PUBLICITY by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

THE saint MAGAZINE

JULY
50c

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

A Russian Secret Agent Tangles with A Retired U.S. Spymaster in

THE DANGLING BUTTON

By BRAD STEIGER

Also Stories by

CORNELL WOOLRICH
STEPHEN DENTINGER
DONALD E. WESTLAKE
LESLIE CHARTERIS

AND OTHERS...

At distressingly frequent intervals, when I am too slow off the mark to turn a newspaper page or change a radio channel, I am afflicted with the latest blathering of some politician about the need or obligation of the more developed countries to "feed and clothe" Southeast Asia.

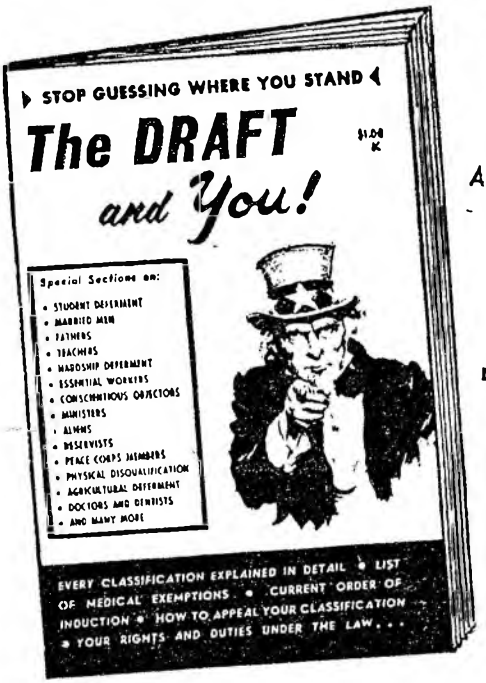
I have put the phrase in quotes because that is the verbatim formula with which I am intermittently assaulted and with which I specifically want to take issue. I am not beefing about the blather, which is only what I expect of any politician, or the fact that anything he says presages more forays against my bank account, because that is the standard way for a politician to get attention, by spending enough of other people's money to look like a big shot himself; nor am I even proposing at this moment to probe the controversial implications of assuming a responsibility to feed everyone on earth just because they happen to be there. I am picking on the second but indissolubly linked half of that cliché: the word "clothe".

Now I may not know much about the politics or strategic values of Southeast Asia; but I have spent some 12 years there, off and on, and I can claim to know at least as much about the climate as anyone. And I should like to proclaim that that is one area of the globe where clothing serves no purpose whatever except as adornment or to placate the superstitions of Christian missionaries.

It is not needed as a defense against sunburn, because the natural inhabitants already have that in the pigmentation of their skin. It is not needed for protection from the cold, because there is no cold. It may, however, help you to catch a cold, if you get soaked in one of the sudden typical downpours and have to remain in its clammy embrace instead of quickly and easily drying off your bare skin. It is not needed as an armor against lust; because the natives never were made especially lustful by the sight of each other's nakedness until civilized invaders arrived to teach them that it could be wicked and exciting.

It would seem only intelligent to me to eliminate the clothing provision entirely, leaving more money to be spent on food, if you like, out of the same total budget. Let the missionaries be enjoined from the kind of proselytizing which inflicted the ugliness and discomfort of Mother Hubbards on the happy graceful pagans of Hawaii and Tahiti, and let us send nudist volunteers to encourage them to revert to the untrammeled ways of Bali, at least as Bali was before Indonesia attained the doubtful blessing of freedom to embroil itself in politics and ideologies. And let us suffering taxpayers watch the additional funds that would be brought to those needy countries by an influx of tourists eager to observe and photograph their idyllic scenes.

Come to think of it, I have often wondered at the zeal of evangelists abroad to link conversion with body covering, bearing in mind that censorship at home has always tolerated the exposure of dark-skinned people in travelogs to a degree which would be blasted from most pulpits if they were white. So why must we be more puritanical about Foreign Aid?



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instead of the saint—XI

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

When I was living in Hollywood—which dates it at least before 1952—I saw a pair of one-act operets (if I may coin a word modelled on "novelet" to describe a shorter piece in operatic form without the quite different implications of "operetta") by Gian-Carlo Menotti, one of which, called *The Telephone,* dealt with the tribulations of a young swain trying to propose to his gal and being interrupted every time he got to the point by the ringing of that invaluable but exasperating invention of Alexander Graham Bell, whereupon his beloved would leave him twiddling his thumbs while she warbled an interminable yatitiyat with the invisible interloper. When she finally hung up, and the ardent suitor (who should soon have been cooled down by this preview of what he was planning to espouse) would start building his pitch again, *b-r-r-ring* would go the infernal machine again, and off she would trill into another torrent of inanities. After several repetitions of this frustrating routine, the lover at last catches wise (if you can call it that: a really wise man would have gone home and forgotten the whole thing) and goes out to the nearest phone booth, from which he calls the girl, and only by that brilliant device secures her undivided attention to his plea.

This may sound more like the outline of a revue skit than grist for the mill of a serious composer; but if Menotti's object was to demonstrate that the operatic convention could be brought right down to the earthiest situations of contemporary life he could not have picked a more authentic example.

How often have you been in a crowded shop, patiently waiting your turn to make a purchase, and finally earned a salesman's attention, only to be elbowed aside by some queue-crasher who would have been summarily dealt with if he had tried to jump the line in

person, but who has squeezed ahead of everyone else simply by putting a coin in a call box? How often have you been in a business meeting, having trudged through snow or summer heat to confer with some tycoon or wizard in his office, having taken great pains to be on time and having cooled your heels in his waiting room for a while nevertheless—only to be cut off in the first minute of the discussion by some lazy lout with just enough energy to dial a number?

I am aware that the queue-crasher and the lazy lout must, on many such occasions, have been myself. But the offense can be, and I think usually is, committed through inadvertence or thoughtlessness. For all the caller knows, the shop may be empty and the salesman despondently wondering if he will ever earn another commission; the mighty executive or prestigious consultant may be practising short putts on the carpet or flipping the pages of the latest *Playboy*. The ultimate guilt attaches to the uncouth recipient of the call, who permits such rude interruptions to civil intercourse.

I think it is high time that the Telephone Company, or one of those terrifying stuffed matriarchs who professionally pontificate in books and newspapers on the niceties of behavior which their perpetually insecure readers seem to believe can only be determined by edict and protocol instead of by natural good taste, should publish a brochure on Good Telephone Manners, which might authoritatively solve a problem which telephone subscribers have conspicuously failed to resolve for themselves.

From this I would exclude the time-worn but still valid gags about the telephonitis of teenagers, which seems to require the gadget as a kind of perpetual intercom to a generation's togetherness, carried to extremes which has led parents of my acquaintance to the borders of desperation before the problem of making or expecting to receive a call on their own telephones. I had my own experience of this when my daughter (now the mother of my grandchildren) would establish telephonic communication with the soulmate of the month, and they would agree to meet somewhere in an hour's time, and they would then spend the next fifty minutes yammering over all the gossip which one would have expected to occupy their meeting, until there was barely time to run for the appointment. I long since gave up wondering what they had left to talk about when they did get together; but I have no doubt that females, even at that age, will never run dry of material for vocal exercise. There are two, and only two, remedies available to parents suffer-

ing from this capacity: install a separate telephone, with a different number, exclusively for the use of the young, if you are rich and indulgent enough, or else impose a rigid three-minute limit on juvenile calls, enforced if necessary by the pressure of one finger on the disconnect button.

What is needed in adult circles is a campaign to instruct subscribers that an incoming call is not pre-emptive merely because somebody outside made it. The business man with a protective secretary can, and should, train her to tell callers on the phone that he is occupied and they must wait or he will call them back, exactly as if they had walked unannounced into the outer office; the smaller shop assistant should answer the phone, say so if he is busy, and ask if the caller would like to hold on or call back, exactly as he would to anyone else who wandered into the shop.

If this educational project is ineffective (as my observation of modern manners gloomily forces me to admit it may be) I should like to see the Telephone Companies incorporate in their contraptions, before push-button dialling, all-numerical codes, and suchlike furbelows, a simple "Do Not Disturb" switch which, when flicked on, would cause the instrument to respond to incoming calls with something between the standard ring and the rasping engaged signal, a dulcet soothing tone which would signify "Yes, there is somebody home, but it isn't convenient to talk right now. Please hold on a few minutes or call again soon."

Until this accessory is available, I shall personally just decline to answer the telephone when it rings at a time inconvenient to me. If I am in the middle of an important conversation, or just sitting down to a nice hot meal, or taking in something I don't want to miss on radio or television (yes, even that is occasionally possible) the telephone can ring its bells off before I will pick it up. I figure that if the call was important, the caller will try again; and if it wasn't, I haven't missed anything.

One menace from which no moral or mechanical device will protect you, however, is the pest who has determined to use your telephone number to sell you something or to cross-examine you on behalf of some alleged "poll".

One way to deal with the telephone salesman is to profess great interest in whatever rubbish he is peddling, but to explain that because of your exceptional working hours you could only meet him to complete a transaction at some weird hour, say after midnight, at some other address, which careful exploration will only prove to

be located in the middle of a cemetery or in a large hole where an old building has just been demolished. (Every telephone subscriber should prepare himself with two or three such non-existent addresses in his neighborhood.)

As for the pollsters, perhaps the most rewarding procedure is to try to unbalance their findings. If they say "Are you a registered member of a political party?" you could reply "Yes, the United Vivisection Party." If they ask "What television program are you watching?" you answer "Mickey Mouse", and when the interrogator says "I don't think Mickey Mouse is on at this time" you retort "Well, my Seeing Eye Dog said it was Mickey Mouse." The extensions and variations of this ploy need be limited only by your own ingenuity, which should surely be able to improve on these impromptu suggestions.

But whatever the circumstances, it is high time to remind ourselves that for all its potentially useful services the telephone should still be treated as a servant, not a master, and should be kept in its place.

If any perfervid liberal seems to detect an undemocratic note in that last sentence, let the chips fall where they must.

I believe that the popular notion of "democracy" has undergone too much distortion even after the earliest and perhaps acceptable transition from the original meaning of "mob rule" to the concept of equal rights and equal representation.

In any intelligent company, it should be sufficient to point out that the Communist countries are the most stridently insistent on calling themselves "Peoples' Democratic Republics", despite every incontrovertible proof that their political structure is founded on the dogma so perfectly satirized in the formula: *"All citizens are equal, but some are more equal than others."*

Equality of opportunity, except in the most idiot outposts of wishful thinking, can not be made synonymous with equality of achievement. Even the sacred doctrine that "all men are created equal" requires serious re-examination in the light of modern knowledge of genetics: unless you fondly disbelieve in heredity, chromosomes, and all such scientific abracadabra, you must admit that just as one child is born to be light-skinned and one to be dark, one

destined to grow tall and one to be a shorty, so some are born with a capacity to develop intellectual powers or artistic gifts that are forever unattainable by others who were not so lucky, no matter how doggedly they may toil at it. But dedication to the ideal that everyone should have an equal chance has led, especially in the United States, to a derivative but illogical inclination to discount success and to deny it respect and social standing. The school drop-out wastrel on the dole is convinced that, except for the minor matter of a credit rating, he is just as good a man as someone who by exploiting his brains or talents with thrift and energy has attained eminence in his vocation; the servitor's deference is scaled precisely to the magnitude of the expected tip. The greatest compliment that the common man can pay to a famous one is to say that "he's just like any other guy."

The rich, the powerful, and the gifted have themselves been so intimidated by these standards that nowadays they seem to vie with each other to see who can be the most commonplace and folksy, creating the requisite image of ordinariness like a film star doing her own shopping at the supermarket in a pregnancy smock and hair curlers. And they are encouraged by a choir of fuzzy-minded philosophers who praise these contortions as symptoms of progress towards the kind of Utopia which I would have thought had been lethally satirized by Gilbert and Sullivan well before the dawn of this century, in the song about the mellow-hearted king in days of old:

When he had Rhenish wine to drink
it made him very sad to think
That some at junket or at jink
Must be content with toddy.
He wished all men as good as he,
And he was good as good can be,
So to the top of every tree
Promoted everybody.

Which, after a couple of succinct stanzas of illustrative *reductio ad absurdum* leads him to the inevitable conclusion that

When everybody is somebody,
Then no one's anybody.

I think that like many other misty-eyed do-gooders, the apostles of this philosophy actually do most damage to the cause which should be nearest to their hearts, which I assume to be the improvement of the multitude. I say, let the billionaires ride in solid gold Rolls Royces and light their cigars with sheaves of paper money:

let movie stars stage Dionysian orgies that would stagger the reportorial abilities of *Playboy:* let artists (among whom I include exponents of all the classic arts) roar like the lions they once used to be called, and heap contempt and contumely on the bourgeoisie.

This may nudge some sulky mutterers towards thoughts of revolution and the building of backyard guillotines. But it would also fire a deserving few with the realization that they too could be big shots, and give them the incentive to achieve it, and at least they might end better off than the envious nits whose fundamental program is simply to impose a legalized crippling on anyone who might otherwise outrun them.

Since I seem to have made a sidelong reference to *Playboy* in each of the preceding sections of this department, I am wondering whether I have any stupid readers for whose benefit I need to explain that I am not involved in any feud or fracas with that publication.

It would be ridiculous to suggest that we are jealous of their circulation. After all, they only have a hundred or so readers to our one, which is not much of a gap in astronomical figures. And we have achieved our colossal subscription list without the lure of a single nude, either in cartoon or Ektachrome.

We are not miffed because they made such a feature of the later works of Ian Fleming. He had to sell them somewhere, since he didn't have his own Magazine. And conversely, *Playboy* never had the chance to buy the Saint, since this Magazine always had a first option on his adventures. From the sidelines, we could only admire the editorial taste which, directly their James Bond monopoly was terminated by the demise of Mr. Fleming, made them the first to fill the breach with *Loxfinger,* a hilarious parody featuring the adventures of Oy Oy Seven, thus proving their complete impartiality.

Nor should anyone be deluded that I am envious of the Playboy Mansion, that working warren stocked with uninhibited Bunnies from which Mr. Hugh Hefner conducts his business, I, too, might be able to afford some such stately pleasure dome, if I chose to lay all my eggs in one blanket, so to speak; but I'm afraid my wife would never stand for it. And, in sober contemplation of my venerable and ripening years, I am bound to admit that she may actually be thinking mainly of my own health. But Mr. Hefner will have to

wait another 20 years to get this perspective.

If I had any complaint against *Playboy*, it would be about *The Playboy Philosophy*, a feature to which Mr. Hefner devotes great personal effort and a prominent proportion of space. The feature is there, however, not to fill in for a dearth of other material (as I have always candidly admitted that this one is) but obviously because Mr. Hefner wants to write it. And he has wanted to, and done it, through so many installments that fanciers of marathon contests might be interested to bet on whether he will keep going longer than I will in this department. My money would be on Mr. Hefner, because I have a hunch that his appetite for work is far greater than mine, and furthermore he seems to be driven by a messianic attitude towards his subject to which these jottings of mine never have aspired. All I ever set out to do was to declare a few prejudices, scatter a few arguments, provide some entertainment and at the same time amuse myself. I do not mean that I am any less sincere in my contentions, but I am not too seriously impressed by their importance and I don't expect the world to be much shaken by them.

I personally wish Mr. Hefner would be as relaxed, because I find his earnestness somewhat embarrassing. I feel that he is suffering from his own version of the syndrome I was just talking about. Apparently it is not enough for him to have created a phenomenally successful magazine in which can be found an unusual frequency of good fiction, informative articles, and clever cartoons, besides the reliable quota of full-color bosoms. It should be a matter of sublime unconcern to him how many of the readers study his nudes with artistic appreciation and how many with plain concupiscence. He need not care whether all his readers are splendidly sophisticated or whether they are branded in some puritanical strongholds as degenerate. He should not need the indorsements of priests and rabbis to reassure him. His popular acceptance is already confirmed enough by his booming circulation. He is publishing a fantastically popular magazine which gives good value even for a rather elevated price, and if there is anything reprehensible about that it can only be charged to the public whose desires it obviously satisfies. I read it regularly myself, and don't feel I need to apologize for it, even though I may not go down the line with all of it. Does anyone?

Mr. Hefner has made himself a couple of fortunes, and will probably make more. Also, between chores, he personally lives like a sultan and I hope enjoys every minute of it. Good luck to him.

Only I shall personally enjoy his magazine more when he outgrows his present compulsion to try to justify himself.

Scratching vacuously around for some light-weight topic with which to balance the rather ponderous tenor of this month's cogitations, I regretfully decided that my current reflections on Rhodesia and indeed the whole problem of today's Africa, much as I would like to air them, could not possibly be made flippant and gay enough to meet that requirement.

However, a natural association of ideas did remind me of a completely irrelevant glimpse of the logic of the American African as I once accidentally caught it when I arrived too early for a dinner party one absent-minded evening—strictly by mistake, I assure you, for I think that arriving too early on such occasions is even more inconsiderate than arriving a little late. Our equally embarrassed hostess was forgiving enough to invite us to fix ourselves a drink while she concluded her primping, and to facilitate this she herself fetched in some ice from the adjoining kitchen, which allowed us to catch sight through the swinging door of a couple of dusky domestics, one busy at an ironing board while the other scoured away at some utensils in the sink. After that, while solitarily sampling the Peter Dawson, we found ourselves almost trapped into innocently eavesdropping on the conversation of the help.

That is how, during a break in our own forced conversation, we had the good fortune to hear one of them say, with the greatest tolerance:

"Come to think of it, if it wasn't for us colored people, the white folks would get awful dirty."

So after all, everything is still in the point of view.

the dangling button

by Brad Steiger and Jerry Twedt

RAINY nights are made for reverie in front of a crackling fireplace, and Colonel Ardway frowned his resentment at the unsympathetic intrusion of the doorbell.

"Quiet, beast," he told the German shepherd that barked expectantly at the front door.

"Lynn!" Ardway was surprised, yet pleased, at the umbrella-sheltered figure of his son's fiancee.

"Good evening, Colonel Ardway." A wisp of blonde hair had freed itself from beneath the rain-beaded hat, and heavy breathing gave evidence of a battle against the elements.

"What in the dickens are you doing out on a night like this?"

"Getting wet."

"Oh!" Ardway said, stepping quickly aside. "Well come in, come in!"

Lynn stepped inside, knelt to pet the shepherd that whined for her attention. "Are you glad to see me, Rex?"

Brad Steiger is the author of more than two hundred published short stories and articles and of fourteen books, mostly true crime or mysteries, including POLTERGEISTS and THE MENACE OF PEP PILLS. Jerry L. Twedt, currently a writer, producer and director with WCKT-TV in Miami, was an agent in Counter Intelligence Corps from 1957 to 1960.

"I should have known it was you. Old Rex was so excited he was falling all over himself."

Lynn brought the great snout next to her pixie nose. "Do you like me, big fella? Do you?"

"Like you!" Ardway echoed. "He's appointed himself your slave and bodyguard. I'll bet he won't even let your husband-to-be touch you."

Lynn gave the shepherd a squeeze, ducked her head to avoid an affectionate tongue.

"Let me take that coat," Ardway said, extending his hand. "Really wet out, huh?"

Lynn nodded. "And windy, too. I'd thought I'd blow away."

"You didn't walk, did you?" Ardway asked over his shoulder as he hung the raincoat in the hall closet.

"No, I drove. But walking from the car was a problem."

"Well, come on in the den and warm up. I've got a good fire going."

"I hoped you would," Lynn smiled.

"My, you look fetching all starched and prim in your nurses' uniform," he told the slender blonde as she crossed the den to the open flame of the fireplace. "Duty tonight?"

"I go on at eleven."

"Won't you sit down?"

Lynn shook her head. "I'd rather stand here by the fire."

"Suit yourself," Ardway said; "I'm going to lower these creaking bones of mine into a chair."

Ardway put match to the pipe that had been allowed to die, drew a few preliminary puffs, sat back when the tobacco took. "As much as I love having you here, I'm curious why you chose such a terrible night to come visiting."

"Why?" Lynn crinkled her forehead. "Why because of your note."

"Note? I didn't send you any note."

"But there was one on my door when I came home from shopping this afternoon," Lynn explained. "It said to come over at nine because you had something important to tell me."

Ardway tapped pipe stem to teeth, tried to make sense of it all. "Do you have the note with you?"

Lynn arched an eyebrow. "You really didn't send it?"

"No, but I'd like to know who did."

"Ah-hah!" Lynn smiled, shaking a forefinger knowingly at Ardway. "It was Max!"

"Max?"

"He's an intern at the hospital. He's been giving me a bad time about stepping out with you while Sandy's gone."

Ardway grinned around the stem of his pipe, not entirely convinced. "Well, when you see Max, thank him. That's the high-

est compliment I've had in years."

"I'll break his skull with a bedpan," Lynn promised. "Oh," she squealed, her eyes suddenly lighting on Ardway's desk, "is that a letter from Sandy?"

"What there is of it."

Lynn pursed her lips. "A little on the short side?"

"After writing half the night to you, he doesn't have much time for me," Ardway teased. "He says he's busy, and that he and a Russian guide are going mountain climbing, and . . ."

"Mountain climbing!"

"Didn't he tell you? Here. Read it for yourself."

Lynn started to open the envelope, then turned it over with a puzzled frown. "Why, he's in Georgia! In the letter I received today, he was still in Moscow."

"Maybe it was delayed."

"I don't think so. It took just two weeks, like all the other letters have."

