I said innocently, "Having luck?"

He looked at me out of that great, balloonlike sphere of

damp skin as if I were insane. Then he said, shrugging, "Not so bad."

He drank another glass of the sticky liquid, then eyed my bland, calmly pleased face.

"You?" he asked.

"Very well." I tapped the figure-filled notebook which happened to lie on the bar between my hands. "I have a very good system."

The greedy hunger that flickered in his dark, almost pupilless eyes was quickly replaced by the blankly suspicious disbelief which stupid men mistake for shrewdness.

"You're kidding."

Now it was my turn to shrug.

"But you think it works?" he asked uncomfortably, after several seconds of trying without success to direct his turgid eyeballs at something other than my notebook.

"I know it works."

He rubbed his thumb against the tips of his glittering fingers. "You win?"

I nodded. "In fact I've won enough that I almost don't mind having to quit." (A slightly inebriated slur made my candor more convincing than it might have been—I hoped.)

Fat man looked at me from the corners of his eyes

and snorted. "Nobody that's winning quits."

"I have to. I have to go back to America. My wife's already there, in Kentucky, and we don't have roulette in Kentucky. I'm going to raise race horses."

He kept trying to see through the red plastic binding of my little notebook. I was aware also that someone had taken the stool on my right side, and that this new person—a short, slender man in a dark suit—was listening to our conversation with interest.

"You win often?" asked the fat man.

"About ninety percent of the time. It's not perfect, of course, but it doesn't matter. I'm sure if you won all the time the casinos would find ways to keep you out. But I've spent two years working on this in different places, and for months I lost." I shook my head. "It's too bad that just as it's really working I've got to give it up. In the right hands it would be worth millions."

"I've heard of systems working, but I never saw one that did. Where'd you get this?"

"It's my own. But the original idea came from a Chinese physicist I knew in the university."

"I'm a businessman myself," he said.

But the mysterious connotations of words like *Chinese* and *physicist* stirred whatever minute fraction of his brain was set aside for imagination.

"How does it work?" he asked.

"The whole universe is subject to laws," I said, "and whatever happens whose laws we don't understand we call chance, or accident. But the laws are there, and it's our job to work until we discover what they are."

"I mean, how does it work?" he insisted, and gave me to understand that he might be a customer, if I should consider selling my system—assuming, of course, that he knew in advance that it was any good.

Of course. And I knew that only luck could carry me over that formidable hurdle.

"Watch me bet," I said, "and bet the way I do."

"I'll watch," he said.

We walked to one of the less crowded tables. I was uneasily aware of the dark man looking from the bar, then turning to the mirror when I saw him.

"I have to have the last three numbers that came up," I explained. "All right. Thirty, twenty-seven, and

ten. Now, on this first sheet I find the code number for each one. Thirty is seven. Twenty-seven is four. Ten is eight."

"What do you mean, ten is eight?"

"Ten belongs to group eight. You'll see later."

"I'm no Chinese physician."

"So then I look on these pages and add the blocks of numbers that correspond to the code numbers. Do you understand?"

"No."

"Well, look. These are permutation and combinations—atomic mathematics. When you've added the blocks you see now it all comes out. The code numbers were seven, four, and eight. That makes nineteen. One and nine. One plus nine makes ten, and that was the last number on the wheel. And one from nine leaves eight, and eight plus nineteen equals twenty-seven, which was the number before ten."

"What's the next number going to be?" A very practical man.

The wheel was about to spin, so I didn't risk taking time to give him the whole process. Thirty-six was the number that came into my head, so I popped a chip onto that square.

Seven was the number.

"Hm!" wheezed the fat man, looking more comfortable.

"Ninety percent," I said, pretending to consult my notebook in surprised consternation. "Not a hundred perfect."

"So," he said after I had calculated again. "What's next?"

"Red."

"Red? No number?"

"It's not always a number."

The white ball spiraled toward the turning wheel and dropped quickly into twenty-six, black.

He didn't even wait for three failures.

"Ninety-percent," he scoffed rudely, turning to waddle away. Then he looked back over his shoulder and laughed, showing his hippo teeth: "Ninety-percent!"