Ardway studied the envelope. "Well, now, isn't that interesting? This letter was mailed only five days ago."

The doorbell chimed and Rex leaped to his feet with a vigilant growl.

"This must be my night for visitors." Ardway sighed, getting to his feet. "You stay here and read Sandy's letter," he told Lynn.

The man in the raincoat and hat was of medium height with a slender, yet athletic build. He appeared to be about 45 and his: "Good evening, Col. Ardway" was flavored with a slight German accent.

"What can I do for you?" Ardway asked.

The man laughed softly. "That's a typical American greeting, isn't it? Most interesting."

"Who are you?" Ardway scowled at his unknown visitor. This seemed to be a night for practical jokes.

"Don't you remember me? We worked together during the War. Of course, I suppose I've changed since I was twenty-two."

"I'm sorry, but I . . ."

"Ernst. Ernst Reinbeck."

Ardway felt an icy claw clutch the pit of his stomach. "But . . . but you're dead!"

"On the contrary, I am very much alive. But if I stand out in this rain much longer, I may soon die of pneumonia!"

"Come in, Ernst," Ardway said, shaking the man's hand. "Come in. This is . . . well, it is like having a dear departed friend rise up out of the grave."

"And it is good to see you once again, Colonel."

"But how?" Ardway asked as he helped the German out of his wet trenchcoat. "The reports that came through said that you had been captured and executed by the Nazis."

"Almost," Reinbeck conceded, "but not quite. I'll explain it all later. As for now, if you haven't changed too much, you have a fire going somewhere in this lovely old house."

"Your memory is excellent," Ardway laughed. It's in the den."

"I knew you wouldn't disappoint me," Reinbeck said. "On a nasty night during the War, I always knew you would have a roaring fire."

Reinbeck seemed about to conjure up another remembrance of times past when he saw Lynn. Standing before the fireplace in her crisp nurses' uniform, the blonde seemed to be a strange mixture of cold efficiency and warm sensuality. Reinbeck's mouth began to form new words, gave them up for a broad grin.

Ardway intercepted his former colleague's thoughts: "This is my son's fiancee. Miss Lynn Allington. Lynn, this is Ernst Reinbeck. I worked with Ernst during the war."

Lynn extended her hand. "How do you do?"

Reinbeck took the hand she offered, seemed undecided what to do with it, finally gave it a brief shake.

"I must compliment your son on his taste in women," he told the colonel. Then, to Lynn: "Do you mind if I share your fire?"

"Please do."

As Reinbeck began to cross to the fire, Rex rose to his feet, a low growl rumbling in his massive throat.

The German froze, smiled nervously. "I'm afraid your dog doesn't like me, Colonel."

"Down Rex!" Ardway commanded. "Don't mind him. He's old and cranky. And possessive toward Miss Allington. Come on over and sit down, Ernst. He won't bother you."

"I'd rather stand if you don't mind."

"Everybody wants to stand tonight!" Ardway said, dropping his arms to his side in a gesture of bewilderment. "Well, I don't; and since it is my house, I'm going to sit."

"It seems *der Fuchs* is getting old, too," Reinbeck said softly as he drew a silver cigarette case from his coat pocket.

"Who?" Lynn asked.

"*Der Fuchs* means fox," Reinbeck explained. "That's what we used to call Coloney Ardway."

"Among other things," Ardway smiled.

"Tell me, Miss Allington," Reinbeck wondered, "did you know your future father-in-law was a spy?"

"Well, yes and no," Lynn said. "Sandy told me he was in the O.S.S. But I didn't know he was actually a spy."

"One of the best," Reinbeck said, nodding his head slowly. "You know how good he was

because he is still alive."

"I was lucky," Ardway shrugged.

"True," Ernst said, "but you made most of that luck. I learned a great deal from you."

"Were you in the O.S.S., too?" Lynn asked.

"Not officially," Reinbeck answered after he had lighted his cigarette. "When Colonel Ardway was posing as a watch maker, I was stationed nearby as an orderly. A Nazi orderly, that is. To shorten a very long story, I became an Allied informant."

"I can see that you two have a lot of old times to catch up on," Lynn said. "Could I interest you in some coffee?"

"Indeed you could," Ernst said. "Strong and black."

"Do you have time?" Ardway asked, glancing at his watch.

"Plenty. I'll go fix you two spies some lunch. I won't be long."

"What a charming girl," Ernst sighed as she left the den, the shepherd at her heels. "It is so sad that such a delightful young woman should have had so much tragedy in her life."

Ardway looked sharply at the man who had so strangely and suddenly returned from the past. From a dark, violent time that was best left buried and dealt with only in shock-filled, screaming nightmares.

"What do you know of Lynn?"

"Actually very little," Reinbeck admitted. "Her father was killed at Normandy. Her mother died about five years ago of cancer. She worked her way through nurses' training. I know much more about your son."

"Do you?"

"Yes. I know that not only does he have a brilliant mind, but he is also a fine athlete. I hear that he especially enjoys mountain climbing."

Ardway leaned forward in his chair, his eyes narrowed. Reinbeck's emphasis on the words *mountain climbing* was unmistakable.

Reinbeck seemed oblivious to the effect his words had upon Ardway and went on talking, his manner that of a precocious child called upon to recite for adults.

"Your son came close to being an All-American in college, besides being an honor student. He went on to graduate school and last spring received his Ph. D. in physics. He was hired by Landruff Aviation where he is currently doing research on rocket engines.

"On August 12, he joined a group of twenty scientists who are now touring Russia by special invitation of the Soviet Government."

Ardway slowly picked up his pipe. "What do you want, Ernst?"

"But I haven't yet told you what I know about you."

"I'm not interested," Ardway said harshly.

"Now don't get angry, Colonel," Reinbeck cautioned. "Angry men can't think clearly. And I can assure you that for the next few hours you must think clearly. Here, let me light your pipe."

Reinbeck pulled out a matchbook, struck a paper match into flame, leaned down to light Ardway's pipe.

Ardway stared coldly at the German, blew out the flame. "I can light my own pipe, thank you."

Ernst smiled, tossed the dead match into the fireplace. "As you wish." He took a last drag of his cigarette, flicked it after the match.

"After the War, you came home only to find that your wife and daughter had been killed in an automobile accident. You took your son and returned to Vienna. You served as operations officer for 'Operation Paper Clip', which I must admit was quite successful. You smuggled out some of Eastern Europe's best scientists.

"You then spent three years in the Pentagon—hated it. In 1954 you were assigned to Berlin, where, in 1955, you had a minor heart attack. You received a medical discharge, came home, and through your friend Alvin Connelly were hired as chief security officer for Landruff Aviation."

"Get to the point," Ardway said impatiently.

"Ah, yes . . . the point," Ernst smiled, leaning against the fireplace. "How impatient you Americans are. The point is this: I was not killed by the Gestapo as you believed. Perhaps I would have been if I had not been captured by the Russians when they overran the headquarters where I was being interrogated. I told them of my work with you, and they sent me to Russia where I was given an excellent education in intelligence work."

Ardway leaned back in his chair. "So you're a Communist agent."

Ernst laughed. "Better to call me a Russian agent. To the dismay of my teachers, I could never quite embrace Communist doctrine. But I do excellent work, and that's all my superiors care about."

"What do you want from me?"

"Your company has successfully tested a new rocket engine. It is smaller, lighter and has more thrust than any of ours on the same type."

"And you expect me to give you those plans?"

"No. Just make them available so I can microfilm them."

Ardway rose to his feet, faced Reinbeck. "You know that I'd

die before I'd let you see those plans."

"Yes, I know. But your life is not at stake. Your son's is."

Ardway's lower lip trembled. "So that's it!"

"In a letter you received today, your son talks of going mountain climbing with one of our guides. This guide is, of course, one of our agents. Let me show you what will happen."

Reinbeck took a pen knife, then two buttons connected by a piece of string out of his pocket. "Suppose we say that these two buttons represent your son and our agent.

"The top one will be our man, and the bottom one your son. They will climb the mountain to a predetermined ledge. Let us say the mantle is the ledge."

Reinbeck slowly pulled the buttons up the fireplace wall, lifted the top button over the mantle. The bottom button swayed hypnotically, anchored in space only by the thin thread.

"Our man will climb onto the ledge and help your son. But just as Sandy is about to climb up onto the ledge, our man will cut the rope. And . . ."

Reinbeck cut the string and the button fell to the hearthstone.

". . . your son is dead."

Ardway stared at the button. The heat from the fireplace seemed unbearable. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead.

"Our man will pick up the body, hurry down the mountain and tell everyone about the accident. He will tell how your son slipped and fell, how he was dangling from the rope which was around our man's waist. Our man will tell how he tried to pull your son to safety, but that in doing so he began to lose his grip. And seeing that his guide was about to fall, your son cut the rope.

"It will be a tragic accident, but your Sandy will be a hero all over Russia. 'American Gives Life to Save Russian Friend.' And then if you were to come out with your ridiculous spy story, the whole world will know that it was nothing but a crude imperialistic trick to propagandize a poor boy's death. And by his own father!"

"You devil," Ardway said, sinking back down to his chair.

"You overestimate me," Reinbeck laughed. "But hurry. Time is wasting. At twelve o'clock here, it will be dawn in Georgia. If we are to save your son, I must have the plans by 10:30. We have less than an hour and a half."

"Even if I let you film, it's impossible for that message to get through in time!"

Reinbeck shook his head. "If I have the plans by 10:30, I call room 304 at the Sleepy Way Motel and tell my contact that

tomorrow's weather will be sunny and mild. The message will be beamed to a fishing trawler which will radio the message directly to Moscow."

Ardway studied the palms of his hands. He hated the taste of utter helplessness. "That engine isn't of that high a priority. With my access to classified material and high-level conferences, this will only be the beginning."

"That is most certainly true," Reinbeck agreed.

Ardway rose, bent down to pick up a poker from the hearth. He turned to face Ernst.

Reinbeck took a quick step back, jerked an automatic from beneath his coat.

Ardway smiled. "I was just going to stir the fire," he said. "For a man with all the cards, you seem a bit nervous."

"Cautious," Reinbeck corrected him. "I have worked with you long enough to have great respect for you."

Ardway bent to the fireplace, began to stir the coals. "If I should let you film, how do I know that you won't kill Sandy anyway?"

"Because he's our insurance policy for future co-operation. It wouldn't bother you, perhaps, to ruin your own career. But if your son were safely home, you would destroy his future as well. After all, who would permit the son of a traitor to do research in aeronautical physics?"

Ardway rose, replaced the poker. "Nice try, Ernst, but it won't work."

"Oh?" Ernst frowned, putting the automatic away. "Why?"

"Because you're bluffing."

"What makes you say that?"

"The letter is a forgery. As phoney as this whole scheme. The Kremlin wouldn't commit the diplomatic *faux pas* of allowing an accident, no matter how carefully planned, to befall a State guest."

"The letter is genuine," Reinbeck said confidently. "And you know it."

"Do I?" Ardway asked, rising from his seat before the fireplace and walking to his desk. "Am I not a handwriting expert?" His hand reached for a magnifying glass. "I was comparing this letter with some of Sandy's old ones just before Lynn arrived. Come see for yourself. The 'I's' and 't's' are different."

Ardway offered the letters to Reinbeck. The German reached out for them, then, as if awaking from a trance, stepped suddenly backward and drew his gun.

"Sit down, Colonel!"

Ardway remained motionless for a moment, then dropped into his chair.

"You are still the fox, aren't you," Reinbeck laughed. "Twenty years ago I might have fallen

for that."

"You came quite close just now."

"So I did," Reinbeck admitted with a nervous chuckle. "But I won't get careless again."

"We'll see."

Lynn's knock at the door of the den gave Reinbeck enough warning to slip his automatic back into its holster.

"May I come in and once again intrude upon the reunion of two old war buddies?" She held a tray of coffee and cookies in her hands. The great German shepherd padded softly beside her.

"Ah, Miss Allington and steaming coffee," Ernst smiled expansively. "What a wonderful combination."

"My, but you're full of compliments," Lynn laughed, setting the tray on a coffee table before the fireplace.

"You know," she said, pouring the coffee," Colonel Ardway only had instant coffee. Poor man must be too lazy to brew a pot of regular coffee. It's a good thing for him that there'll soon be a woman in the house."

"Ah, yes," Ernst nodded. "December 29 is the wedding date, is it not?"

Lynn looked up, glanced uncertainly at Colonel Ardway. "Why, yes it is."

"Leave her out of this!" Ardway said, his voice quavering with impotent rage.

"That's impossible, Colonel," Ernst frowned. "She is very much a part of this operation. Otherwise, I wouldn't have sent her a note to be here."

"You sent that note?" Lynn asked incredulously. "But why? I mean . . ."

"Ernst, we can settle this without Lynn."

"Apparently we cannot," Ernst shrugged. "You have proved to be most stubborn. But a woman in love is a most persuasive instrument. Miss Allington, sit down!"

There was no charm about the man now. It was as if he had suddenly removed a mask and revealed his true self . . . cold, ruthless, efficient.

"Try not to become too upset, Miss Allington," Reinbeck said. "You'll need your wits about you to save Sandy?"

"Sandy!" Lynn looked at Ardway, hopefully searching his face for a sign. "What is it? What is he talking about?"

"Unlike Colonel Ardway," Reinbeck answered, "I am still an intelligence agent. A Soviet agent. If the Colonel does not see fit to provide me with certain rocket engine plans by 10:30, Sandy will not return from his mountain climb."

Lynn's mouth dropped open; she stared at Reinbeck in a near state of shock.

"It is 9:15," Ernst said, consulting his wrist watch. "There is little time left."

"Are the plans so important?" Lynn asked Ardway.

"No," Ernst interrupted. "They are of a very low priority. But to the Colonel they are more important than his son's life. He refuses to give me the opportunity to microfilm them."

"Colonel . . ." Lynn began, her eyes pleading.

"I'd become what I despise most," Ardway said, meeting her tear-rimmed eyes with his own, " a traitor. I can't live without self-respect."

"But," Lynn asked, "can you live without Sandy?"

"This is a most impressive mantle, Colonel," Reinbeck said, indicating the many pictures of Sandy and the various trophies and medals that he had won in athletic competition. "You must be quite proud of your son."

"I am," Ardway said.

"How fortunate that after he's dead you'll still have his trophies, and pictures."

Lynn left her chair, sat on the footstool before Ardway. She could no longer keep the tears in check, and they streamed unashamed down her cheeks. "Don't let him die, Colonel. Oh, please don't let him die!"

Ardway took the weeping girl into his arms. "Listen to me Lynn. If I give Ernst the plans, it's the beginning not the end. We'll all be hooked!"

"Why? Sandy will be safe. What can they do?"

"Oh, Lynn," Ardway sighed. "There's no end to what they can do. I will be a traitor and you, the accessory. If we don't do whatever they tell us, we'll be exposed. You and I will go to prison and Sandy's career will be finished. Or they will tell Sandy and force him to give information to protect us. It's like a maze, Lynn. If we step inside, we're lost!"

"But," Lynn insisted, "if you don't give up the plans, Sandy will be dead!"

"I'd rather have Sandy dead then spend the rest of his life as a puppet!"

"Perhaps you would prefer Sandy dead," Ernst said, "but I doubt if Miss Allington would. As long as one lives, there's always a possibility of finding a solution."

"When Sandy's back, I know we can find a way out," Lynn said. "I know we can!"

"Lynn!" Ardway snapped. "Don't you see you're thinking exactly what Ernst wants you to!"

"All I've heard are words!" Lynn said, rising to her feet, dropping her arms helplessly to her sides. "But I don't care about words! I'm not interested in self-respect and duty. All I want is

for Sandy to live. And I'll do anything to keep him alive!"

"Do you think I want him dead!" Ardway demanded. "I've loved him a lot longer than you have!"

"Then how can you let him die!"

"Because your life with Sandy would be sheer hell! You'd live under constant fear. I've seen what this can do. It tears a person apart. It kills by inches."

"We must leave in five minutes if we are to get to the plant and return in time to save your son," Ernst pointed out. "You have five minutes in which to save your son's life."

"I don't need five minutes," Adrway said, his hands clutching the mantle for support. "My decision has been made."

"Please," Lynn whimpered. "Please. . . ."

"I . . . I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Ernst shook his head slowly. His smile could have been inspired by sadism or sympathy, but more probably, by respect. "You are a hard man, Colonel. I thought that between your love for Sandy and Miss Allington, you would give in. I am truly sorry that your son must die."

Lynn darted from the side of Ardway and clutched the arm of the agent.

"Don't let him die! Please don't let him die!"

"Miss Allington," Reinbeck gestured helplessly. "I don't want your fiancee to die. But the Colonel's decision gives me no choice."

"Please . . . I'll do anything you want. Go anywhere with you."

Ernst's eyes blinked rapidly in surprise, then he broke into loud laughter. "I have always found it amusing the way a woman thinks that giving her body will solve everything."

He shoved Lynn roughly to one side. "Sorry, I can't trade your body for Sandy's."

Ardway could see it coming, but he was powerless to prevent it. Lynn had been pushed beyond the limits of her self-control. With a strange cry of rage, all of her anger, fear and frustration exploded in a violent, unthinking attack upon Ernst. Her nails clawed at his face; her feet aimed themselves at his legs—and higher; her open mouth seemed capable of tearing naked flesh.

Ernst recovered with a violent curse and a vicious backhand slap that sent Lynn sprawling. The powerful German shepherd, which had already started across the room at Lynn's charge, snarled and leaped at the agent.

Ardway dashed for his desk as the impact of Rex's 97 pounds sent man and dog crashing over chair and coffee table. He had his revolver gripped securely in his fist before Ernst had begun

to scream.

"Help! Help! Get him off! Get him off!"

"Back, Rex!" Ardway shouted at the snarling brute. "Back! Heel, boy! Heel!"

Then, to Ernst: "Keep your hands behind your back!"

He knelt beside Lynn, helped to her feet. She was shaken and confused by the quick turn of events. "Take his gun," he told her.

She walked hesitantly to the agent lying before the fireplace, knelt beside him.

"Ernst," Ardway warned, "if you so much as wiggle, I'll blow your head off! It's under his coat on the right hand side," he told the dazed girl.

Lynn reached under Ernst's coat, pulled out the gun by her fingertips.

"Now, Ernst," Ardway directed, "get up and sit in that chair. And do it slowly!"

Rex moved in close, snarled as the agent got to his feet.

"Just keep that monster away from me!"

"Down, Rex! Down boy," Ardway told the dog. "He would like nothing better than to get at your throat," he reminded Reinbeck, "so easy it does, all right?"

Lynn still held the automatic by her fingertips.

"Are you all right, Lynn?" Ardway asked her.

"Yes. I . . . I guess so. But what shall I do with the gun?"

"Point it at Ernst. And if he does something you don't like, shoot him!"

"I wouldn't advise that, Miss Allington," Ernst smiled nervously. "You need me to save Sandy's life."

"No we don't," Ardway said. "You're no use to us whatsoever. Thanks to your temper and vanity you gave me your code and where to call. Lynn, call the Sleepy Way Motel and ask for room 304!"

"I did slip there, didn't I?" Ernst smiled.

"It's ringing," Lynn said, handing the receiver to Ardway.

"Hello," Ardway acknowledged the clerk's syrupy greeting. "Room 304, please. Are you sure? Well, ring it anyway!"

Ardway held the receiver to his ear for a few moments, his knuckles showing like white marbles in the tension of his grip. With a curse, he slammed the receiver into its cradle.

"Colonel," Ernst scolded, "did you really think that I would be so stupid as to tell you where my contact is waiting. This puts us right back where we started from."

"Not quite," Ardway said, trying desperately to keep the rage from warping his words. "You get on that phone and call whomever you are to call. Make the

call, Ernst. Make it to the right person and say the right words. Because I'm holding you here until I find out what's happened to Sandy. And if he dies, you die!"

"And if I make the call and your son is saved, then what happens?"

"We'll talk about that after I know Sandy's safe."

"We'll talk about it now! Once you find out your son is safe, I'll have lost my bargaining power. You'll turn me over to the F.B.I."

"You have no bargaining position now! Either you save Sandy or you die!"

"It's not that simple, Colonel. You want Sandy alive, and I have no desire to die. But I also have no desire to spend the next fifteen years in one of your prisons. You let me go and I'll make the call!"

Ardway appeared momentarily stunned. "Let you go! Do you think I'm getting senile? You'd never make the call!"

Ernst shrugged. "You'll just have to trust me."

"I'd sooner trust the devil with my soul!" Ardway said. You make that call from here."

Ernst shook his head. "It is 10:15. Unless I make that call in the next fifteen minutes, Sandy dies."

"If the clock strikes 10:30 and you haven't phoned, you're a dead man," Ardway countered.

"Miss Allington," Ernst told Lynn, "you had better convince this stubborn old man to let me go. There are no longer secret documents or principles involved. It is a bargain of my freedom for Sandy's life. I'm sure that you would much prefer to see me free than Sandy dead."

Lynn's teeth caught at her lower lip. "Colonel . . ."

"He's bluffing, Lynn. Don't listen to him."

Ernst shifted restlessly in his chair. "I have a bargain for you, Colonel. Let me have my gun and then I'll make the call."

"What?"

"If I have my gun pointed at you and you have yours pointed at me, neither of us would dare shoot. Then I'll make my call. And after Sandy is safe, I'll leave."

"No, Colonel!" Lynn pleaded. "He'll kill you!"

Ardway studied Reinbeck for several seconds before he broke the silence. "The old Mexican stand-off, eh? Very well. Lynn, give me his gun and go over by the desk."

"No, Colonel!"

"Please do as I say!"

Ardway took the automatic from Lynn, waited until she had crossed the den to the desk.

"Ernst, I'll put your gun on the table and then I'll step back. You come and pick it up, then

return to your chair. And keep that pistol pointed at me. If you should try to turn it on Lynn, I'll kill you. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

Ardway placed the gun on the table, stepped back. As Ernst rose slowly from his chair, Rex snarled. Ernst froze, stared at the dog.

"Down, Rex." Ardway ordered.

The dog obeyed. Reinbeck picked up his gun, pointed it at Ardway.

"Make your call," Ardway said.

"That won't be necessary," Ernst smiled. "There is no one to call, and it wouldn't do any good even if there were."

"You've already killed him!" Lynn screamed.

Ardway's forefinger tightened around the trigger of his revolver.

"Don't do anything rash, Colonel," Ernst cautioned. "Your son isn't dead. With good flight weather, he will probably be sitting in this room tomorrow evening."

"What!" Lynn's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Go on," Ardway said.

"From our viewpoint, it is a sad story. Four days ago, Sandy and three others went for a horseback ride. Evidently your son is a better mountain climber than he is a horseman. He fell off and broke his leg."

"Broke his leg!" Lynn echoed.

"That's correct. A doctor set it and Sandy is on his way back to the United States."

"Colonel!" Lynn said, taking a step toward Ardway. 'Sandy's coming home!"

"Stay where you are!" Ardway told her sharply. "I don't believe him."

"I didn't think you would," Ernst admitted. "But it is all true. Every word of it."

"If he had been hurt, I would have been notified by now."

"Ah, you were!" Ernst said. "But telegrams have a way of getting delayed in the Soviet Union. I wouldn't be surprised if you received it tomorrow."

Ardway pursed his lips, studied Ernst's face for a clue to the truth. "Assuming for a moment that what you say is true, then this whole affair has been a bluff."

Ernst laughed. "Quite true. Though it wasn't meant to be. Your son's untimely accident made the climb impossible. But since you didn't know about the accident, we decided to go through with it as originally planned. It would have been especially gratifying if you had given us the plans, then found out that Sandy was on his way home."

Lynn slumped weakly into a chair. "It's all over.

Sandy is safe. Really safe." She dabbed at her eyes with a

tissue plucked from Ardway's desk. This time I'm crying for happiness."

"And I shall leave you to your happy tears," Reinbeck said, with a slight bow. "Good evening to both of you."

"If you take one step toward that door, I'll kill you," Ardway said, waving his revolver for emphasis. "You have simply told us a story. One of the many you've offered this evening. Unless you can give me evidence, we'll both stay right here until we know the truth."

Ernst stared into the unblinking eye of Ardway's revolver, tried a feeble smile. "What evidence would satisfy you?"

"You're the glib talker, the quick wit, the man with all the stories," Ardway said. "You come up with some damn good evidence—fast!"

Ernst sobered, then broke into an expansive grin. "Of course! Why didn't I think of that before? Sandy is flying into New York on flight number 107 of Wide World Airlines. He is scheduled to arrive at 6:30 New York time."

"All right," Ardway said after a moment's hesitation. "Lynn, let's check that out. Come over, pick up the telephone and take it back to the desk. Call New York International airport and ask for the World Wide Airlines. Ernst, I'm going to move to the fireplace. You turn with me."

"As you say."

Lynn carried the phone back to the desk, dialed the operator.

"Now when you get the information desk," Ardway instructed, "ask to speak to her superior. It is against regulations to give out the names of passengers. Bring the phone back to the table and let me talk to him."

"In a few moments, this whole comedy of errors will be concluded," Ernst said to Ardway. "I'm afraid my superiors are going to be quite unhappy with me. I have bungled this quite badly."

Ardway said nothing as he listened with one ear to Lynn speaking excitedly into the phone.

"The entire operation," Ernst went on, "was based on the hope that you had grown old and careless. It turned out to be a false hope."

"What will happen to you . . . if you go back?"

Ernst smiled at Ardway's double entendre, shrugged his shoulders. "I think I'm too valuable to execute."

Lynn brought the receiver to Ardway. "She's getting her superior."

Ardway took the phone, turned to face Reinbeck, his automatic pointed directly at the agent's stomach.

"Hello? My name is Colonel Roger Ardway and I must know

if my son John Edward Ardway is on flight 107. Yes, I know it is; but at the risk of sounding melodramatic, this is a matter of life and death. Sir, as wild as this sounds, it is true. I am holding a gun on a man who is in turn holding a gun on me. Now whether or not we shoot each other depends on whether or not my son is on flight 107. You don't need to know why! Just give me the information . . . please! Thank you!"

"Is he going to tell you?" Lynn asked.

"Yes. He's getting the list. We'll soon know. Yes, sir. That's right. John Edward Ardway." Ardway smiled at Lynn: "He *is* listed!"

"Thank God!" Lynn said softly.

"I've been told he has a broken leg," Ardway said into the receiver. "Do you know anything about this? Thank you, sir. Thank you very much!"

Ardway cradled the receiver. "It seems that you were telling the truth, Ernst. He is listed as a passenger and there is a notation to meet him with a wheel chair."

"He's safe," Lynn said. "Oh, thank God!"

Ernst chuckled. "I doubt if God had much to do with it. You should rather thank a frightened horse. Well, Colonel, this has been an interesting evening, but I really must be going. May I go peacefully, or are we to have a wild west shoot out?"

"You may go," Ardway said. "Lynn, get his hat and coat out of the closet, open the front door, then come back in here."

"Well," Ernst said. "Wish me luck, old friend. I am going to be in for a few very unpleasant hours."

"But somehow you'll survive," Ardway reassured him. "You have already come back from the grave once. Surely any man who can manage that can survive a Soviet wrist-slapping session."

"I must be getting old," Ernst said, slowly shaking his head. "I'm almost pleased that things turned out the way they did."

"Almost, but not quite," Ardway said sarcastically.

Lynn re-entered the room.

"Is the door open?"

"Yes. His hat and coat are hanging on it."

"Good. When we leave, you stay in here with Rex and lock the door. Now, Ernst, you may leave."

"Thank you. Will you show me to the door, Colonel?"

"By all means. Let's take it slow and easy."

"But of course."

"If you put away your gun, I'll allow you to put on your coat."

"I'm not that foolish, Colonel."

"Suit yourself."

Ernst picked up his hat and coat, placed the hat on his head, the coat over his right arm. "Good night, Colonel. Perhaps we shall meet again."

"Perhaps."

The German slowly backed out the door. Then, as he passed the knob, he swung the door between himself and Ardway.

Ardway squeezed his trigger twice and dove to one side as the door splintered from Reinbeck's automatic. He did a fast roll and came up in firing position, expecting Ernst to come through the door.

"Colonel! Colonel Ardway!" Lynn was shouting above the excited, angry barks of Rex. "Are you all right?"

Ardway slowly got up, flipped out the lights, stood to one side of the door and kicked it open. Ernst lay face down across the steps.

"Colonel! Answer me!"

"Stay where you are, Lynn!" he shouted. "I'm all right."

He knelt in the rain beside the body of his old comrade. "You couldn't go back empty handed, could you?"

He was never certain if Ernst whispered the words with his dying breath or if it was only the rain hissing off the steps, but he knew that he had heard someone —something—say: "You are still *der Fuchs!*"

NEXT MONTH

BLACK GENII
by TERENCE ROBERTS

Terence Allan Roberts (whose true name still cannot be revealed) tells another story of British Intelligence's fantastic fight on all fronts to block Nazi penetration of the Caribbean during World War II. We have asked Mr. Roberts whether he ever had a young man named James Bond serving under him. The answer — "No comment!" In this, and even more so in his upcoming fourth story of this Secret War in the Caribbean, it seems to us however that this must have been where Mr. Bond first learned his trade.

publicity

by Margery Allingham

"BENEDICK," murmured Tadema, just loudly enough for the cadence of his fine voice to be audible all round the dressing-room.

The intonation did not quite satisfy his fastidious ear.

"Benedick," he repeated, giving the word this time a sadness and a certain pride.

Then, with an assumption of carelessness which could have been only for his personal benefit, since he was entirely without other audience, he took up the copy of the illustrated weekly once more and studied afresh the full-page snapshots of himself and Chloe standing on the steps of her mother's house in Brook Street.

Her new oiled make-up looked very well, he thought. She was youthful, yet sophisticated and arresting without being actually vulgar. A dear girl.

Of himself he was not so sure.

As long as there has been a theater, men such as Sir Geoffrey Tadema have been a part of our own memories — of your memories and of mine... Margery Allingham, whose latest Albert Campion novel, THE MIND READERS, was reviewed in our January 1966 issue, is the author of FLOWERS FOR THE JUDGE, TIGER IN THE SMOKE, MR. CAMPION, CRIMINOLOGIST, etc.

Snapshots were notoriously unkind. Yet the photograph was certainly like him, and he peered affectionately at the gallant and romantic figure which the London public knew so well. He re-read the caption slowly.

BENEDICK AND THE DEB

'The surprise of the little season has been the engagement of Lady Chloe Staratt, beautiful daughter of the Earl of Scaresfield, to Sir Geoffrey Tadema, the bachelor actor knight. Lady Chloe, besides being the acknowledged leader of the younger set, is thought by many people to be the smartest woman in London. Sir Geoffrey is the great lover of the stage, but until now has proved himself impervious to Cupid's darts. Their many friends have been surprised and delighted by this romantic love match.'

Tadema threw down the paper and smiled. The Press had been magnificent. The dailies had been generous with space and there had been several long interviews in the cheaper Sundays. But the old *Tell-Tale* had come up to scratch. They had done the thing with the right delicacy. Some of the dailies had mentioned the discrepancy in age, he had been sorry to see.

At fifty-one, Tadema looked, on the stage at least, sixteen or seventeen years younger. His figure was as good, or nearly as good, as ever it had been, and he had changed hardly at all in the past ten or eleven years.

His astonishing success was all the more extraordinary in view of his limitations, histrionically speaking. In addition to his face, which had a propensity for expressing passionate emotion decently repressed, he had a natural charm of manner, a little more theatrical off the stage than it was on, and two endearing mannerisms: his nervous shake of the head when addressing the beloved kept his feminine gallery in ecstasy, and his sudden smile, so disarming in its warmth, moved the same body to audible quivers of delight.

Obviously it was not these alone which had kept the name of Tadema in foot-high letters on the board outside the Gresham for nearly fourteen years. He had other assets.

An excellent business man, he had a gift for finding the right sort of play and, of course, he had his instinct.

In what circumstances an instinct becomes genius, and when genius is transmuted into Art it is difficult to say, but with Tadema publicity was all these three, with the result that the public, who very properly believes what it has inferred, read,

or seen with its own eyes, knew that Sir Geoffrey Tadema was romance made carnate. It also knew that his conquests were myriad and that his life was the constant pursuit of the One Woman of the Perfect Heart, a vaguely defined lady but easily identifiable by every woman in his audience.

Since in private life Sir Geoffrey was a normal bachelor of somewhat fixed habits, this public façade of his was no mean achievement. Publicity was his hobby, and he worked at it with diligence and delicacy.

Jealous colleagues spoke bitterly of vast sums spent in bribes, betraying that they knew nothing of the Art and of newspapers less.

Sir Geoffrey himself honestly believed that he represented the secret soul-mate of all unloved women in London, but he overestimated himself, as he began to find out about two years after the talkies first became a real substitute for the theatre.

It was this discovery which was ultimately responsible for Chloe. On the screen Tadema's years were irritatingly apparent, and his famous personality curiously artificial. He had made one movie at his own expense and had regretted it ever since. He accepted two secondary parts in other films, but in the studio he was clumsy and a nobody, and neither he nor his admirers liked to see him playing second fiddle.

On the stage he was still a force, but his last play had run only nine months instead of the customary twelve, and he felt himself slipping.

He had been considering a happy and romantic marriage for some time as a new medium for the Personality when he first met Chloe, then on the crest of her first wave of public interest. She was the most photographed, most paragraphed deb of the season, and he admired the way she worked at it.

The thought of marrying her did not then occur to him, but now, in her second season, when he realized that she was not out for money and titled obscurity but was preparing for a career as a public person, the beautiful idea had come to him.

The hour was propitious. The recent royal engagement had put marriage at a premium, and Chloe's adventure with the masked motor bandits, who had chivalrously restored her possessions because of her sweet face and endearing manner alone, had just come out.

Chloe had been 'too much of a sport' to prefer a charge against the criminals, and had only 'confessed' the story to a newspaperman after pressure. This risky business had come off very well, considering, although Tadema

had felt it dangerously crude at the time. He felt instinctively that an engagement would be a sound move for both of them.

Chloe saw it, of course. Tadema warmed to her with real affection when he saw her grave eyes when he proposed. He was a little in love, even. It was typical of him that he should have done the thing so thoroughly, once the ulterior motive had been faced and shelved in the back of his mind.

He was hurt when she used the twenty-four hours which she demanded before giving him an answer to allow a pet paragraphist to get into print with the 'rumour,' but he was mollified by the Press reception.

'Our great lover.' 'The man who understands women.' 'Real romance at last.'

At the moment Tadema was very pleased.

He was so happy, even, that when a total stranger walked in upon him—an unheard-of thing at any time and almost sacrilegious before a matinée—his smile did not fade.

The newcomer paused in the doorway and stared at him disconcertingly.

After a moment or two of this stern scrutiny Tadema's good humour wavered. He rose to his feet and was about to make the obvious inquiry when he suddenly recollected where he had seen this tall, thick-featured boy before. The newsreels of the week had been largely concerned with the latest air hero, and although Mr. Gyp Rains, the twenty-year-old boy flier, looked even younger and more raw when in colour and the usual three dimensions than he had appeared on the screen, he was nevertheless perfectly recognizable.

Quite apart from any little professional feeling which an old public favourite may experience when faced with a new, Tadema conceived an instant dislike for this solemn youngster with the cold blue eyes who stood in his dressing-room doorway and regarded him so uncompromisingly.

The aviator's first remark did not help to dispel his animosity.

"I've come to see you, sir, because I felt it was my duty and the only decent thing to do," he said.

Tadema fell back upon the particular brand of sarcasm of which he was a master. "How very nice of you," he said. "Perhaps you would sit down and be as decent and as dutiful as you can in the few moments which I have at my disposal."

Had he said nothing at all he could hardly have made less impression upon Mr. Rains's stolid and bony countenance. The boy advanced into the room, placed himself within a foot of its own-

er, and recited, still in the same monotone:

"Chloe did not want me to tell you, sir, but I realized that even a man of your age has his feelings and I thought it was the only right thing to do, and so I've come to warn you. I always do what I think is right," he added with unexpected *naïveté,* and Tadema, who had the uncomfortable impression that he was back on the stage with the stock company of his early youth, caught a glimpse of something glazed and terrified in the intense blue eyes and realized that he was dealing with a young man labouring under intense excitement.

But he had no time for any feelings Mr. Gyp Rains might have been imperfectly concealing. He had heard the name 'Chloe,' and a great fear had descended upon him.

"Perhaps you'd better explain a little more fully," he said. "What's all this about?"

Beads of sweat appeared upon the younger man's forehead and his naturally vivid colour had heightened.

"It's a secret," he said. "Chloe and I are to be married. We've fallen in love and we're going to elope. I start on my big flight tomorrow night and she's coming with me. They'll find her at the first stop in Athens, of course, and I don't suppose they'll let her go on, but we're getting married late to-morrow; so you see it'll be all above-board."

*

Had his revelations been less sensational Tadema might have been alarmed for his visitor's immediate health. The youngster was breathing stertorously, and this, combined with his sweating forehead, unwavering blue eyes, and complete lack of expression, made a somewhat alarming spectacle.

But the actor had other more personal matters to consider. He sank into his chair, ignoring this time the subconscious warning.

"Are you talking about Chloe Staratt?"

"Of course," Mr. Gyp Rains seemed to regard the question as surprisingly unnecessary.

"I see," said Tadema with awful solemnity. "I see. And what do you intend me to do about it?"

For the first time during the interview Gyp Rains's face changed. His eyebrows rose. His eyes became round and foolish.

"What *can* you do?" he said. "I only came to tell you."

Tadema's mouth opened but no sound came.

Mr. Rains continued. "I've only told you," he said gently, "because I did not think it was the decent thing not to. You can't do anything because we're in love. You see that, don't

you?"

The final question was put gently. There was no threat in it, and as such it was completely unanswerable.

"Look here, my boy —" Tadema was clutching wildly at straws, "I don't want to appear offensive, but you don't think that something Lady Chloe may have said may have given you a wrong impression? I mean —"

"Oh, no." The shining countenance was blank as ever. "I brought this along. She couldn't keep it very well, could she? She saw that as soon as I put it to her."

And, advancing toward the dressing-table, he set down amongst the grease-paint the very large and expensive diamond-and-platinum ring which Sir Geoffrey had chosen only a few weeks before and had paid for but a few days previously.

There was a long and difficult pause. Mr. Gyp Rains braced himself for the final efforts. "Both Chloe and I rely upon your decency, sir. We know you won't give us away. Chloe's afraid of trouble with her father, you see, and so far, you are the only person in the know. You won't let us down, will you? I know that."

And, having dropped his bombshell, Mr. Gyp Rains, lone boy flier and latest darling of the air-minded British public, smiled kindly at Sir Geoffrey Tadema and walked stolidly out of the dressing-room, a ridiculous, humourless, and unconquerable figure.

Tadema acted the big scene silently by himself for perhaps two minutes. He paced the floor, he looked at the ring, he peered at himself in the mirror, he threw the ring away, picked it up again, put it in his pocket, shrugged his shoulders, wiped his eyes, and went through every pantomime which the most exacting producer could have desired.

And then, having reacted in this perfectly normal way, he pulled himself up abruptly and began to think. There were many words which fitly described Chloe, but he was not the man to fall to cursing. Behind his fury there was a quiet part of his mind which could almost admire her. As a piece of publicity it was superb — the discovery in Athens, the secret marriage, and that stolid, love-besotted boy to back her up. There was a story to delight the most blasé of journalists.

It was while he was visualizing this flux of newsprint that he suddenly saw his own name. A wave of hot blood rose up in his throat and passed over his head, so that his hairs tingled. He saw himself d flated, saw his care-

fully built-up personality blown away in idle sheets down a dusty road. This would be the end of him. This would be disaster—the beautiful, romantic figure drowned in tears of pity if not derision.

He bounded to his feet again. Something had got to be done. Yes, by God! something had got to be done, and how much time had he?

The call-boy knocked timidly at his door.

"Five minutes, Sir Geoffrey. Curtain's up."

There are times when the mind panics, moments when the imagination takes the bit between its teeth and carries a man headlong through vasty avenues of nightmare much more vivid than actual experience, hampered by time and the hour, can ever hope to be.

In the intervals of the worst performance of his life Tadema lived through the whole gamut of human humiliation. He heard himself pitied and derided, heard his age discussed and fixed at an erroneous sixty-five, saw his perennial youth withered and his beautiful façade torn down to reveal a travesty of himself, ten times more false than any illusion of the past.

Even in his saner moments, when he regarded the situation coldly, the prospect of being publicly jilted by Chloe for a younger, wider-known man was not inviting, to say the least of it.

To do him justice, he had very little thought of retaliation as such. His mind was completely taken up with self-protective projects.

Even so, his immediate plan of campaign was most difficult to decide, and there was the vital question of time. When had the insufferable young lout said they intended to elope? To-morrow night? Tadema paused in the middle of the repudiation scene in the second act and stared glassily at Miss Miller, who played the girl.

She gave him his cue and an apprehensive glance under her lashes. It was not like the old man to lunch unwisely. She hoped devoutly that he was not going to have a stroke.

By the middle of the third act Tadema had it all worked out. If Chloe was going to elope the following day she would be discovered in Athens the next morning and would make the evening papers of the same day. That gave him only until to-morrow to set up a counterblast, only until to-morrow to get into print himself with a sensation which would make her effort an anti-climax.

His mind revolved feverishly. To-day was Tuesday. Therefore Chloe would strike the headlines on Thursday evening. That gave

him Wednesday night's press and the Thursday's morning papers to get his blow in first. It could be done. It was just possible if one acted promptly.

There was only one vital question to be settled. What on earth could he do? Tadema was desperate.

He dismissed his dresser and stood staring through the minute window of his dressing-room at the roofs and spires of London, deep blue in the evening light.

At length he turned slowly away and switched on the lights. He had decided on the first step. Where it was going to lead him he had no idea, but like all true artists he trusted to his instinct and prepared for action.

The inspiration for the second move would come, he did not doubt. Necessity, the proverbial mother, should provide.

Having committed himself to the undertaking, he went about his preparations with artistry and dispatch. The nondescript grey suit taken down from the peg in the big store where no one recognized him, since no one expected him, fitted well enough to look comfortable. The soft shirt with two collars was equally unarresting, as were the brown shoes, socks, tie, and even underwear—Tadema was justly famous in theatrical circles for his passion for detail—which he collected on his journey throughout the shop.

At a minute before six o'clock he walked out of the store, a half-dozen or so blue packages stowed away in a neat brown suitcase.

Fifteen minutes later the cloakroom of Tottenham Court Road Tube Station received the case and Tadema taxied home to his Mayfair flat to bathe and dine before returning to the theatre for the evening performance. He was not exactly happy, but he experienced that curious sense of elation which comes to those about to take a desperate plunge.