But it wasn't defeat. I'd try again. No more rich boobs, though. I needed somebody intelligent enough to admit the possibility of something he couldn't immediately understand, and somebody unrich enough to really need a system.

I didn't expect the very man to be standing at my elbow when I turned away from the table.

"I know of a London-

er who won four hundred thousand marks at Baden-Baden with some such system," he said, and I noticed that above the ash-flecked lapels of his dark suit his white shirt collar was just slightly frayed.

I hadn't been aware that he had followed me from the bar, and it took me a moment to get over the rather unnerving effect of his sudden appearance.

"Is that so?" I said.

"Yes." The fingers that lifted a cigarette to his lips were stained yellow-brown, and he kept one eye half closed against the constant smoke. "I was in Mulhouse at the time, and I made a trip over hoping to meet him, but he was gone."

"You'd like to know more about my system."

"I overheard," he said, "and I'm interested in buying. But only if it's valid." He drew in his already hollow cheeks as he inhaled from his cigarette. "Valid," he repeated, and his whole presence gave me the creeps. "Of course I'm aware," he went on, looking surreptitiously around—he was obviously an extraordinarily nervous man—"that you can tell me such a system is worth millions—worth in fact the combined finances of all the casinos in

the world, but I assume you're willing to be reasonable."

He nodded toward the table, and I had to explain the same hocus pocus I had given the fat man.

"Red will come up next," I said confidently, and I put my next to last chip on the table.

The ball clattered home—to a red numbered slot, and my one chip was two, and I was back in business.

My customer was much more impressed with my success than if I had guessed it without an apparent method. I could tell by the sharp glances he gave me and by the extra quantities of smoke which he sucked into his lungs.

"Red again," I concluded, and my scalp tingled as I placed my bet.

The ball whirred in its channel, moved in slow circles down its embankment.

The number was red again.

"Do you never bet the numbers?" asked the customer, lighting a new cigarette from his old one.

"Yes, sometimes." I lost track of my calculations and thought of the cork tree for luck. "In fact, now. Number four."

I put a chip on four, and to my great discomfort the

intended victim pulled a stack of eight or ten from his pocket and put them beside mine.

"It's never a certainty," I said.

He looked at me through his grey exhalations and didn't remove his chips.

I almost knew my luck would hold, and I looked away from the wheel, heard the final click of the ball, and the announcement, "Four."

I collected my winnings, and he collected his, and we went off to a corner of the bar to talk price.

I had had misgivings before, I had others as I bargained with him over the cost of my system, and I had more as I watched him walk toward the crowded midnight tables with the red notebook in his hand. But those were nothing compared to the misgivings I had as I started through the swinging doors to leave the hall and was stopped by the uniformed attendant. I was fingering two and a half thousand francs—to me about five hundred dollars—in my trousers pocket, and I was dizzy with anxiety to get out of the building and out of France.

"The cashier wishes to speak with you, sir."

The cashier—who had taken care of my customer's

check so that I could be paid —was a short, obsequous, white haired Italian who spoke English.

"You are a friend of the gentleman?" he asked.

"No. Why?"

"It's no concern of mine, but I feel I should tell you, this gentleman, Pretecuif, is not a good associate. A dangerous man, not good in the head. A power in Algeria in the war, before France left, but now all lost."

"Not good in the head?" I whispered. "Insane?"

"No, maybe not that," said the cashier, holding me just inside the door. "But not good in the head. They say, the things he did..."

"I'm really in a hurry," I interrupted, trying to disengage his fingers from my coat sleeve.

"Horrible things...with a knife..."

I almost took the cashier with me, but I made it through the door.

"You're American," he called after me. "I have a cousin in New Jersey!"

I was away in time. No maddened Pretecuif exploded through the swinging panels after me. But if my hands had shaken as I took my entrance card they shook even more as I hurried through the cool night. I didn't want

to run. I restrained myself. But when I got to the villa, struggling for breath, I locked the doors and turned out the lights immediately. There was probably no train before morning, and the villa had no telephone, so even a taxi was out of the question. I finished off the last of the whiskey, as I looked down at the long curving line where the lights of land were sliced off sharply by the darkness of the sea. I tried not to pick out the lights of the casino and not to imagine the emotional condition of my unstable friend, smoking, in more ways than one, beside the spinning wheel.