The discovery that Sharper, his old-maidish and inappropriately-named man, had let Lessington into the study to wait for him was an unexpected blow. Lessington was a plump, bald, forty-ish person whose early effeminacy had grown into effeteness. If his plays had not been so competent Tadema could not have tolerated him. As it was he fraternized with him but grudgingly.

Lessington was in form. Apéritif in hand, he posed before the fire and just had to tell old Taddy the perfectly marvellous notion he had just had for the new show.

"Of course I shall put it over," said Lessington. He spoke with assurance, and Tadema reflected bitterly that he would.

"Splendid, my dear fellow,

splendid!" said Tadema with great heartiness, since a warning voice in the back of his mind bade him behave normally. If anyone should guess there was anything unusual afoot the whole strength of his project would be ruined.

He got rid of Lessington only when dinner was over and he was departing for the theatre. Conversation had been a great strain, but he had weathered it. Lessington, he knew, would now be prepared to swear that dear old Taddy had been completely himself and to report that they had spent a very happy hour discussing a new play.

Back at the theatre Tadema put on a very careful performance. The relieved Miss Miller found the Old Man in the best of humours. He accepted a supper invitation for midnight and agreed to give a magazine correspondent an interview after the show.

As the time wore on he was conscious of a growing nervousness, but he had made up his mind and in the interval before the third act he wandered into De Lara's room and stood chatting with the 'heavy' for a minute or so.

Paul Ritchie, his own understudy, who shared the dressing-room, was lounging disconsolately in his corner, he saw, but the young actor said afterward that the Old Man never once looked in his direction after the first affable nod.

After leaving De Lara, Tadema, who was wearing the striking pin-stripe suit in which he appeared in the third act, was seen by Lottie Queen, the 'heavy' woman, on the staircase leading up to the roof. He smiled at her, graciously congratulating her on her performance, and passed on. It went through the old lady's mind that it was odd that he should be wandering about the theatre when time was getting on, but it was a habit of the company to wander up to the flat roof when the weather was close and she thought no more of the incident just then.

An electrician observed him higher up on the staircase immediately below the roof, but the man said no word passed, and that was all the evidence the united company could supply when the inquiry was instituted.

At the moment when Tadema stepped out upon the dark roof, the dizzy lights of the City below him, he was trembling with excitement, but he realized that he had very little time and moved swiftly, stepping daintily across the leads to the desolate collection of builders' débris which he had observed there earlier in the week and the recollection of which had given him his idea.

The Gresham Theatre was an

old-fashioned building whose rococo parapet was barely four feet away from its nearest neighbour, the Ever-Safe Insurance Company's premises. At one particular point a younger man might have sprung from one roof to the other, but Tadema preferred the plank. Pulling it out from beneath the laths and folded sacks he pushed it into position and prepared to climb across.

It was a risky proceeding for a man of his years and unathletic habits, and it is possible that had he seriously considered the physical side of the venture his nerve might have failed him.

As it was, however, his thoughts were occupied only by the other aspect of the plan, the enormity of it, the courage, the complete ruthlessness. It took his breath away. To walk out of the theatre in costume in the midst of the play! To go on to the roof and thence to — disappear! Told of any man it would be a piquant story, like the beginning of a mystery yarn, but when the man was Tadema— oh, the headlines would be large and the wind would seep out of Chloe's sails! Would she start, even? Sir Geoffrey doubted it.

He stepped on to the insurance company's leads and thrust the plank back sharply. It clattered on to the theatre roof so noisily that for a moment he was afraid. Discovery at this juncture would be disastrous. But there was no untoward sound from below, and he went on.

The fire escape descended into a narrow alley behind the building. As Tadema went down the spidery stair a new cause for alarm confronted him. London is a crowded city, and the ever-watchful police are suspicious of shadowy figures on the fire escapes of dark buildings. An arrest, or even an inquiry, would be too embarrassing even to contemplate.

Sir Geoffrey reached the pavement white with apprehension. He went unchallenged, however, and sped through the darker streets toward Tottenham Court Road.

For the next half-hour his mind was taken up completely with technical details. It is a simple thing to plan to change one's clothes, and with them one's personality, in the toilet room of a large and crowded station, but it is a surprisingly complicated project to carry through. Sir Geoffrey had completely overlooked the hampering qualities of a sense of guilt.

In spite of these unexpected difficulties, however, his metamorphosis was remarkably successful. One does not dress up and pretend to be somebody else practically every night of one's professional life without becom-

ing an adept at the art, and at twenty minutes to eleven, when Paul Ritchie was ploughing through the last act at the Gresham, a mild-looking provincial gentleman walked on to Liverpool Street Station, a newish portmanteau in his hand.

This stranger bore a superficial resemblance to the debonair Sir Geoffrey, it is true, but none of the weary passengers on the great dirty station glanced at the neat grey-suited figure with any sort of recognition.

Tadema himself was gradually getting the feel of his part. As he became increasingly aware of his safety he experienced a new sensation. He felt free. He had fifty pounds in cash on him in an envelope — all he had dared to collect without leaving traces of flight. His watch, studs, wallet, and a letter or two were still in the clothes he had worn on leaving the theatre which were now stowed away in the case in hand. He felt light and irresponsible, almost as though he had really walked out of life as cleanly and as mysteriously as the world must soon believe.

He glanced at the station clock. His train, the Yarmouth Mail, left in thirty-five minutes. Why he had chosen Yarmouth he did not know, save that it was at a fair distance from London and was on the coast. He had no definite plan in his head as yet, but he relied upon the long slow journey to bring counsel. The first and most important step had been taken and Chloe had been passed at the post. That was the main thing, and the rest, he thought superbly, would come.

The suitcase, and its contents, must be disposed of to the best possible advantage. Obviousness dictated the coast. Hence Yarmouth, since Brighton would have been ridiculous. But all that was yet to be arranged. Inspiration would arrive.

Tadema smiled, and the man who had been watching him so intently for the past ten minutes from the other side of the platform moved a little nearer.

Duds Wallace walked round Tadema, eyeing him covertly. The height was okay, he decided. So were the shoulders. And there was about the same room round the waist. But above all the style was right, and, in Duds's opinion, style was the ticket.

With a certain department in Scotland Yard where minor criminals are regarded with complete understanding, Duds Wallace was something of a pet and a curiosity. He was unique. His long criminal record, which comprised some sixteen convictions, related an odd history of misdemeanour and proved conclusively that whatever other qualities Mr. Wallace might have possessed the

gods had not made him versatile. His programme was always the same. Whenever his somewhat finicky taste dictated that he required a new outfit, he stole a suitcase.

This in itself was sufficiently unenterprising, but he carried his orthodoxy a step further. Invariably he stole a suitcase from a railway station, and — invariably this was the hallmark of a Wallace activity — his victim was a man who closely resembled himself in build, colouring, and a quiet, inexpensive taste.

At the moment, Mr. Wallace, whose sartorial ambitions alone seemed to lead him into wrongdoing, was downright ashamed of his appearance. His sharp brown eyes rested wistfully on Tadema's substantial portmanteau. There was a suit in that: he would bet on it; a suit, shirts, pyjamas, and, with luck, a pair of shoes.

He glanced at the actor-manager's feet and those decent brown shoes with the round toes swept away his last remnants of doubt.

Having made up his mind, Duds followed his routine closely. When the train came into the main platform Tadema selected an empty third-class compartment, placed his bag on the corner seat to reserve it, and, as his watcher confidently expected, stepped out on to the platform again and wandered off to look for a paper.

As soon as he was lost to sight, Duds entered a second empty third, a little lower down the train. Instead of sitting down he passed on into the corridor and wandered up to Tadema's compartment. His casual manner was excellent. He gripped the suitcase with just the right familiarity and carried it out into the corridor.

As he passed on down the train he glanced into each carriage enquiringly as he went by. Tadema was nowhere to be seen. It was really very simple.

When Mr. Wallace reached the end of the train, which had pulled into the shadow of the passenger bridge, he walked out of the last compartment, passed through the main booking hall and, turning up the dark hill, melted quietly into the street.

Tadema discovered his loss when it was too late to do anything about it. Irritated and disconsolate, he threw himself down in a corner seat and glowered. Apart from the normal sense of insult which invariably comes to one on discovering that the misfortunes which seem so natural in others should have at last overtaken oneself, Tadema felt he had a special grievance. Without his clothes there was really no point in his going to the coast at all, yet here he was entrained for Yarmouth, of all places. The

very foundation of the plan he had intended to evolve upon this journey was removed. Moreover, he could have no redress for the loss of his property. In the circumstances he could hardly go to the police. It was all very exasperating, and augured, he could not help feeling, bad luck to the venture.

He reviewed his position gloomily. If things were not going to go right they were going to go very badly indeed. However, he comforted himself with the thought of the sensation in the morrow's papers and, after some moments of happy contemplation, some of his old confidence returned and he leant back, content to wait for inspiration to arrive. Something, no doubt, would turn up. He slept.

He awoke with a start at one minute to four in the morning to find himself bundled out on to a dark and clammily cold railway station, without overcoat or luggage. He looked about him. No provincial town is at its best at four o'clock on an autumn morning. Tadema did not know the place and did not particularly want to. His best plan, he decided, was to leave Yarmouth. He consulted a weary porter.

"First train, sir? Where for, sir?"

"Anywhere," said Tadema recklessly. "The first train to leave this station."

The man looked at him curiously and replied that there was a slow branch-line train leaving in an hour.

"Take you to Esbury, Lessing, and Saffronden," he concluded.

Saffronden. The name struck a familiar note in Tadema's memory. There was a theatre in Saffronden, or rather, there had been once a theatre there: the Theatre Royal, a little dark house with a smell. The old 'Hearts Afire' company under Benny Fancy had played there for a week way back in 190—. Tadema forgot the year.

Another memory returned to him. It was very vague, but it conjured up a sensation of warmth and stuffiness and amusement. It was a joke, he fancied, and something to do with cocoa, of all things; something excruciatingly funny to do with cocoa. He brightened up.

"I'll go to Saffronden," he said, adding abruptly as he returned to the temporarily forgotten porter: "There's a bookstall there, isn't there? What time do the morning papers arrive?"

Both bewildered replies having proved satisfactory, Tadema the fugitive entered the Saffronden train.

He was waiting on Saffronden station when the papers arrived, and he pounced upon a copy of

the *Sun* and turned the pages over feverishly.

At first he thought he was not mentioned at all and a feeling of bewilderment passed over him. It was not until the third time that he searched the paper that he found the small paragraph tucked away at the bottom of the page.

'Famous Actor's Indisposition. Sir Geoffrey Tadema, the well-known actor-manager, was forced by indisposition to retire from the cast of *Lovers' Meeting*, now enjoying a successful run at the Gresham. Sir Geoffrey's part in the third act was played by his understudy, Paul Ritchie. Sir Geoffrey is confidently expected to return to his role at this evening's performance.'

Tadema swore softly under his breath. What an idiot Wentworth was! As a business manager he was intelligent and economical, but in an emergency he always did the wrong thing. If only the fool knew it, he was wasting precious time. He'd have to rely on the evening papers. The lunatic would be sure to do something by that time.

Tadema could not repress a schoolboyish chuckle at the spectacle. "Dashing about like a demented hen," he said to himself as he walked down the winding hill from the station into the main road of the town, which had miraculously become much smaller and sleepier than he remembered it.

But by the time he was breakfasting in the seedy commercial room of the 'Red Lion' his trepidation had returned. Time was so very short. By this time tomorrow Chloe would be well on her way to Athens and a few hours later the wires would be buzzing.

He was beside himself with impatience and a growing sense of impotence in the matter. There was nothing he could possibly do to speed things up. He had relied upon the morning newspaper to give him a lead. Whatever he did, it had to be good.

By the end of breakfast he had decided to wait. Nothing could be done at the moment; so much was painfully obvious.

By paying in advance and sending out for a suit of pyjamas, Tadema dispelled any doubts which the clerk at the 'Red Lion' might have entertained concerning him, and, having bathed and shaved, he retired to bed, leaving instructions that he was to be called with tea and an evening paper so soon as that sheet should have arrived.

He lay awake for some time, fuming at Wentworth and worrying over his predicament, but his night's journey had been long and uncomfortable in spite of his doze in the train, and he dropped

off into a fitful sleep.

However, he was awake and pacing up and down the room in pyjamas and a bed quilt when the chambermaid arrived. The girl set down the tray and would have spoken, but Tadema had pounced upon the folded paper and she went out again huffily.

Right across the front page and surmounting a large photograph of himself were the words:

TRAGIC DEATH OF FAMOUS ACTOR

The double-column headlines told more.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE FROM ROOF IN MIDST OF PLAY

DEATH THIS MORNING IN TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES
DIES IN STAGE CLOTHES

Early this morning a man was knocked down and terribly mutilated by an L. C. C. tram in the Gray's Inn Road. From papers in his pocket the police discovered him to be the famous stage actor, Sir Geoffrey Tadema. Subsequent inquiries at Sir Geoffrey's flat proved that the actor-manager had not been seen by any of his associates since the interval after the second act of *Lovers' Meeting* at the Gresham Theatre last night, when he was seen by Miss Lottie Queen going up on the roof of the theatre.

'When Sir Geoffrey's body was found it was clad in the clothes which he wore in the third act of the piece. His friends can give no explanation for the tragedy. 'He was in the best of humours when I saw him last night,' said Mr. Lessington, the playwright, on the 'phone this morning. 'I cannot understand it.'

'Mr. Henry Sharper, Sir Geoffrey's valet, broke down at the mortuary where he was taken to identify the body. He fainted when he saw his master's corpse, and has been taken home to relatives suffering from shock.

'A summary of Sir Geoffrey's career is given on page 5.'

Tadema let the paper drop from his hand. His eyes were glazed, and the expression upon his face was mainly pathetic.

"Well, I — I'm damned," he said aloud, and added as a gleam of intelligence returned to his blue eyes: "I am, too."

Tragic death. Tadema sat on the edge of his bed in his new pyjamas and re-read the words until they became meaningless and afterward horribly clear again. He was, of course, completely unaware of the existence, or rather pre-existence, of Duds Wallace, that luckless seeker after sartorial correctness who, clad in all the glory of the pinstripe

suit, had blundered blindly into a tram on the way to air his plumage.

But it was obvious that some disaster must have occurred. Tadema read every word the paper had printed about himself, and there were a great many, and then, with disaster weighing numbly upon him, he dressed carefully and went downstairs.

He collected the other papers and carried them off to his room. They had the same story, of course, but with a few added details.

There was only one mention of Chloe. The *Trumpeter* observed that Sir Geoffrey's financée, Lady Chloe Staratt, was out of London.

"Thinking out some way of cashing in on the story," thought Tadema grimly. "Or, more likely, trying to prevent the young flying lout from blethering his side of the affair."

For the first time a faint smile passed over the actor's lips. Chloe was frustrated all right; temporarily rendered speechless, it seemed.

His enjoyment in this aspect of the affair was short-lived as his own position became painfully apparent. As far as publicity was concerned he had certainly scored heavily. His name and prowess filled all three papers, but what of the future? What could he do? What on earth could he do? How could he return without providing the greatest anticlimax of all time?

He toyed with the idea of simply walking back into his part and meeting the subsequent inquiry with a more or less plausible story. That would be a sensational course, in all conscience, and would serve his purpose very well unless Chloe eloped. And she would: he knew it instinctively. Chloe would elope and people would draw the inevitable and, unfortunately, true conclusions.

The only way to prevent her going off and marrying someone else immediately was for him to remain dead. If he remained dead, how could he ever resurrect himself? How could he ever explain why he had allowed some unknown man to be buried in his stead?

He wandered out into the town. Some of the passers-by glanced at the stranger in their midst with the mild interest of country folk, and Tadema might have been alarmed for the safety of his incognito had he cared about it. Fortunately, or unfortunately, he was perfectly safe. The carefully taken studio portraits reproduced in the newspapers showed a man twenty years younger, with darker eyes and deeper and more interesting shadows than this pale, worried-looking middle-aged gentleman

who hurried along so fast and yet, had they only known it, so aimlessly.

As far as the man in the street was concerned, Sir Geoffrey Tadema was dead.

The queue outside the pit impeded his progress, and finally pulled him up. He stood staring at the shabby old theatre for a moment with the first interest he had shown in externals since the advent of the evening papers. The Theatre Royal was on its last legs, or at least its plaster pillars were crumbling. Tadema was shocked. A genteel shabbiness it had always possessed, besides its characteristic smell, but in the old days it had never looked like this. To Tadema the Theatre Royal, Saffronden, looked like some depraved and leering old harridan clad in filthy finery, all the more depressing because he had known her in her better days.

The Chasberg Stock Company was playing there, he gathered from the bills. The piece that week was *Beggar's Choice,* and the highest price of admission five-and-nine.

Tadema took a box.

He remembered the play as soon as the curtain rose. It was an ancient melodrama about a race-horse, an impoverished lord, and the inevitable Lady Mary. He had played in it himself many times in the old days.

He almost enjoyed it. The contemplation of the past at least took his mind off the horror of the present.

Seated well back among the dusty crimson curtains, the pungent camphory smell tingling in his nostrils, he looked down at the shabby old stage and remembered with a hint of sadness something he had long forgotten, the excitement of these early days. Tadema, already extremely sorry for himself, nearly wept when he remembered how long ago it all was.

He had been watching the Lady Mary for some minutes before he recognized her. It was a trick of her voice which finally caught his attention and made him lean forward in the box and peer more closely at her face. She was older, of course — far too old for the part. Tadema could not remember her name, but her voice was familiar, and she had a way of turning her head and smiling that came back to him.

He could not see his programme, and relied upon his memory. What *was* the woman's name? Chrissie something, he was inclined to think, and they had travelled together. It must have been in the old repertoire days.

She had improved, he thought suddenly. That was it; in the old days she had been appalling. Appalling and rather sweet. She

was still pretty enough, if it came to that, in spite of her figure settling and her hair looking a bit old-fashioned and not so bright.

Tadema closed his eyes and delved back into the past. The voices on the stage helped him considerably. He remembered whole sequences, and there was one scene on the steps of a hotel just off the racecourse which returned so vividly to his mind that he sat up abruptly. That was it! Her name was Chrissie, and they must have played this part together at some time in the past.

It wasn't such a coincidence, if one thought of it. He had played in the provinces for fifteen years, and there must have been a great many actresses who claimed to have played with Tadema. Some of them Sir Geoffrey could remember much more clearly. This woman was only a vague memory. But he knew her. Her name was Chrissie something, and she had been rather sweet. It had been very long ago, he decided; in his early years. He didn't think there had been the ghost of an affair. If there had he would have remembered.

He turned his attention to the stage. Whole scenes, he realized, were modern interpolations. Much of the bravura had been dropped. It was all very interesting.

When the lights of the first interval went up he looked at his programme. "Lady Mary . . . Miss Chrissie Dilling." Chrissie Dilling; that was the name. How could a woman have gone through a lifetime of leading ladyship with a name like that?

He was debating whether to send his card round, and had indeed half decided to when he remembered his predicament with a start and the whole dreadful business poured back into his mind. He did not go out of the theatre, however, but sat there till the curtain rose again. At least he was hidden, and inspiration must surely come in time.

Fortunately for him, the second act opened with a scene in an attic room which he remembered. The words came back to him so clearly that he was irritated by the rather hopeless boy playing the part when his inflections and interpretations were unfamiliar.

Chrissie *had* improved! She was almost good, in an old-fashioned way. Not West-End standard, of course, but first-class for the provinces. She held the audience, too. They loved her.

Something else returned to Tadema's memory. He heard Chrissie complaining that someone always struck a match in her big scenes and it put her off. Always at the most dramatic part that

little pin-point of light out in the dark audience would catch her eye, telling her that there was someone whose attention she was not holding.

Softly, and feeling indescribably guilty, Tadema drew a box from his pocket. He waited for the right moment and struck the match. He was leaning forward, and the flickering light caught his face, accentuating the hollows and darkening the eyes.

Miss Dilling wavered, her glance rested on the box, and then, with a little shrill cry, she clasped her hand over her heart.

Tadema started back in his box. He did not see her gallant recovery, did not see her struggling on with the scene. The only thought in his mind was one of intense excitement, and, curiously enough, of relief. He was alive. The secret was out: whatever disaster might accompany the revelation, he was alive again. Somebody knew it. He slipped out of the box and hurried round to the stage door.

He was sitting in the dressing-room when she came in from the stage, still a little pale under her make-up. Tadema rose and gallantly held out his hands.

"Why, Chrissie!" he said.

The woman stared at him, and for an uncomfortable moment he thought that she was going to faint. Stock Company actresses are more or less inured to shock, however, and Miss Dilling revived.

"Well, Geoff," she said, and added awkwardly after a pause, "I was only thinking of you this evening."

As soon as the words left her mouth she bit her lower lip sharply and regarded him apologetically with round eyes.

Tadema remembered the trick. He remembered the eyes, too, and it occurrd to him again that there must have been some sort of little romance here: nothing serious; just a boy-and-girl flirtation perhaps. She was several years younger than himself; ten, perhaps — he was not sure.

Miss Dilling continued to stare. "Well, I don't know what to say, I'm sure," she said at last. "The papers are wrong, of course."

Sir Geoffrey felt suddenly at ease. His brief experience as an unimportant, not to say practically nonexistent, person had told upon him subconsciously, and the relief at finding himself once more a personage was tremendous.

"Well, naturally," he murmured, smiling at her and sinking down once again into the uncomfortable basket chair. "There's been some silly mistake. I must put things right in a day or so. Meanwhile, this is very pleasant, Chrissie."

Miss Dilling blinked, and Ta-

dema remembered that she had never been very clever.

"But what happened?" she ventured timidly. "How did you get here?"

Tadema leaned forward. "As a matter of fact, old girl," he said, unconsciously slipping back a decade or even two in his phrase: "I disappeared. Someone pinched my clothes and got himself smashed up unrecognisably; the idiots think it's me."

"Disappeared?" echoed Miss Dilling. "Why, Geoffrey, whatever for?"

"Strain," said Tadema, who was always more inventive before an audience. "My dear girl, the strain and the worry of that West-End work — show after show, expenses running on and people badgering one for jobs! I couldn't stand it. I felt I must get away or go mad. So I walked out."

Miss Dilling raised her head and met his eyes. So easily she could have said: "From the roof of the house in the middle of the show?" or even: "That's a nice yarn to tell anybody." Either remark would have been disastrous. But Miss Dilling was a rare person.

"You poor boy," said Miss Dilling.

Presently, when a girl arrived with the modest glass of stout which she always took after the second act for her health's sake, she insisted that Tadema swallow it.

Since he had eaten no food all day he was very grateful.

"Look here, Chrissie," he said when her call came, "I'll go in front again but I'll look round after the show. We might have a little supper together at the 'Red Lion.' I'm staying there. What do you say?"

Miss Dilling flushed. "That would be very nice," she said.

"You'll keep my secret, won't you?" Either the stout or the unusualness of the whole adventure was stimulating Sir Geoffrey's mercurial temperament.

"Of course I will!" She was laughing. She really was extraordinarily well preserved. "Oh, I must fly. After the show, then."

Miss Dilling was gone. Tadema went back to the box.

Chrissie's performance was not quite so good in the third act. She was excited and her mannerisms were accentuated. She reminded Tadema strongly of herself in the old days. Chrissie Dilling was still, in spite of years of the most disappointing, soul-wearying work in the world, rather sweet and nice.

She was also very human, so that if she confided her thrilling secret to Mr. Katz, the stage manager, she was not altogether to blame.

Mr. Katz did not believe her, but he was loth to let any oppor-

tunity of pleasing Mr. Lewis, the manager, go by, for Mr. Lewis had the ear of Mr. Chasberg himself.

Tadema was actually waiting just inside the stage door when Miss Dilling came out. As he helped her into one of the few cabs which Saffronden possessed he was so engrossed that he did not see Mr. Lewis, who was so smart that his friends thought him wasted in the provinces, watching him from the stage-doorkeeper's window with a thoughtful and introspective eye.

The morning papers published a fresh Tadema sensation. Lady Chloe Staratt had been led by an apparently friendly *Sun* reporter into an admission that her engagement to Sir Geoffrey had been broken off on the morning of his disappearance, but whereas the weeping, broken-hearted Chloe might have made a pretty enough picture to grace any suburban breakfast table, it was considerably marred by an independent statement by Mr. Gyp Rains in the same paper to the effect that his own marriage to Lady Chloe had been fixed for the morrow, this announcement being backed up by the evidence of a special license.

The *Sun,* never famed for its delicacy, published the two stories one after the other and the report of the inquest in the next column.

Since the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of 'Death by misadventure' and vetoed absolutely any question of deliberation, the combined effect of the three stories was unfortunate as far as Chloe was concerned.

Tadema, reading the paper over his breakfast in the hotel lounge, was almost sorry for her.

Most of his sympathy, however, he reserved for himself. The morning's news had brought him no respite. He was still a dead man, and to revive with honour looked like proving an impossibility.

He had just decided to lie low for another forty-eight hours at least, until opportunity if not sheer necessity drove him to action, when Miss Dilling arrived. Tadema was pleased to see her, but only mildly so. By morning light she looked most of her age and her clothes were painfully provincial. However, her smile was friendly and admiring.

She came out with her request immediately, her eyes meeting his anxiously. She hardly dared to suggest it, but Derek Fayre, her leading man, was really too ill to play and Mr. Lewis was so worried. The incognito would be preserved, of course. No one knew. She had simply spoken of him as an actor friend, and that had given Mr. Lewis the idea.

After all, they had done the show so many times in the past. It would be like old times. Would he? Would he? Dare she ask?

The idea appealed to Tadema from the moment it was presented to him. It is possible, of course, that he might have smelt a rat if anyone but Chrissie Dilling had put the thing up to him. But she was so patently without second motive, so obviously anxious only to play at old times again. All women were sentimental, Tadema thought privately; all except that hussy Chloe.

Over supper the previous evening he had asked Chrissie why she had never married. Her reply had been heartbreaking.

"Oh, you know how it is," she had said, wrinkling her nose at him. "First, it's a career. Afterward, there's no one round the theatre quite good enough. And then — you just don't."

Poor old Chrissie, with her ladylikeness, her stout for her strength's sake, her old-fashioned sophistication that was sophistication no more. She just hadn't.

He went to rehearsal with her like a lamb. He had a glorious time. Every nervous criticism put in by the breathless Mr. Katz for verisimilitude's sweet sake amused and delighted him. Things which would have rendered him speechless in his own theatre here struck him as being funny, and the old play came back easily. Right words, wrong words, delicious gags, they slipped to his tongue and he let himself go.

The irony of the situation as he knew it he found exquisite, and all the more so since he had an appreciative audience in Miss Dilling. Neither of them so much as thought of Mr. Lewis, which was perhaps fortunate.

Breathless, laughing, and twenty years younger, Sir Geoffrey knocked off for lunch. He and Miss Dilling ate sausage and drank beer at the 'Red Lion' and reminisced.

Tadema put the world of reality into the back of his mind. He felt reckless and somehow slightly truculent. If the world combined to mock and frustrate him, at least he was a fine old trouper still. Yes, by God he was! And secretly he longed for the show.

There was an electric atmosphere in the Theatre Royal that night. The whole company was in a state of whispering hysteria. Even the seedy orchestra tuned up its ancient instruments with a spirited quaver or two and the audience had got wind of something in the magical way that audiences have.

The only two innocent participants in the comedy were frankly and engagingly happy. The first act went with a bang. Tadema was aware of a large and appre-

ciative audience, and gave his best. The Personality revived in all its early splendour. Miss Dilling was quite carried away.

No curtain calls till the end of the show: that was the rule of the house and it was observed.

Tadema climbed happily out of mess jacket into hunting pink and from hunting pink to naval uniform without a dresser or a qualm. He romped and gagged and threw his weight about atrociously, while the provincial audience, which only asks a little spirit, rejoiced with him. It was a glorious night.

When the final moment came on the steps of the castle (how fond we were of steps!), and the lovers were reunited with the immortal line, 'Marry me, Mary. I'm a man again,' Sir Geoffrey swung Miss Dilling into his arms and kissed her in the style of his predecessors with a sound that was heard at the back of the gallery.

That gallery rose, and the grand, glorious sound of applause poured sweetly on his head. Tadema, gallantly leading Miss Dilling, took the curtain. Not once or twice, but again and again they came forward. At last Dilling fled and Tadema took the final call alone.

As he stood before the curtain, the lights shot up in the theatre and he looked around its dustiness. The crowd was still applauding and Tadema bowed. He was superbly happy.

As he raised his head again, however, he stiffened. Directly in front of him, in the middle of the first row, was a boiled shirt, and above that shirt sat the smug face of Evans of the *Trumpeter*.

Tadema, grown old again, glanced sharply down the line, his blood chilled. There they were, all of them: Richardson, Playfair, Jones—the whole gang.

He walked back through the curtains, his head held stiffly but his eyes unfocused, strode through the sniggering throng behind the scenes and entered the little dressing-room at the end of the corridor.

Miss Dilling, a faded blue robe over her slip, turned from her dressing-table and paled before his expression. He told her what he thought coldly and all the more bitterly because of his great humiliation. Miss Dilling wept.

"I didn't—oh, Geoff, I didn't."

"Nobody else knew," said Tadema. "Do you realize," he went on with sudden heat, "that to get a little publicity for your paltry little company you've sacrificed and made a fool of *me?* Publicity!"

He laughed rather theatrically, and would have made his exit on that word, but they were upon him like a pack of dogs. They all swarmed in through the door, jostling, laughing, eager and con-

tent that the chase was yielding a kill. They were all there, the half-dozen that he had seen in the stalls and more that he had missed.

Tadema, obscuring the tragic Miss Dilling, faced them.

"Let's have the story, Sir Geoffrey—the whole story. It'll take a bit of explaining, you know."

That was Richardson, grinning away like a Barbary ape.

"A remarkable performance, Tadema. I didn't think you had it in you."

Sir Geoffrey had often wanted to kick Evans, but never more than now.

"Come, Tadema, was it because of Lady Chloe? You've seen the papers, of course. What poor devil did you lend your clothes to?"

They were jostling him, hectoring him. His mind shuttered.

"We'll let you down lightly. It was the engagement, of course?"

"Gentlemen—" Tadema raised a protesting hand, "—just a moment. Just a moment, please."

The sound of his own voice gave him confidence. It always did; it was so absolutely right.

"Since you've hunted me out — I almost said hounded me down —" the easy, rounded phrases slipped out softly, "I suppose I must tell you the truth."

"I should say so. I'm holding a wire," muttered a youngster, and was instantly suppressed.

Tadema went smoothly on. "Lady Chloe Staratt has said that our engagement was broken off the day before yesterday. Lady Chloe is a very sweet and charming girl, but she is not quite accurate. Our engagement was broken off last Sunday —"

"Why? The whole story. We must have the whole story."

Tadema shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands. A faint smile which was not wholly assumed played round his lips.

"Even an actor has private affairs, gentlemen," he murmured. "And yet — well — since you've come for the truth —"

Turning swiftly like a conjuror, he took Miss Dilling's quivering hand.

"This is Miss Chrissie Dilling," he said simply. "My first love and my last. This evening she has honoured me by accepting the proposal I made her when I first arrived in this town yesterday morning."

He paused for the announcement to sink in, and then, when he was sure he had all their attention, added superbly and with great dignity: "Even at my age, gentlemen, romance is not wholly dead. There is always one woman — somewhere."

He watched them scribbling and his smile widened. Inspira-

tion had arrived.

Chrissie Dilling, that rare woman, did not speak.

Some days later Sir Geoffrey Tadema turned away from the contemplation of his wedding presents to glance at the proofs of an interview which his fiancée had granted to a woman's magazine. Chrissie had brought it to him and now stood at his side while he ran a pencil along the lines.

'Christiana Dilling glanced at me and I thought I saw something very charming in her wistful blue eyes. 'Of course, I always hoped he'd come back,' she confessed.'

Tadema lifted the pencil.

"We'll take out that 'hoped,' my dear," he said, "and put 'knew.' It's better publicity."

BERLIN SPY MAP

The East German army major presses a button behind the huge map of Berlin, and ninety little red lights pop on. "These are the headquarters of every spy organization in West Berlin," he says, and the foreign visitors, crowded into the room in the left wing of the Brandenburg Gate, a few yards from the Berlin Wall, sigh in unison.

He points to one light. This is where the British security organization has its headquarters. To another. This is the headquarters of the C.I.A. To another. From there, French espionage is directed. The location of the East German equivalent service is of course not pointed out. . . .

He presses another button. The red lights are replaced by sixty-six yellow lights. These are the headquarters, he says, of the "German revanchist associations in West Berlin dedicated to carrying out espionage and sabotage." The visitors from abroad listen intensely.

How do you attend this lecture?

Simply contact the East German travel office, and you'll find yourself listening to the major's hour and a half long talk side by side with visitors from England, the United States, Italy, Argentina, France, Sweden and elsewhere.

Finally you are shown photographs—one of them of an assortment of cameras, tape recorders, pistols, a radio transmitter, and other necessities in a modern spy-kit. These had been found at the home of a British agent, the major explains.

Again there is a sigh.

Somewheres in the back of the room, James Bond seems to chuckle . . .

if i should die before i wake

by Cornell Woolrich

THE LITTLE GIRL that had the desk in front of mine in 5-A was named Millie Adams. I don't remember much about her, because I was only nine then, not going-on twelve like I am now. I only remember about those three lollipops—the two she got and one she never got — and how we never saw her again after that. Me and all the fellows used to tease her a lot. Afterwards when it was too late—I wished we hadn't. We didn't tease her because we had anything against her, but just because she was a girl. She had two pigtails hanging down her back, and I had a lot of fun dipping them in my inkwell and sticking chewing-gum on them. I got kept in plenty for it too.

I used to follow her around the schoolyard at noon-recess pulling them and saying "Ding ding!" like they were bells. She used to say, "I'm going to tell a policeman on you."

I know of few writers today who can probe delicately into the mind of a child and then, from that child's standpoint, tell as haunting a story as Cornell Woolrich does here... One of the all-time greats in this field, he needs no introduction to any reader of this magazine...

"Yah!" I hooted, "My father's a third grade detective—that's better than any policeman!"

"Well, then I'll tell a second grade detective, that better than a third grade one!"

That stumped me, so I went home and asked him about it that night.

He looked over at my mother, a little uncomfortably. She was the one answered, before he did. "Not better," she told me, "just a little smarter. Your father'll be one, Tommy, about the time he's fifty."

He squirmed, kind of, but he didn't say anything.

I said, "I'm going to be one too when I grow up."

She said, "God forbid!" but she seemed to be talking to my father more than me. "Never home on time for meals. Called out in the dead of night. Risking your life, your wife never knowing when you'll be carried back on a stretcher—or not at all. And for what? A picayune pension when you've given your youth and strength, and are no good to them any more!"

It sounded swell to me. He sort of smiled. "My father was one before me," he said. "And I can remember my mother saying the same thing when I was Tommy's age. *You* can't stop him, you may as well get used to the idea. It's in the blood."

"Yes? Well it's going to come out of the blood, if I've got to use the back of a hair-brush to drive it out!"

Millie Adams, on account of the way us fellows had teased her, got in the habit of eating her lunch in the classroom instead of coming out in the yard. One day when I was getting ready to go out with mine, she opened her tin lunch-box and I saw this peachy green lollipop stuck in it. One of the kind that cost a nickel apiece too, not just a cent. And green is lime, my favorite flavor. So I hung around and tried to make up with her.

"Let's be friends," I said. "Where'd you get that?"

"Someone gave it to me," she said. "It's a secret." Girls always try to tell you that any time you ask 'em anything.

I knew better than to believe her. She never had any nickels for candy, and Mr. Beidermann down at the candy store wouldn't even trust us for one of the penny kind, much less a five-cent one like this with wax paper on it.

"I bet you swiped it!" I said.

"I did not!" she flared. "A man gave it to me, I tell you! An awful nice man. He was standing on the corner when I was coming to school this morning. He called me over and took it out of his pocket and said, 'Here, little girl, you want some candy?" He said I was the prettiest little girl went by the whole

time he was standing—"

She covered her mouth with her hand. "Ooh, I forgot! He told me not to tell anybody. He said he wouldn't gimme any more if I told anybody."

"Gimme a lick," I said, "and I won't tell anybody."

"Cross your heart and swear?"

I would have promised anything to get at it. My mouth was practically dripping across her shoulder from in back. So I crossed my heart and swore. Once you do that, you can't ever tell—especially if your father's a third grade detective like mine. You're not like other fellows, you can't ever break your word, not even to a dumb thing like a girl. If you do, you're a double-crosser. He told me that and everything he says is true.

The next day when she opened her lunch-box at noon, there was an orange one in it. And orange is my favorite flavor too. I was right there on the job, believe me. We shared it lick and lick alike.

"Ooh gee!" she revelled, "he's an awful nice man. He's got big stary eyes like a saucer and they keep looking all around. He's going to give me another one tomorrow, a cinnamon one."

Cinnamon is my favorite flavor too. "Bet he forgets," I said.

"He said if he does, I should remind him, and I can go with him and get it myself. I can take as many as I want. He's got a big house off in the woods, all full of lollipops and gumdrops and chalk-lit bars, and I can bring back as much as I want."

"Then why didn't ya?" I jeered. As though any kid in their right mind would turn down a swell chance like that! I knew she was just making the whole thing up to sound important, show off.

"Because it was one minute to nine and the bell was ringing already. Think I wanna be late and spoil my record? But tomorrow I'm gonna leave the house early so I'll have lots of time."

When we got out at three I steered clear of her because I didn't want the other fellows to think I was a sissy. But she came up to me just as I was beginning a game of catch-ball with Eddie Riley and yanked my sleeve. We were about a block away, all going home in a crowd.

"Look," she whispered, "there's that man I told you gave me the lollipops. See him standing down there under the awning? *Now* d'ya believe me?"

I looked but there wasn't anything wonderful to see. Just a man in slouchy old clothes, with great big long arms like them monkeys they have at the zoo nearly hanging down to his knees. The blue shade from the awning came down over his face and shoulders, but you could see

his big pop eyes glistening through it. He had a shiny jackknife in his hand and he was cutting a callus on his finger, and looking all around him like he didn't want anybody to see what he was doing.

I was ashamed to let Eddie Riley see me talking to a girl, so I shoved her away. She didn't have any lollipop left any more, anyway. "Aw, who cares?" I growled. "Throw me a curve, Eddie!"

Eddie muffled a couple of my throws, because he was going backwards on our way home, and while he ran after the ball to pick it up, I had time to look around. Millie and the man were walking down the side-street holding hands with each other. But then all of a sudden he turned around and walked the other way in a hurry, and went around the corner without her like he forgot something. And Mr. Murphy, the traffic-cop, came up the side-street just then, on his way to stand in front of the school and direct traffic like he always did when we kids were let out. That was all.

Next day Millie finally broke her record, she didn't come to school all day.

I was kind of hopeful that maybe she'd come the day after with all that candy, like she said, and share it with me. But the day after, her desk stayed empty too.

The principal came in just before three, and we saw two men in gray suits that looked like truant-officers standing outside in the hall. We all got kind of scared at first, but it wasn't anything; they weren't after any of us for breaking windows or anything. The principal just wanted to know if anybody present had seen Millie Adams on the way to school day before yesterday.

One girl raised her hand and said she'd called for Millie, but Millie had left the house extra-early, quarter-past eight, so she'd missed her.

I was going to tell them what she told me, about that house full of candy in the woods, but I remembered I swore and crossed my heart, and my father was a third grade detective, so how could I? I knew it was all just fibs anyway, and they'd just laugh at me or make me stand up in the corner.

We never saw Millie again. One day about three months after, Miss Hammer's our teacher's eyes were all red and wet, like she'd been crying just before the bell rang. And from then on, my father wasn't home for nearly a week straight. He'd just come in late at night once in awhile, for a shave and a shower, and go right out again. One night through the door, I heard him saying something about "an es-

caped lunatic." But I couldn't understand what that word meant, I thought it was some kind of an animal. Some breed of dog, maybe.

"If we only had some kind of a lead," he said. "Any kind of description at all to go by, no matter how sketchy! If we don't get him, you know, it'll only happen over again, it always does!"

I got out of bed and I went out to him. I said, "Dad, if a guy gives his word not to tell something, and his old ma— his father's a third grade detective, can't he *ever* break his word?"

"No," he said, "never. Only stool-pigeons tell and welshers."

"One in the family's enough!" my mother said sharply. "That'll be all of that!" And she reached for her slipper, so I beat it.

Sometimes when he came home like that, that week, he brought papers with him. But when I'd find them the next day, the front page was always torn off, like it had somebody's picture on it I wasn't supposed to see. But I only went for the comic-strips anyway. Then after about a week, they were left whole again like before, and he started coming home for supper again.

Pretty soon all of us kids in school forgot all about Millie Adams.

I got promoted in the Fall, and in the Spring again, and in the Fall and in the Spring. I couldn't get anything higher than C's in proficiency and C-minuses in conduct, but as long as I made it and didn't get left behind, my father would just shove my head with his hand and say, "That's all right, Tommy, you'll make a good detective anyway. You're a chip off the old block." Only he always said it when my mother wasn't around. Oh, I nearly forgot. He got made a second-grade detective when he was only thirty-five yet, and not fifty like she said. She got kind of red when he reminded her, I noticed.

I was lucky all through 5B and 6A and 6B, I didn't have a girl sitting in front of me again until 7A. She was a new girl, transferred from another school, and her name was Jeanie Myers. She always wore a white middy blouse, and she had a bunch of brown curls hanging down her back.

I liked her from the start, because she got very good marks, and the way the work kept getting tougher all the time, it came in handy the way she let me look over her shoulders and get all the right answers. Most girls are stingy that way, but she was like a fellow. So when the other fellows started to tease her, I punched one of them in the nose and made them quit after that. But then she had to come up to me in front of the whole crowd

and say, "Tommy Lee, I think you're awful wonderful!" and I didn't like that much, you bet.

But outside of divvying her answers up, she was just as dumb as other girls. She had one baby habit; she was crazy about colored chalk. She was always carrying it around with her, and whenever you saw pink or yellow streaks on a fence or the side of a house, you knew Jeanie Myers had passed that way. She just couldn't resist marking up everything in reach, couldn't seem to go by anywhere without drawing a long track after her on a wall or sidewalk. We fellows used lots of chalk too, but the plain white kind, and we used it for something useful like a baseball score or a game of prisoner's base, not just making wavy lines along fences. She didn't even know she was doing it half the time, just walked along with her hand out tracing chalk - marks without looking.