Maybe it was the late hours, the liquor, or anxiety to escape everything, but I was astonished to discover that I had slept until eleven-thirty in the morning. The sun was bright on the hills and sea, and the cloudless mistral was rising, rattling the window glass and shaking the trees. I showered and shaved, feeling a little better about my criminal career in the light of day, and had some lunch from the refrigerator. Later I packed two bags, made sure my money was secure in my jacket pocket, and looked both ways before stepping out the front door.

Then all the anxiety came back. With every step I felt someone had fallen in behind me. I walked downhill on a narrow, stoney path, avoiding the main road, with a heavy suitcase in either hand, my fine shoes coated with dust. Then I looked back up at the lashing top of the cork tree and swore at it for the two-edged nature of its inspirations.

I was hoping to find a cab when I left the path, as each block closer to the center of town seemed to draw me closer to some grim fate I preferred not to imagine. I had no way of knowing which doorway, which window, was safe, and my natural defenses were limited to an out-of-shape body and three hours of fencing lessons. My victim—what irony that word had acquired—could remove my cash and my skin at his leisure, and while I would be vividly aware of the proceedings there was nobody else around to wonder about me one way or another.

I was coming into the neighborhood of the railroad station, sweating, wind and flying grit pushing me along faster and faster from behind, flapping my coat and trousers, and of course it had to happen. Just as twenty

had to come up when I wasn't betting it, he had to be there, walking out of a narrow side street next to a butcher shop. His hands were in his pockets, his black suit ashen with dust, his cigarette in his lips, and one eye half closed. He saw me, and for an instant there was no recognition, then sudden enlightenment. His legs froze where they were, and he snatched the cigarette out of his mouth.

I turned into an alley. I thought of facing him, but con men—even new ones—can't afford chivalric codes, so I ran through cobbled, corkscrew streets, my only goal the general direction of the station. But I was lost, and to my dismay I finally emerged from the labyrinth immediately beside the same butcher shop where I'd spotted my victim. I relieved my arms for a minute from the weight of the luggage and leaned panting against the fly-specked glass of the shop, where slabs of blood red meat hung near my head on metal hooks. But there was no sound of running steps behind me, and no dark figure in the windy streets.

Having seen my bags, however, he must have reasoned I was headed for the station, and he must have gone there

to intercept me. So I backtracked a little, passed through swaying plastic strips into the dark cavern of a bar, and took a seat in the back. I drank a half bottle of wine while a couple of men played dice at another table, and the bushy-haired owner cleaned his fingernails with a goosequill toothpick. I found by telephoning the station that there was a train at six-ten. There were two trains before that (it was after three o'clock by now), but I figured my victim would wait awhile at the station before giving up and leaving. If only fate didn't bring him here.

At ten minutes before train time I walked into the smelly station, bought my ticket, and went quickly out to the platform to wait. It then occurred to me that even a homicidal maniac would have sense enough not to wait for me all day at the station, but would come in just before each train. It was too late, though, to do anything but hold my breath and hope, making myself inconspicuous behind a wooden outcropping of the wall.

I seemed to hear the engine for a long, long time before it appeared, and when it did, and hissed to a halt. I was in the moment the doors

clattered open. I went back through the cars, found an empty compartment, threw my bags on the racks, sank into the seat, and tried to get the engine moving through sheer will power.

My head jerked. The compartment door opened. But it was only a pleasant looking British gentleman who said good evening, took the place opposite me, and unfolded his newspaper.

Then with slow metallic sounds up ahead, and a slight jolt, the car began to move, and the station walls slid by, and the stone of old houses appeared and moved away. After that, the rugged hills and sunset water. I was dizzy with relief.

"Amazing," said the Englishman. "Absolutely amazing."

"What's that?"

"This chap at the casino—Pretecuif—broke the bank last night, then went back this afternoon and closed the place a second time. Five hundred thousand francs in all. Claims it's some type of system he's got. Of course, it's more than likely they've had it done for publicity. You can assume he has an in."

But I couldn't say anything. I was thinking of the cork tree and the ants.

Continued from other side

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