Buying it all the time kept her pretty broke; that colored kind comes to a dime a box, and sometimes she bought as many as two boxes a week. So she hardly ever had any money left over for candy. That was why I was so surprised when I saw her unwrapping the wax paper off this five-cent lollipop one day at recess.

It was green. Lime is my favorite flavor, too.

"Yesterday aftanoon," I accused her, "you wouldn't lend me a penny for caramels, then you go and buy a whole fi' cent lollipop, you piker."

"I did not!" she said. "A man gave it to me on the way to school this morning."

"Aw, since when do grownups hand out candy free to us kids like that?" I wanted to know.

"He did so! He's in the candy business, that's why! He's got a great big warehouse or somep'n full of it. I can have all I want for nothing, free. All I hafta do is go there and help myself—"

For a minute I had a funny feeling like somebody I once knew long ago had been given a green lollipop like that, and I tried hard to remember who, but I couldn't. It wasn't last week, or the week before, or last month. It wasn't even last year, and I could hardly remember back that far anyway, so I had to give up trying.

After she licked it down halfway, she split it with me. She was very nice that way, Jeanie. "Don't let on what I told you to any of the other kids," she said, "or they'll wanna get in on it too."

Next day when the bunch was all piling out into the yard at recess, she turned around and whispered over her shoulder to me: "Stay in, I've got another

one."

She kept the lid of her box down until they were all gone, then tipped it and showed me. It was orange, and orange is my favorite flave. I shoved in on the seat next to her and we got to work between us. Slup, slup, slip, here, it's your turn now.

I screwed up my face and kept staring at the blackboard, which was all empty. I kept trying to remember something about an orange lollipop too. First green, then orange. It was like I'd done all this before. "Boy, am I having fun this week!" Jeanie raved between licks. "Every day a free lollipop for a treat. He's an awful nice man, whoever he is. Tomorrow what kind d'ya think I'm going to get? Cinnamon!"

Without knowing how it happened, I wasn't thinking about lollipops any more, I was trying to remember the names of breeds of dogs. I don't know what that had to do with it, but I couldn't quit. I even asked her to give me some when I ran out of them myself, but she only gave me the ones I had already. Airedale, St. Bernard, collie. It wouldn't work.

"Ain't there some that end in 'ick'?" I said.

"Masticks?" she said.

"No, that's mastiffs," I said scornfully.

I had an awful empty feeling, like I had to tell somebody something real bad, but I didn't know who, and I didn't know what I had to tell, so how could I? And then the one o'clock bell rang, and it was too late.

I had an awful bad dream that night, about a lot of old newspapers lying on the ground out in the woods somewhere, and they all had their front pages torn off. Then when I picked them up and looked under them. somebody's whole arm was sticking up out of the ground, stiff and dead, and the hand-part was holding onto a bright-red cinnamon lollipop. Boy, it scared me! I woke up and pulled the covers all the way over my head.

My mother had to call me three times next day, I was so sleepy, and I just about made school by the skin of my teeth. I just landed in my seat as the bell quit ringing, and old battleax Flagg gave me a dirty look, but she couldn't do anything about it.

When I got my breath back I looked up, and something looked different about the room. I could see Eddie Riley's head and shoulders up two seats ahead with no one in the way. Then I saw right away that was because Jeanie's desk was empty, she wasn't in yet. And she was always in ahead of me, she'd never been late before.

Flagg called on me right away, and I was kept too busy to think about anything but what the square-root of some blame thing

was. Then at ten-after she and another girl named Emma Dolan came in together.

When the period was over, old hatchet-face Flagg said: "Jeanie, you're staying in this afternoon for being late. Emma, I'll overlook it this time, because I know your mother's sick this week and you have to help around the house."

It was the first time she'd ever been kept in like that, Jeanie, and I felt kind of sorry for her.

At noon she took a red cinnamon lollipop out of her lunchbox. She was boiling. "I'da had a million of 'em if I hadn't run into that ole Emma!" she complained. "We were on our way over to where he keeps his candy-supply, it would of only taken a minute, and then she had to come along and spoil everything, he went off and left me! Now I can't go this afternoon either on account of being kep' in!"

I wanted to be extra-special nice to her—we were going to have an exam next day and her answers would come in handy—so I said, "I'll wait for you outside, huh, Jeanie?" when the bell rang at three and everybody but her got up to beat it.

I hung around playing ball with myself, throwing curves up into the air and running under them to catch them when they came down, and it sort of carried me down a ways without noticing it, until I was nearly two blocks away from the school. Then I missed one and I had to run after it, and it wound up in front of somebody's feet standing under an awning on the sidewalk.

I bent down and got it, and then I looked up and there was a man standing there very still in front of me, in the blue shadows under the awning. He had big stary eyes and long arms like them chimps at the zoo, and he was doing something with his fingers, bending them in and out like he wanted to get hold of something with them.

He didn't pay much attention to me, I guess he wasn't interested in little boys. I looked at his face for a minute, and I had a feeling I'd seen it before someplace. Especially them roly-poly eyes. I backed away and went on playing ball, and he just stayed there where he was, without moving, except only his fingers like I told you.

I threw an extra high one, way up, and while I was staring straight up watching it, all of a sudden a name seemed to come down and hit me out of the blue sky. "Millie Adams!" Now I knew where I'd seen those funny eyes before, and now I knew who'd shared a green and an orange lollipop with me. He'd given them to her—and then she never came back to school any

more. Now I knew what I wanted to tell Jeanie—not to go near him, because something would happen to her. I didn't know what, but something.

I got so scared I quit playing ball and I ran all the way back to school and went in the yard, which we weren't allowed to do after-hours. I sneaked up outside the window and looked in.

She was still sitting there at her desk doing her homework, and Miss Flagg was up front correcting papers. So I started to tap as light as I could on the pane, to get Jeanie to turn around and look at me. She did, but then right while I was making signs to her, Flagg looked up and caught us, and she made me come inside.

"Well, Thomas," she said, sour as a lemon, "since you seem unable to tear yourself away from the classroom, suppose you sit down and go to work. No, not behind Jeanie, on the other side of the room please."

Then after a couple of minutes, just to make things worse, she said: "You may go now, Jeanie. You've stayed long enough. Tomorrow see that you get here on time." But then when she saw me getting ready to get up and go with her, snapped: "Not you, young man! Stay right where you are!"

I couldn't hold back any more, I hollered out at her: "No! Miss Flagg, don't let her go! You can't! Make her stay in! She's going after some candy and—!"

She got riled as blazes and banged her hand down on her desk, "Here, here!" she yapped. "That'll be all of that! Not another word out of you! Every time you open your mouth, I'm keeping you in another half-hour!"

I saw Jeanie gathering up her books and starting for the door, and I couldn't stand it. "Jeanie!" I yelled at her, "Don't go out there! Wait for me outside in the yard!" Miss Flagg got up and came down the aisle and stood over me, red as a beet.

"Do you want me to send for the principal!" she barked. "I'll have you put back to 6B if you make another sound! I'll have you expelled for insubordination!" I never saw her get so sore before.

Jeanie was sore too—at me. "Snitcher! Tattle-tale!" she said under her breath, and closed the door after her. I saw her go past the window outside, and then I didn't see her any more. She'd left the grounds.

I did my best to try and tell Miss Flagg, but she wouldn't let me talk. And I was half-bawling, and so excited I could hardly talk straight anyhow. "She's going to get some lollipops and she's never coming back, and then the front pages of the papers

are all going to be torn off and —!" I was sobbing so hard I don't think she heard half I said. Her face was like stone, and she was writing a note to my father. "Like Millie Adams—and *you* done it, *you* done it!"

She hadn't been on the staff when that happened to Millie Adams, so she didn't know what I meant. And she kept giving me another half-hour and another half-hour, until finally I had to stay in every day all week until six, and I was suspended, and I had to bring my father, and a million other things. I was licked and I knew it, and I just had to sit there mum, while the sun went down outside and purple shadows piled up in the schoolyard, and finally it was all dark and she put on the electric lights. Even then she wouldn't let me go, until the minute of six.

Then she made me take a note home with me, and when I lit out and didn't close the door, she made me come back and do it over again.

When I finally got out for good and all, the streets around the school were dark and empty, just a bleary arc-light shining down on the corner, and when I passed where that awning was, it had been folded up for the night and there wasn't anyone standing there any more. Something funny went up and down my back, like when a cat's fur goes the wrong way, as I went by there.

Instead of going home, I went to Jeanie's house first, which was off in another direction, and hung around outside trying to look in the windows and see if she was in there. They were all lit up and I saw her mother and her kid sister, but not her. Her mother kept coming to the window and looking out, and that's how she saw me out there. Then she came out to the door, and said, "Tommy, have you seen Jeanie? She should have been in long ago. I think she went over to Emma's house. If you see her, will you tell her to come right straight home? It's after six, and I don't like her staying out this late—"

I felt sort of sick and scared, and I didn't have the nerve to tell her. I backed off the porch, and I said "Yes, ma'am," and I ran like anything.

Emma lived awfully far out, and she wasn't there. I knew she wouldn't be anyway, but I went to see, because Emma's family didn't have a phone. Emma came to the door chewing bread and said Jeanie never showed up at her house after she got let out. I didn't know where else to go but home then.

I would have been scared to go there at all any other night but this. It was after seven already—and was I in Dutch! Just that night my father had to be home early, and supper was all

over, and he was sore at me for being late. And I guess they'd both been kind of scared too, and they took that out on me too.

I couldn't get a word in about Jeanie. I no sooner opened up about being kept in, which was only the first part of what I wanted to tell him, than he whacked me and told me to go to my room and stay there. Then while I was still trying to tell him, he saw the note Miss Flagg wrote, and after he read that, that finished it. I couldn't get a word in sideways, he was making so much noise. He locked the door on me from the outside, and there I was.

Nobody seemed to know but me, and nobody would listen to me or believe me or try to help me. Not Miss Flagg, not Jeanie's mother, not even my own father, who I thought was such a regular guy. Now it was probably too late. I sat there on the edge of my bed in the dark and held my head.

I heard our phone ringing through the door, and he quit ranting long enough to answer it. Then I heard my mother say, "Oh Tom, no—not again!" in a scared voice.

"What else *could* it be?" he said. "The Chief just said they found her schoolbooks lying there in an alley. I told you it would happen again, if we didn't catch up with him the first time —"

He meant Jeanie, I knew he meant Jeanie!

I jumped up and started to wangle the doorknob like sixty, and holler: "Dad, lemme out a minute! I can tell ya what he looks like! I saw him this afternoon! I saw him with my own eyes!"

But the front door banged before I got halfway through, and they'd both gone out without listening to me. I guess my mother must have gone over to stay with Mrs. Myers awhile and try to buck her up. I kept up my racketing, but no one answered, so I knew she wasn't in the place either.

I didn't know what to do then. I sat back on the bed and held my head some more. I thought, "How they ever gonna get him, if they don't know what he looks like? *I* do, and they won't gimme a chance to tell them. I gotta stay here shut up, when I'm the only one knows!"

Thinking about Jeanie made me feel shivery even where I was, right in my own house. I wondered what a man like that would do to her. Something pretty terrible, because they hardly ever called my Dad up like that after he went off duty, and they had tonight.

I got up and went over to the window, and stuck my hands in my pockets and stood looking

out. Gee, it was dark out! The street looked so scary and lonely, with just a pale arc-light way down by the corner. I thought of Jeanie out there someplace, with something awful happening to her and nobody around to help her. I took my hands out of my pockets and some of the junk I always carried around with me spilled out after them. Marbles and nails and parlor-matches for roasting mickeys (potatoes) and a hunk of chalk and—

I stood looking at the chalk and remembering how Jeanie always—

I threw up the window and climbed across and got out onto the porch-shed. It slanted down, but I braked against the slates. We lived upstairs in a two-family house. Maybe a grown-up would have had a hard time shinnying down the porch-post to the ground, but it was a pipe for me, I only weigh a hundred. There were even withered vine-stems to help me.

I beat it off the block in a hurry, in case my mother should come back. I knew *he* wouldn't, he stayed out whole days at a time when they sent for him like this. After I got past the street that went down Jeanie's way, I wasn't worried about being spotted any more.

I went the same way I did every morning on the way to school; only I'd never gone to school at night like this before. But I didn't go all the way, I stopped two blocks away where that rolled-up awning was. Everything looked different from what it did in the daytime, the school black and the sky black and no kids around at all—only me.

I said to myself, "She bought a new box of chalk day before yesterday, because I saw a full-length stick in her hand when we got out at three." But it didn't last long, the way she wore it away against everything in sight. Suppose she didn't have any left —by today?

I went around the corner from where the awning was, and I started looking along the walls. There wasn't anything on them, but they weren't any good for chalking anyway, they were mostly glass storefronts and doorways. I went down the whole block and I couldn't see a mark. I said to myself, "Maybe she was walking on the outside, where there's nothing but air."

I got all the way to the next corner, and I was going to turn around and go back, when I saw a hydrant out on the edge of the curb and it had a pink chalk-gash across the hub. Jeanie—this afternoon! Because her house was up the other way, she never passed here on her way home other days.

I got all steamed up and I

said "I knew it would work! I bet I follow her! I bet I find her!" and for a little while I even forgot to be afraid. It was like that game we kids play. Hare and Hounds. I ran across the gutter and went along the next block. There was still too much glass, which is no good for chalk, but there was an ashcan sticking out that must have been there all day without being taken in; it had a wavy pink line around its ridges.

Next block didn't have anything, and there was a peach of a brick wall along it too, perfect for chalking. She wouldn't have passed that up, no sir! So I crossed over to the other side of the way, and she and he must have too, because there was a lamppost there and that had just a short little dab. It was skinny, there wasn't much room, and she just took a peck at it for good luck as they went by.

Next block had something, and next, and then all of a sudden it quit. I went ahead looking, then had to come back again to where they ended. Did her chalk give out here, maybe? Did he catch her doing it and make her throw it away? Not Jeanie—you couldn't get her to part with a piece of chalk for love or money. And he wouldn't get rough with her, because this was Allen Avenue, and in the daytime there was lots of people around, even if there was no one around now.

I turned off to my left—I know my left because your heart's always on it—and I went down that way. It wasn't as nice here as our part of town any more; a great big gas-works, and old tumbled-down houses, and dark alleys and things. But the chalking was swell. That was the trouble, there was too much of it. Nearly every wall and vacant space was crawling with it, and some of it was words you get your mouth washed out with soap for saying. But it was all white chalk luckily, the colored kind costs too much, so I knew it wasn't Jeanie's. Then when I saw where a sudden bright-yellow streak started up and went on and on, with just breaks where there were doors and windows, I knew I'd found her again. She'd run out of pink around the corner and started in on a yellow stick, that was all.

It was so easy to follow, on account of being a thick hunk she was holding, that I started to run instead of just walking, to catch up quicker. I shouldn't have. All of a sudden without any warning a skinny little bit of an alley-way opened up alongside of me, and there was a whole lot of men standing around in it. A car was fronted up to the curb with its lights shining smack into it. But what scared me worst

about the whole thing was that one of those men was my own father, he was standing right in the middle of all of them! Did I jump back quick! He had his back to me luckily, and didn't see me. I heard him saying, "— around here someplace. Well, the quicker we start a house-to-house search, the better, boys." One of them was holding one of our arithmetics like we used in school, with our names and grades on the inside of the cover.

I ducked around the back of the car, keeping out of the light, and got across to the other side of the alley. The yellow line went right on from there uninterrupted, about me and Jeanie's reach from the ground.

I was dying to step up and tell him, "Dad, if you'll only follow this line it'll take you to her, I *know* it will!" but I didn't have the nerve. I knew what I'd get for being caught out on the streets that late without permission, especially after he left me locked up at home. He'd probably whale the daylights out of me right in front of the whole bunch of them. So I went off by myself into the dark, away from them all, and kept following the line on my own hook, and I guess they never even knew I passed there.

I couldn't understand why she'd throw her own books away into an alley like that; she knew better than to do that to school property of her own accord. And she was still all right up to here, nothing had happened to her yet, or she wouldn't have kept on tracing this line. The only thing I could make out was the man must have been carrying them for her, pretending he didn't want her to get tired, and he shied them in there without her noticing, figuring she wasn't going to need them any more. Or else he pretended they weren't going very much further, were going to come right back, and said to leave them there for a minute, they would be all right, no one would touch them.

But they did go on further, lots further—so I guess she never noticed he got rid of her books for her. All of a sudden vacant lots began showing up, and then there was one last house, and then the houses quit dead and it was the edge of town. Open fields started in from here on. The road kept going, but without any sidewalks any more.

I'd never been this far out before, not even in the daytime, and I was stumped for sure now. There wasn't anything left to chalk up any more. But the yellow streak had run right smack up to the very edge of the end-house, and then run off into thin air, so they must have kept pointed straight ahead. I did too, but I sure wasn't keen on it. I

had to walk in the dirt and stones along the side of the road, and jump back sometimes when cars came whizzing by, so I wouldn't get hit.

Way up ahead, it seemed like a mile off, there was a row of billboards. It took me a long time to get up to them, but when I did I was glad I kept going, because the lower supports—the picture-part was way up over my head—had little yellow strokes on them. So she'd still been holding onto her chalk even this far out. It must have been lonely out here even in the afternoon, and now it was terrible. Just this gray road in the darkness, with black fields all around, and high grass hissing in the wind. The road had lights on telegraph-poles, but they were awful far apart. And you felt worse after you left each one behind than you did before you came up to it. She'd stroked them, though; they must have been walking off-side like I was. Maybe he'd been afraid to ask for a lift while he had her with him.

I looked back, and the lights of the city were so far behind me I couldn't see them any more, just a haze in the sky over where they were. Gee, I wanted to turn around and go back, bad! But I kept thinking, "If I was in poor Jeanie's shoes, I wouldn't want the only fella that knows where I am, to give up and go back!" So I didn't.

There was worse coming up ahead, too. I tried to ignore it as long as I could, because I knew what it was, and I didn't like the idea very much either. Something even blacker than the rest of the blackness had been slowly coming nearer for a long time. Like a big black wall where the fields ended, and the nearer I got the taller it got, until it was way up over me. The woods!

Finally they got up to me and closed in around me on both sides. I took one last look back, toward where my father and those other men were, so far behind me. Then I took a deep breath and held it, and kept moving, and I was in! The road kept going right on through, and even the lights kept up far apart, so at first it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I was careful not to look anywhere but straight ahead. I might've seen something I didn't want to. I was just as scared now to turn back as to go ahead, that's why I kept going ahead.

When I got up to the next light-pole, she'd passed it too. But when I got to the one after that—she hadn't. They'd turned off somewhere in between the two. I thought, "Does—does this mean I gotta go in among those trees and things, with him maybe behind one of 'em waiting to jump me?" Boy, I sure felt little

and lonely and scared. It was like dying a little to go in there. If I'd only had even just Eddie Riley along with me, or anyone at all, but I was all by my lonesome.

I probably would have hung around there all night trying to make up my mind, when something did it for me all of a sudden. A roaring sound came heading toward me through the woods, and before there was even time enough to get scared, a pair of bright white headlights came shooting down the road at me, with a car behind them headed in to town a mile-a-minute. I only just had time to jump out off the way to keep from getting hit, it was whizzing along so fast.

The brakes squawked and screeched and it stopped somewhere down the road out of sight, beyond the light. I ducked behind a tree listening, and I heard a lady's voice say, 'I'm telling you it wasn't an animal! I distinctly saw his face! Now what's a child doing alone in the woods at this hour of the night? Go back and see if you can find him, Frank."

I heard the door open and a man got out and came back toward me calling, "Little boy! Sonny! Come here, we won't hurt you!"

Gee, I wanted awful bad to run out to him and say, "Take me in with you, will you please, mister?" But all I had to do was think of Jeanie and I couldn't do it.

I turned and beat it away when he got too near, afraid he'd collar me and keep me from trying to find Jeanie or something. And that's how I got in the woods. I stopped again, in further, and held my breath, so he wouldn't follow me by the noise I was making. I heard the car start up again, and caught a red wink from its tail, way off between the trees, and then it was gone and I was alone in the woods.

Once you were in under 'em, the trees weren't as thick-together as they looked from the outside. It was bad enough, but at least it wasn't like a jungle or something you read about in books. About five minutes after I first went in, something funny started to happen. The tops of the trees all lit up red, like there was a fire around, and some of it got through down to the ground where I was. But then when it started to change to white little by little, I caught on it was a late moon coming up full. In one way, it didn't make it any better for me, it made it worse than before. I could see my way better, but I could also see lots of spooky shadows and things that I couldn't before when it was all evenly dark. This way I saw too much.

I went roaming on, knowing

I might lose the road for good and all, but too tired and scared already to care much if I did. Every once in a while I'd think I'd see something move, and I'd run—away from it, don't worry. It was while I was sprinting like that, across a sort of open place pale with moonlight, that my foot caught over something and I took a full-length flop, and there was a clatter that nearly busted my heart in two.

It was her tin lunch-box, lying there on the ground. She'd carried it all this way, thinking she was going to fill it up with candy. So now I knew I'd finally hit the place where she caught on, got frightened, and quit going any more of her own accord. He must have kept talking a lot until now to keep her attention, to keep her from noticing how far into the woods he was bringing her. But here was where she finally tumbled something was wrong. There were other things there besides the lunch-box. I had to look a little, but I found them in the moonlight. Two brand-new pieces of chalk that hadn't been used yet, but that somebody had stepped on and broken where they fell. And I also found the black sailor-tie that she always wore around her middy-blouses. The bow was still in it, but it was torn in half, like he'd caught her by it when she first tried to run away.

"Oh, gee, Jeanie," I thought, scared stiff, "did he kill you?"

Ahead, like looking through a long black tunnel, there was another open patch of moonlight. I ran on toward it, because I was too scared to stay there with that lunch-box and those other things any more. When I got to it and looked, somehow I knew it was the place. It was the place, all right. Though there wasn't a sound, though nothing was stirring, it was the place. It kind of —seemed to be waiting.

It was a much bigger clearing than the last. There was a crazy old decayed house standing in the middle of it. It didn't have any glass in the windows, and you could tell no one had lived in it in a long time. Maybe it had once been a small-size farm or something, and it had been given up; the trees were closing back in on it, the little trees in front, the bigger trees behind them. It just sat there in the moonlight, kind of waiting, as if to say "Come on in, little boy," and then—snap.

I circled all the way around it first, without coming out from between the trees. I dodged behind them from one to the other, and it felt like someone was watching me the whole time from those black holes of windows, waiting for me to come nearer. Finally I got up my nerve and stole out into the open, on the

side where the shadow of the house fell and there was no moonlight to give me away. I got up close under one of the yawning windows and listened. I couldn't hear anything, but that was because my heart was thumping so hard.

I whispered very low, "Jeanie, are you in there?" and then I nearly dropped dead, but nothing happened.

I was afraid to go around by the door, because that was the side where all the moonlight was, and I knew that warped porch or doohicky would grunt like anything under me. So I finally reached up and caught the window-ledge I was under with both hands and chinned myself slowly up, without scraping my feet against the weather-beaten old clapboards. I'm a good chinner in school. But when my eyes came up over the sill, it was all black inside, I couldn't see a thing. I let myself down to rest, and I thought of a test to find out if it was okay to go in there or not. I picked up a handful of gravel and tossed it in, and heard it light all over the floor inside like rain. I crouched, ready to sprint back to the trees, but nothing moved, nothing happened. The house just seemed to keep on waiting. So I got up my courage and chinned myself up again, and this time I stuck my legs across and got in.

I waited for hands to grab me, out of the dark, but they didn't, and after I was in a little while I could see moonlight reflected in the front part of the house and that sort of guided me. I went toward it through an opening in the wall where there wasn't any door left any more, and came out into a hall. It was bright as milk out there, with moonlight spilling through the open door in front and the busted fanlight above it. Off to one side there were rickety stairs going up into the dark.

I put my hand on the post at the bottom of them and waited for more nerve to work itself up. When it had, I started inching up then, waiting on each step before I took the next. Every time they squeaked, I got off that place and moved to another. One time the whole thing snapped, like a log in a fire, and I waited a whole five minutes with my tongue hanging out, but still nothing happened. The house just kept on waiting.

When I was finally up on the top landing, there was a closed door off to one side of me. It wasn't missing like the ones downstairs. I put my hands against it, sucked in my breath, and startled easing it open. If there'd been anyone in there, I kept reassuring myself, they would have heard me long before now. So maybe nobody's in there

(let's hope). I finally got it back far enough to look in and around the edge of it.

This room was on the moon-side, but it had its shutters closed over the glassless windows. Only crazy little criss-cross chinks of light came through the slats. I whispered, "Jeanie, are you in here?" I only had nerve enough to do that once in each room. But this time somebody sort of coughed. I had to grab my mouth with both hands to keep from yelling. I got all wet like it was summertime, but I was all cold like it was winter. Before I could get my head back out of the door, the cough came again. It was such a little bit of a sound, like a baby choking, that I hung onto the door-frame with both hands and managed to keep from bolting for the stairs. It almost sounded like a weak cough for help, if there is such a thing.

I could make out a lot of lumps on the floor, a pile of old burlap-sacks or something strewn around. I said "Jeanie?" a little louder than I'd yet spoken, and to my horror they started to wave a little. I didn't know what was coming out of them, rats or snakes or—I hung on tight to the door so as not to give ground.

What did come out of them was two feet, little feet, a kid's feet, tied together. One was black with a stocking on it, one was white because the stocking had fallen down.

I wasn't afraid now; I knew. I jumped over and pulled all the empty sacks off, and I could see her white middy-blouse in the dark. I felt for her face, and the reason she could only cough was her mouth had a rag tied across it.

I took a terrible chance and scraped one of the birdseye matches from my pocket along the floor. I could have opened the shutters, but that would have taken longer. The match showed there wasn't anybody else but us in the room. Her eyes were shining, but it was all black around them where the tears had been running down for hours steady. I took a good look at the knot on the gag and then I put the match out. I needed both hands.

I got it off easy, I'm good at knots. He'd tied the cords around her hands and feet good and tight, but my fingers were smaller than his, I could get them in places he couldn't. Even so it seemed to take ages, and I kept expecting to feel somebody grab the back of my neck any minute.

I slipped my arm under her and helped her to sit up. She cried a little more just from habit, because she'd been crying so long already.

"Where'd he go?" was the first thing I whispered.

She quit crying long enough to let some voice through. "I—I

don't know," she whispered back.

"Has he been gone long?"

"When the m-moon came up."

"Did he go out of the house?"

"I think s-so, I heard his steps go 'way outside."

"Maybe he's gone for good," I breathed hopefully.

"No, he said he—he was just going to dig the hole. He said he was coming back and—do it then."

'Do what?"

"K-kill me with that knife he's got. He pulled a hair outa my head right in front of me and tried it on the knife to see if it was sharp enough or not—"

We both looked all around us fearfully. "Let's get out of here," I said hurriedly. "Can you walk?"

"My legs are asleep." One of them gave under her when she tried to stand up and she nearly went down, but I caught her just in time.

"Hold onto me," I said.

We got out the door that way and to the head of the stairs. The moonlight down below in the hall looked wonderful—if we could only get down there and out where it was.

"Don't make any noise going down now," I cautioned, "he may be around out there someplace."

We hobbled down them as quiet and careful as we could, on the inside close up against the wall, me feeling our way along it, she hugging me close. The circulation came back in her legs and it got easier for her to use them. It looked like we were going to get down all right and out of the house. We were only about a quarter of the way down from the top when it happened. I think both of us shouldn't have stood on the same step at one time, that was it. Something banged like a gun, and the step split in the middle and went down like a V. My whole foot went in and through. The toe-part got caught down *below* the split and I couldn't bring it back again.

We both worked like sixty, she with her hands and me with my hands and feet both, trying to get it loose again. I couldn't no matter how I turned it. The board had snapped part-way back or something over it, and it hurt like the dickens the way it squeezed. I couldn't even get down to my shoe and unlace it, or I would have tried pulling it out of that.

We had to quit finally, we got so tired-out pulling and hauling at it. We both had to sit down together on the step above it—I could do that—and rest. And wait.

"Jeanie, go ahead," I kept begging her, "get down there while you still can make it, and—and keep going straight over that way,

with the moon behind you, until you get to the road—"

She hung onto me like glue with both hands and wouldn't budge. "No, no! I'm not going without you. If you hafta stay, then I'm gonna s-stay too. It wouldn't be fair, Tommy—"

We sat without saying anything for awhile—just listening. Listening hard. Once in awhile we tried to cheer each other up, by saying things we both knew weren't so. "Maybe he won't come back till daylight, and somebody else'll find us first." But who would come to a forgotten house like this way out in the woods. He was the only one knew about it. "Maybe he won't come back at all." But he hadn't gone to all the trouble of bringing her here just to leave her tied up, and we both knew it.

Once she asked, "Why d'you suppose he did it? I never did anything to him."

I remembered something my father had said when that happened to Millie Adams that time. "He's an escaped cadillac or something."

"What do they do to you?" she wanted to know.

I wasn't sure, I only knew they found them out in the woods under old newspapers long afterwards. But I couldn't tell her that, because she was only a girl. "I—I guess they bully you and tease you lots."

"He did already," she shivered. "He kep' drinking out of a bottle and singing loud without any tune, and then he'd make me feel how sharp that knife was, and he cut off one of my curls and waved it around on his finger—"

Something crunched outside the house like little stones, and our arms grabbed each other so tight we were just like one kid instead of two.

"Quick, Jeanie, run!" I hissed. She couldn't even whisper she was so scared, all she could do was shake her head.

There weren't any more crunches for a minute, and we thought of everything we could that would help and said it into each other's ears.

"Maybe it was just something fell down off a tree."

"Maybe he won't come in, maybe he'll stay out there—"

We both saw the shadow at the same time, and gave a heave together. It was in the middle of all the white moonlight on the floor down below, like someone was standing close up against the front doorway listening. It didn't move at first, just stayed still, a big black head and shoulders.

We lay back flat against the slope of the stairs and tried to get in as close as we could against the wall where it was darker. But my foot wouldn't let me move much from where I

was, and her middy-blouse was so white.

The black shadow was moving now, it was coming further in now, it was spreading across the moonlight like ink on a blotter. It got longer and longer and longer, and grew a pair of long legs like a man on stilts. He was down there below us in the hall now, the real him, not just his shadow any more.

I breathed into her ear: "Hide your face against me, don't look at him, maybe he won't see us." She turned it around the other way like I said, and I went on looking through her hair.

The stairs shook a little, and he must have put his foot on it. Then he put his other foot on it, and it shook some more. He came up like a cat, hardly making any sound at all with his feet. But we could hear his breathing plain. I guess he hadn't seen us yet because he had just come in out of the bright moonlight. The higher up he got, the more of it he shut off from us, all I could see was him now, black in front of us. She tried to turn her head back again to see, but I grabbed it with my hand and held it.

All of a sudden he stopped, with a creak of the whole case, and didn't move. I guess he'd seen the white of her blouse up there ahead of him. Something spit and we both bucked, she and I, and then yellow shone out all over the stairs and he was holding a match out to us. It wasn't very bright, but it was plenty for him to see us by. And us, him.

I'd been right, it was the man under the awning, but what good did that do now? Those long arms, and bulgy eyes, and gee, what a fierce face! Then he started to smile like he was tickled. He said, "Oh, so a little boy came too, while I was gone." And he came up a step. "And you both got all the way out here and then you couldn't get any further—hee, hee!" And he came up another step. "Well, I don't like little boys much, but as long as you came all the way out here, I'll have to make the grave a little bigger—"

I started to tuck my free leg up under me, to stay as far away from him as I could as long as I could. Jeanie was just a little round ball against my side, looking the other way. "Get out o' here, now!" I said in a scared voice, very low. "Get out o' here, now! Leave us alone!"

He came up another step and he was bending right over us, double nearly. I couldn't hold out any more, even if I was going-on twelve. "Dad!" I started to holler, "Oh, Dad, quick!"

"Yes, call your Daddy," he said silkily, reaching out one long arm for Jeanie's blouse, "Call your Daddy. He'll find you all cut up in little pieces. I'll

send him your ear, maybe, by parcel post."

I didn't know what I was doing any more. I struck out at him with my free leg, because there was nothing else left to do. I had her in my arms. My feet went right into his stomach and he never expected it. He made a funny sound like "Oof!" and the match went out. The staircase gave a worse bang, even, than when my foot got caught. Like a giant firecracker or a cannon. He went thumping all the way down to the bottom, and a whole lot of dust came up all around. When I could see the moonlight through it again, there was a big black gap in the middle of the case, but not too wide to jump across, and the rail was off, and the whole thing was tipping sideways from the wall, but not enough to spill you off. And best of all, oh best of all, my foot was free!

He was down there at the foot of the stairs lying back on his elbows. But he didn't seem to be hurt much. He jumped right up and gave a roar, and reached into his clothes, and when he swung his hand back, something flashed in it in the moonlight.

"Jeanie, quick, my foot's out!" I yelled, and we both went scampering the rest of the way up from where we were, on our hands and feet like animals.

We got back in the room where she'd been tied and banged the door. He had to come up real slow and careful after us this time, so the stairs wouldn't give way altogether, and that gave us time to run all around the place looking for things to block up the door with. There wasn't much, hardly anything at all. Just two empty packing-cases and they hardly weighed a thing.

We couldn't get out through the window, because Jeanie couldn't have made it, jumping from that high up. I probably would have gotten a broken arm myself. And then he'd just run out the door after us, anyway, and grab us before we could get away.

We got the two packing cases up against the door one on top of the other, and then I got behind them to hold them, and she got behind me. We could hear him testing his way carefully up outside, growling and cursing us. We could even hear his clothing brush the thin wall between us and him. Finally he gave a horrid laugh, and that showed he was up on the landing already. Then he rushed at the door. The momentum pushed the door and the cases and her and me back a little, but we squeezed it closed again.

He shoved again, and this time we got pushed back further still. We half-way closed it again, but not all the way like before. I

could feel his breath snorting in right in front of me.

"Should I pray?" Jeanie panted.

"Yeah, you better," I puffed, leaning with all my might.

She started to jabber in back of me, "If I should die before I wake I pray the Lord—"

He gave another heave, and this time it opened the widest of the lot. I couldn't squeeze it back where it was any more. His shoulder got in and one of his long arms came flailing through, trying to reach at me. "Pray louder!" I wailed at her, "Oh Jeanie, pray louder! I can't hold it—any more!"

Her voice rose to a scream. "IF-I-SHOULD-DIE-BEFORE-I-WAKE-!"

The fourth heave finished us. We all went down together, me and her and the cases, and the door swept us back against the wall. That saved us for a minute, he came too far into the middle of the room before he could stop and turn. I kicked one of the cases toward him, so it would get in his way, and we both scrambled to our feet and broke, she one way, I the other. He went for her, with the knife out again. I got all the way around the door and out into the hall, but I had to come back in again. She'd gone the wrong way, and he'd cornered her over on the other side of the room. She kept running back and forth in front of the shuttered windows, from one corner to the opposite one, trying to get by him, and he kept dancing in front of her, cutting at her with the knife. Her and me were both squealing like pigs, and he was yowling too; the house that was so still awhile ago was like a slaughterhouse now.

I grabbed up a case, tilted it way up over me with both arms, and threw it at him with all my might. It hit him right on the back of the head all right, and he stumbled for a minute, but it was empty and he stayed right on his feet. He whirled, said "I'll get to *you* in a minute," and swung one of those long arms at me with a *whish!* like I was a mosquito.

The back of it swiped my head, and something like a comet with a white tail seemed to hit me, and I was way over at the wall, slumping all the way down it to the floor. The last thing I saw was him snatch up one of those sacks to throw it over Jeanie's head like a net. The comet kept getting brighter and brighter, and it switched over by the open doorway instead of my head, and split up into two or three comets, and some men came stampeding in behind pocket-flashlights, like that one my father carries. One of them even seemed to be him, but I knew better than to believe that, I

knew I was just dizzy. I closed my eyes and sort of went to sleep for a few minutes, wishing I'd been able to save Jeanie.

When I opened my eyes I seemed to be floating around halfway between the floor and ceiling, and when I looked around, so was Jeanie. We were both sort of swinging around up in the air. I thought maybe we died and turned into angels, but it was just a man holding her in his arms, and another one holding me. "Now easy on those stairs," one said.

Neither one of them was my father, though. But I saw him across the room swinging his arm up and down, with something that looked like a blackjack in it, and two of the other men were trying to grab his arm and hold it. I heard him saying, "Too bad I didn't get out here a little ahead of the rest of you! Well, I may have to bring him in alive, now that there are witnesses, but I'm damned if I'll bring him in conscious!"

They took Jeanie and me to the doctor to be looked-over as soon as we got back; he said we would both be all right, only we'd have bad dreams for awhile maybe, I wondered how he knew ahead of time like that what kind of dreams we were going to have.

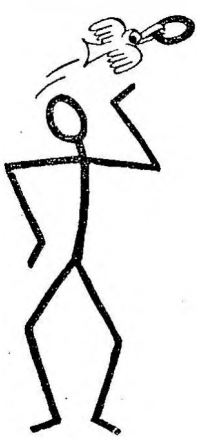
When we got home I asked my father, "Did I do all right? How was I?"

He took out his badge and he stuck it on my pajamas.

"You make me look like a piker," was all he said.

Oh, I nearly forgot; Jeanie don't like lollipops at all any more.

NEXT MONTH—



SET A THIEF
by LAWRENCE TREAT

OPEN SEASON
by JAMES MICHAEL ULLMAN

THE VANDALS
by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

THE PEARLS OF PEACE
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

and

THE EUNUCH

A new Novelet by ED LACY
—in the August 1966 *THE SAINT MAGAZINE*

ring the bell softly

by Stephen Dentinger

In the old days, when the people of the valley set their clocks and fed their chickens by the distant tolling of the church bell, Father Peter climbed the tower steps three times daily to pull the thick rope that ran upward to the single great bell. Now, since there was no longer anyone to hear its ringing, he made the trip but once a day. The bell rang out at six every morning — at the hour when farmers once rose to the demands of the field and the creatures of the wild awakened to another day.

Sometimes, on days like this, he could watch the sun gradually rising over the distant hills, coloring the clouds with a misty pink that turned gradually to scattered scarlet. On these days at times Father Peter would climb to the very top of the tower, to gaze out at the countryside, at his land, his flock.

But the days had faded, just as the flush of youth had faded from his body. Gradually the old

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Can a wanderer, a self-described "gambler with life," a man who has obviously turned his back on everything that once had meaning for him, be seen as Evil itself? The Devil, if you wish . . . ? Stephen Dentinger, a frequent contributor to this magazine, asks this question which so many, and not only Father Peter, have had reason to ask, even in our time . . .

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families of the parish had splintered, with the youngsters going off to the cities to earn their living and find their mates. The old folks usually had remained, working the land until death or disease overtook them in their beds or in the fields or at the chipped kitchen table that seemed so much a part of their lives. Now, now in the autumn, there was nothing. The last family had moved away from the valley the week before, and Father Peter waited only for the official order from his bishop before closing the church and moving on himself.

Each morning after the ringing of the bell he descended to the altar to say mass, and to address a few remarks to those dwindling few who attended. Now there were none at all in the church, but he went through the motions anyway, offering the prayers that were unchanged for centuries. It really didn't matter that no one came any more—it didn't matter to God at least.

The rest of the day, after Mass, was filled with details for Father Peter, though now with the absence of any souls to comfort the details had taken on the mists of change and transition. There was packing to be done, records to be completed, thousands of little tasks he wouldn't have dreamed possible a few years earlier.

And he was in the midst of these tasks, just after morning mass, when a surprising noise sounded from the trees around the church. The birds — something was disturbing the birds!

Father Peter climbed up the tower steps and peered out over the browning trees to where the birds were. Yes, he saw at once the reason for their alarm—a figure, an aged tattered figure, was approaching the church through the underbrush. Here, where no one came any more, where even the birds were startled by a human presence.

The priest climbed down from his vantage point and hurried to meet the stranger. Even now, at the moment he was packing to leave, an unfamiliar face was still welcome at the little church. After all, the stranger might even carry a message from his bishop, with the long-awaited orders to move on.

"Hello, there," Father Peter called out.

The man looked up, and Father Peter had a quick impression of a thickly bearded face, noble but spent. It might have been the face of a warrior or a king, or a beggar. "Good morning, Father. I heard your bell."

"The sound carries a great distance on days like this. But I thought the valley was empty. Are you only passing through?"

The man nodded, his broad

beard shaking with the gesture. "Only passing through. May I stay and rest with you, Father?"

"Certainly. Though I will be leaving soon. Perhaps even today if my orders should come through from the bishop. Come inside, my good man."

Father Peter had not yet eaten breakfast, so he prepared the food for the two of them. As he worked the bearded man spoke softly, indifferently, as if only making conversation. "You live alone here, Father?"

"Alone, yes. There was a housekeeper at one time, but her family moved away from the valley. I could not ask her to give up her relatives and friends to continue catering to the foolish demands of someone such as I. Now, it is not really so difficult to provide my own meals and keep this little place clean."

"Why do you stay, if no one lives in the valley?"

"Why? Because I have not been ordered elsewhere. God—and my bishop—have a plan for me. I simply carry it out."

"Do you think my coming here was part of the plan?" the stranger asked.

"Who knows?" Then, as an afterthought, he asked. "Do you have a name? Mine is Father Peter."

"Everyone has a name, Father. You may call me Chance."

"Just one name?"

"Like yourself. What need is there for more?"

They ate breakfast together, passing casual remarks about the mild autumn weather, and later they strolled among the trees. Above, the milky clouds looked down indifferently, and the breeze began gradually to stir the last dying leaves. And as they walked they might have been, here in this remote valley, the last two people on earth.

"What do you do, Chance? Do you have a profession?" Father Peter disliked personal questions directed at strangers, but now there seemed to be some unfathomable reason, some near compulsion, for keeping the conversation going.

"Oh, Father, I suppose you would call me a gambler. A gambler with life."

They walked further into the valley, and Father Peter showed him the houses and farms, now deserted, which had once lately brimmed with life. A little cemetery, now overgrown with weeds because there was no longer anyone who cared. The road to the nearest town, rutted and muddy, certainly unable to withstand another winter. And always the woods, the overgrown underbrush, waiting to swallow everything which man might abandon.

"Soon no one will come here again," Father Peter said.

"Maybe it's for the best, Fa-

ther. Maybe this valley was planned only as God's dumping-ground." And he took a small package from an inside pocket, a package carefully wrapped in brown paper and sealed with great quantities of red wax. At one corner the paper had begun to rip.

"What is that?" the priest asked.

The man named Chance pulled back his arm and hurled the package into the depths of the underbrush. "Just something," he answered. "Just something that was getting too big to keep."

Was it there, among the vines and weeds waiting to take possession of his valley, that Father Peter first wondered if this man Chance might be the Devil?

"Perhaps I should stay the night," Chance said finally, as darkness began to drift like a fog across the countryside. "Would you have a bed for me?"

"There is always room in my home," Father Peter said, though he could feel the chill on his spine at this strange man's words. Yet hadn't he known from the beginning that the man would stay? Hadn't he known it, somewhere in the depths of his mind?

"Thank you. It has been a long time since I left my own home."

"Where are you from?"

"England, a little place not far from London. You mean my accent didn't give me away?"

For the first time the priest realized the man did indeed speak with an English accent. He relaxed a bit. Certainly Satan would not speak to him with an English accent. "But aren't you anxious to get back?"

"For what? My business is finished."

"Your wife? Do you have one? Your children?"

"Gone. All gone." He shook his head. "But you don't want to hear my troubles."

"That is my job, Chance—listening to other people's troubles. God forgive me, I thought at first you were a demon sent to tempt me in my loneliness. Instead you are simply a man with a problem, like so many other men."

"But no problem for you, Father. I think I'll turn in now, if you'll show me the bed."

"So early?"

"Like you, I must be up early in the morning."

Father Peter sighed and led the way to the room.

In the morning, as if alone, Father Peter climbed the tower and began the daily tolling of the great bell. It hadn't occurred to him until that moment, but this was the first day in more than a week that someone in the valley would be awakened by the

bell. Someone other than the birds.

But as he watched the birds rise from their sleeping places to take wing once more, he was bothered by a memory of the previous day. The man Chance had thrown away a package, but surely here in his valley Father Peter had a right to know what was in that package. What if it was something harmful to his birds?

He made his way down from the tower, and headed immediately into the underbrush in search of the package. It took him some moments to come up with it, and when he did there was a light layer of morning dew still upon it. The package was carefully wrapped and sealed, as if for mailing, but the man Chance must have changed his mind somewhere along the line. From one already ripped corner he enlarged the split until the contents would be visible. After all, there was nothing wrong with looking, he told himself. The man had thrown it away. Heavy, some sort of metal . . .

And then the gun dropped into his waiting hand.

Perhaps he wasn't really surprised. Perhaps he'd know all along it must be something like this. But now seeing it was nevertheless a bit of a shock. The gun was a revolver, well oiled and obviously in working condition. He opened the cylinder and emptied the shells into the palm of his hand. Five bullets had been fired. One remained in the weapon.

Father Peter sighed and put the weapon back in its package. Then he carried the thing back inside. He would decide later what must be done.

When he finished saying Mass, he saw that Chance was kneeling in a rear pew, his head bowed in prayer. "Good morning," he said.

"Good morning, Father Peter."

"Will you be leaving us now?"

"Yes. There is no reason to stay longer," the bearded man answered.

"Was there a reason to come?"

"What?"

"Was there a reason to come? Why *did* you come, Chance?" He stood very close to the man as he asked the question. "Did you think of my valley only as a dumping ground for your package?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I know what you brought here, Chance. I found the package this morning and opened it."

The man named Chance sighed, as if beneath a great weight. "You had no right to do that."

"Perhaps not. But it is done."

"Maybe I'm the demon you

fear after all, Father."

"I doubt it."

"But if I am?"

"That is the chance I take every day of life. Now tell me about it."

"All right," the man said finally. "I committed a crime out there, out in the world."

"Do you want to confess it?"

"I'm not of your faith. I'm not of any faith any more, Father. I killed my wife and two children with that gun."

Father Peter blinked his eyes and stared off for a moment into the distance. He'd heard worse things in his day, certainly, but in that moment the man Chance seemed to embody evil in a most shocking way. "Are you sorry?" he asked finally.

"Sorry? I don't know, Father. I really don't know. Not sorry enough to go back, I guess. But sorry enough to keep on running."

"It's important to be sorry. Go back, turn yourself in to the police."

"No."

Father Peter turned away. "I cannot force you. I have not the strength. And yet, I feel God had a plan in bringing you to my valley."

"Maybe he did," the bearded man said. "I left the gun here."

"Is my little church to be only a dumping place for the evidence of your crime?"

The man named Chance shook his head. "You don't understand, Father. I was saving the last bullet for myself. I threw the gun away because now I've decided to live."

Father Peter looked up at the sky and blinked against the brightness of the hazy sun. "All right," he said finally. "Perhaps that is a start."

And presently, after Chance had departed to make his way out of the valley, Father Peter went back into the empty church to pray. Certainly the bearded man had not been a demon. He'd just been a man, sinning like all men. And what had been done for him? Had Father Peter done anything at all except perhaps to give him his life? Chance would keep on living, and someday he would repent—or kill again.

Perhaps others would come to the valley in the days while Father Peter waited. But after this he would ring the bell softly.

domestic intrigue

by Donald E. Westlake

"MRS. CARROLL," said the nasty man, "I happen to know that your husband is insanely jealous."

I happened to know the same thing myself, and so there was nothing for me to do but agree. Robert *was* insanely jealous. "However," I added, "I fail to see where that is any of your business."

The nasty man smiled at me, nastily. "I'll come to that," he said.

"You entered this house," I reminded him, "under the guise of taking some sort of survey. Yet you ask me no questions at all about my television viewing habits. On the contrary, you promptly begin to make comments about my personal life. I think it more than likely that you are a fraud."

"Ah, madam," he said, with that nasty smile of his, under that nasty little moustache, "of course I'm a fraud. Aren't we all frauds, each in his—or *her*—own way?"

"I think," I said, as icily as

Donald Westlake, author of THE BUSY BODY, reviewed last month, and of THE FUGITIVE PIGEON, THE MERCENARIES, etc., returns with this story of a young woman whose husband is "insanely jealous" — and whose personal life suddenly becomes extremely — well, complicated . . .

possible, "it would be best if you were to leave. At once."

He made no move to get up from the sofa. In fact, he even spread out a bit more than before, acting as though at any instant he might kick off his shoes and take a nap. "If your husband," he said lazily, "were to discover another man making love to you, theres no doubt in my mind that Mr. Carroll would shoot the other man on the spot."

Once again I had no choice but to agree, since Robert had more than once said the same thing to me, waving that great big pistol of his around and shouting, "If I ever see another man so much as *kiss* you, I'll blow his brains out, I swear I will!"

Still, that was my cross to bear, and hardly a subject for idle chatter with perfect strangers who had sailed into my living room under false colors, and I said as much. "I don't know where you got your information," I went on, "and I don't care. Nor do I care to discuss my private life with you. If you do not leave, I shall telephone the police at once."

The nasty man smiled his nasty smile and said, "I don't think you'll call the police, Mrs. Carroll. You aren't a stupid woman, I think you realize by now I'm here for a reason, and I think you'd like to know what that reason is. Am I right?"

He was right to an extent, to the extent that I had the uneasy feeling he knew even more about my private life than he'd already mentioned, possibly even more than Robert knew, but I was hardly anxious to hear him say the words that would confirm my suspicions, so I told him, "I find it unlikely that you could have anything to say to me that would interest me in the slightest."

"I haven't bored you so far," he said, with a sudden crispness in his tone, and I saw that the indolent way he had of lounging on my sofa was pure pretense, that underneath he was sharp and hard and very self-aware. But this glimpse of his interior was as brief as it was startling; he slouched at once back into that infuriating pose of idleness and said, "Your husband carries that revolver of his everywhere, doesn't he? A Colt Cobra, isn't it? Thirty-eight calibre. Quite a fierce little gun."

"My husband is in the jewelry business," I said. "He very frequently carries on his person valuable gems or large amounts of money. He has a permit for the gun, because of the business he's in."

"Yes, indeed, I know all that." He looked around admiringly and said, "And he does very well at it, too, doesn't he?"

"You *are* beginning to bore

me," I said. I half-turned away, saying, "I believe I'll call the police now."

Quietly, the nasty man said, "Poor William."

I stopped. I turned around. I said, "What was that?"

"No longer bored?" Under the miserable moustache, he smiled once again his nasty smile.

I said, "Explain yourself!"

"You mean, why did I say, 'Poor William'? I was merely thinking about what would happen to William if a Colt Cobra were pointed at him, and the trigger pulled, and a thirty-eight calibre special bullet were to crash its way through his body."

I suddenly felt faint. I took three steps to the left, and rested my hands on the back of a chair. "What's his last name?" I demanded, though the demand was somewhat nullified by the tremor in my voice. "William who?"

He looked at me, and again he gave me a glimpse of the steel within. He said, "Shall I really say the name, Mrs. Carroll? Is there more than one William in your life?"

"There are no Williams in my life," I said, but despairingly, knowing now that this nasty man knew everything. But how? How?

"Then I must say the name," he said. "William Car—"

"Stop!"

He smiled. His teeth were very even and very white and very sparkly. I hated them. He said, softly, "Won't you sit down, Mrs. Carroll? You seem a bit pale."

I moved around the chair I'd been holding for support, and settled into it, rather heavily and gracelessly. I said, "I don't know when my husband will be home, he could be—"

"I do," he said briskly. "Not before one-fifteen. He has appointments till one, and it's at least a fifteen minute drive here from his last appointment." He flickered back to indolence, saying lazily, "I come well prepared, you see, Mrs. Carroll."

"So I see."

"You are beginning," he said, "to wonder what on Earth it is that I want. I seem to know so very much about you, and so far I have shown no interest in doing anything but talk. Isn't that odd?"

From the alert and mocking expression on his face, I knew he required an answer of me, and so I said, "I suppose you can do what you want. It's your party."

"So it is. Mrs. Carroll, would you like to see your good friend William dead? Murdered? Shot down in cold blood?"

My own blood ran cold at the thought of it. William! My love! In all this bleak and brutal world, only one touch of tenderness, of beauty, of hope do I see, and that is William. If it weren't for those stolen moments with Wil-

liam, how could I go on another minute with Robert?

If only it were William who was rich, rather than Robert. But William was poor, pitifully poor, and as he was a poet it was unlikely he would ever be anything but poor. And as for me, I admit that I was spoiled, that the thought of giving up the comforts and luxuries which Robert's money could bring me made me blanch just as much as the thought of giving up William. I needed them both in equal urgency, William's love and Robert's money.

The nasty man, having waited in vain for me to answer his rhetorical question, at last said, "I can see you would not like it. William is important to you."

"Yes," I said, or whispered, unable to keep from confessing it. "Oh, yes, he is."

Until William, I had thought that all men were beasts. My mother — bless her soul — had said constantly that all men were beasts, all through my adolescence, after my father disappeared, and I had come to maturity firmly believing that she was right. I had married Robert even though I'd known he was a beast, but simply because I had believed there was no choice in the matter, that one married a beast or one didn't marry at all. And Robert did have the advantage of being rich.

But now I had found William, and I had found true love, and I had learned what my mother never knew; that not *all* men are beasts. Almost all, yes, but not entirely all. Here and there one can find the beautiful exception. Like William.

But not, obviously, like this nasty man in front of me. I would have needed none of my mother's training to know that *this* man was a beast. Perhaps, in his own cunning way, an even worse beast than brutal and blustering Robert. Perhaps, in his own way, even more dangerous.

I said, "What is it you want from me?"

"Oh, my dear lady," he protested, *"I* want from *you?* Not a thing, I assure you. It is what *you* want from *me."*

I stared at him. I said, "I don't understand. What could I possibly want from you?"

As quickly as a striking snake, his hand slid within his jacket, slid out again with a long blank white envelope, and flipped it through the air to land in my lap. "These," he said. "Take a look at them."

I opened the envelope. I took out the pictures. I looked at them, and I began to feel my face go flaming red.

I recognized the room in the pictures, remembered that motel.

The faces were clear in every one of the photographs.

"What you'll want," said the nasty man, smiling triumphantly, "is the negatives."

I whispered, "You mean, you'll show these to my husband?"

"Oh, I would much rather not. Wouldn't you like to have them for yourself? The prints *and* the negatives?"

"How much?"

"Well, I really hadn't thought," he said, smiling and smiling. "I'd rather leave that up to you. How much would you say they were worth to *you,* Mrs. Carroll?"

I looked at the photos again, and something seemed to go click in my mind. I said, "I believe I'm going to faint." Then my eyes closed, and I fell off the chair onto the floor.

He had a great deal of difficulty awaking me, patting my cheeks and chafing my hands, and when at last I opened my eyes I saw that he was no longer smiling, but was looking very worried. "Mrs. Carroll," he said. "Are you all right?"

"My heart," I whispered. "I have a weak heart." It was untrue, but it seemed a lie that might prove useful.

It did already. He looked more worried than ever, and backed away from me, looking down at me lying on the floor and saying, "Don't excite yourself, Mrs. Carroll. Don't get yourself all upset. We can work this out."

"Not now," I whispered. "Please." I passed a hand across my eyes. "I must rest. Call me. Telephone me, I'll meet you somewhere."

"Yes, of course. Of course."

"Call me this evening. At six."

"Yes."

"Say your name is Boris."

"Boris," he repeated. "Yes, I will." Hastily he retrieved the fallen photos. "Call at six," he said, and dashed out of the house.

I got to my feet, brushed off my toreadors, and went to phone William. "Darling," I said.

"Darling!" he cried.

"My love."

"Oh, my heart, my sweet, my rapture!"

"Darling, I must—"

"Darling! Darling! Darling!"

"Yes, sweetheart, thank you, that's all very—"

"My life, my love, my all!"

"William!"

There was a stunned silence, and then his voice said, faintly, "Yes, Mona?"

There were advantages to having a poet for a lover, but there were also disadvantages, such as a certain difficulty in attracting his attention sometimes.

But I had his attention now. I said, "William, I won't be able to see you tonight."

"Oh, *sweet*heart!"

"I'm sorry, William, believe me I am, but something just

came up."

"Is it—" his voice lowered to a whisper "—is it *him?*"

He meant Robert. I said, "No, dear, not exactly. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow."

"Shall I see you tomorrow?"

"Of course. At the Museum. At noon."

"Ah, my love, the hours shall have broken wings."

"Yes, dear."

With some difficulty I managed to end the conversation. I then took the other car, the Thunderbird, and drove to the shopping center. In the drugstore there I purchased a large and foul-looking cigar, and in the Mister-Master Men's Wear Shoppe I bought a rather loud and crude necktie. I returned to the house, lit the cigar, and found that it tasted even worse than I had anticipated. Still, it was all in a good cause. I went upstairs, puffing away at the cigar, and draped the necktie over the doorknob of the closet door in my bedroom. I then went back to the first floor, left a conspicuous gray cone of cigar ash in the ashtray beside Robert's favorite chair, puffed away until the room was full of cigar smoke and I felt my flesh beginning to turn green, and then tottered out to the kitchen. I doused the cigar under the cold water at the kitchen sink, stuffed it down out of sight in the rubbish bag, and went away to take two Alka Seltzer and lie down.

By one-fifteen, when Robert came bounding home, I was recovered and was in the kitchen thawing lunch. *"My* love!" roared Robert, and crushed me in his arms.

That was the difference right there. William would have put the accent on the other word.

I suffered his attentions, as I always did, and then he went away to read the morning paper in the living room while I finished preparing lunch.

When he came to the table he seemed somewhat more subdued than usual. He ate lunch in silence, with the exception of one question, asked with an apparent attempt at casualness:

"Umm, darling, did you have any visitors today?"

I dropped my spoon into my soup. "Oh! Wasn't that clumsy! What did you say, dear?"

His eyes narrowed. "I asked you, did you have any visitors today?"

"Visitors? Why — why, no, dear." I gave a guilty sort of little laugh. "What makes you ask, sweetheart?"

"Nothing," he said, and ate his soup.

After lunch he said, "I have time for a nap today. Wake me at three, will you?"

"Of course, dear."

I woke him at three. He said

he'd be home by five-thirty, and left. I checked, and the crude necktie was no longer hanging on the doorknob in my bedroom.

When Robert came home at five-thirty he was even quieter than before. I caught him watching me several times, and each time I gave a nervous start and a guilty little laugh and went into some other room.

I was in the kitchen at six o'clock, when the phone rang. "I'll get it, dear!" I shouted. "It's all right, dear! I'll get it! I'll get it!"

I picked up the phone and said hello and the nasty man's voice said, "This is Boris."

"Yes, of course," I said, keeping my voice low.

"Can we talk?"

"Yes."

"Isn't your husband home?"

"It's all right, he's in the living room, he can't hear me. I want to meet you tonight, to *discuss* things." I gave a heavy emphasis to that word, and put just a touch of throatiness into my voice.

He gave his nasty laugh and said, "Whenever you say, dear lady. I take it you're recovered from this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes. It was just—tremors. But listen, here's how we'll meet. You take a room at the Flyway Motel, under the name of Clark. I'll—"

"Take a room?"

"We'll have a lot to — *talk* about. Don't worry, I'll pay for the room."

"Well," he said, "in that case . . ."

"I'll try to be there," I said, "as soon after nine as possible. Wait for me."

"All right, M—"

"I must hang up," I said hastily, before he could call me Mrs. Carroll. I broke the connection, went into the living room, and found Robert standing near the extension phone in there. I said, "Dinner will be ready soon, dear."

"Any time, darling," he said. His voice seemed somewhat strangled. He seemed to be under something of a strain.

Dinner was a silent affair, though I tried to make smalltalk without much success. Afterward, Robert sat in the living room and read the evening paper.

I walked into the living room at five minutes to nine, wearing my suede jacket. "I have to go out for a while, dear," I said.

He seemed to control himself with difficulty. "Where to, dear?" he asked me.

"The drugstore. I need nail polish remover."

"Oh, yes," he said.

I went out and got into the Thunderbird. As I drove away I saw the lights go on in my bedroom.

If it was nail polish remover

Robert was looking for, he'd have little trouble finding it. There was a nearly full bottle with my other cosmetics on the vanity table.

I drove at moderate speeds, arriving at the Flyaway Motel at ten minutes past nine. "I'm Mrs. Clark," I told the man at the desk. "Could you tell me which unit my husband is in?"

"Yes, ma'am." He checked his register and said, "Six."

"Thank you."

Walking across the gravel toward unit 6, I thought it all out again, as it had come to me in a flash of inspiration this afternoon just before I had had my 'faint'. The idea that I could have Robert's money without necessarily having to have Robert along with it had never occurred to me before. But now it had, and I liked it. To have Robert's money without having Robert meant I could have William!

What a combination! William *and* Robert's money!

My step was light as I approached unit 6.

The nasty man opened the door to my knock. He seemed somewhat nervous. "Come on in, Mrs. Carroll."

As I went in, I glanced back and saw an automobile just turning into the motel driveway. Was that a Lincoln? A *blue* Lincoln?

The nasty man shut and locked the door, but I said, "None of that. Unlock that door."

"Don't worry about me, lady," he said, grinning nastily. "All I want from you is your money." Nevertheless, he unlocked the door again.

"Fine," I said. I took off my suede jacket.

"Now," he said, coming across the room, rubbing his hands together, "to get to business."

"Of course," I said. I took off my blouse.

He blinked at me. He said, "Hey! What are you doing?"

"Don't worry about a thing," I told him, and unzipped my toreadors.

His eyes widened and he waved his hands at me, shouting, "Don't *do* that! You got it all wrong, don't *do* that!"

"I don't believe I have it wrong," I said, and stepped out of the toreadors.

With utter panic and bewilderment, the nasty man said, "But William said you'd—" And stopped.

We both stopped. I stared at the nasty man in sudden comprehension. All at once I understand how it was he had known so much about me, how it had been possible for him to take those pictures.

So William couldn' live on amount I gave him willingly.

Mother was right, all men *are* beasts.'

As I stood there, trying to get

used to this new realization, the door burst open and Robert came bellowing in, waving that huge and ugly pistol of his.

I still wasn't recovered from my shock. To think, to think I'd been trying to save William from being killed, to think I'd been willing to sacrifice both Robert and the nasty man for William's sake. And all the time, all the time, William had betrayed me.

But then I *did* recover from the shock, and fast, because I saw that Robert had stopped his enraged bellowing and was glaring at me. At *me*. And pointing that filthy pistol at me.

At *me*.

"Not me!" I cried, and pointed at the nasty man. "Him! *Him!*"

The first shot buzzed past my ear and smashed the glass over the woodland painting above the bed.

I ran left, I ran right. The nasty man cowered behind the dresser. Robert's second shot chunked into the wall behind me.

"You lied!" I screamed. "You *lied!*"

All men are bea

SECRETS OF LOCKS AND KEYS

The Magic Circle met in London this April to hear a teacher of biology and science give a lecture demonstration on "Secrets of Locks and Keys."

Attendance was limited to members only.

The lecturer was Father Arnold Plummer, a Dominican monk, a teacher at the Blackfrairs School, of whom it has been said that there are few non-combination safes he cannot crack and fewer houses he cannot break into. He is often called upon to help people in the neighborhood who have locked themselves out . . .

He has, as a matter of fact, yet to find a house he cannot break into. His record for a Yale lock is half a minute. "Advanced lock-picking", to quote Father Plummer (in the London *Sunday Times* for February 27, 1966), "requires intelligence, concentration and great patience—qualities fortunately rare among petty criminals. The real work is done sitting in an armchair, thinking, though the actual picking of a very complicated lock could take two days."

Father Plummer, who says "it is the sheer aesthetic pleasure of overcoming a piece of complicated machinery" which attracts him—his fascination with locks started when he was ten years old—is particularly in demand at the beginning of school term, opening the trunks for boys who've lost their keys.

Deliberately?

The saint CROSSWORD

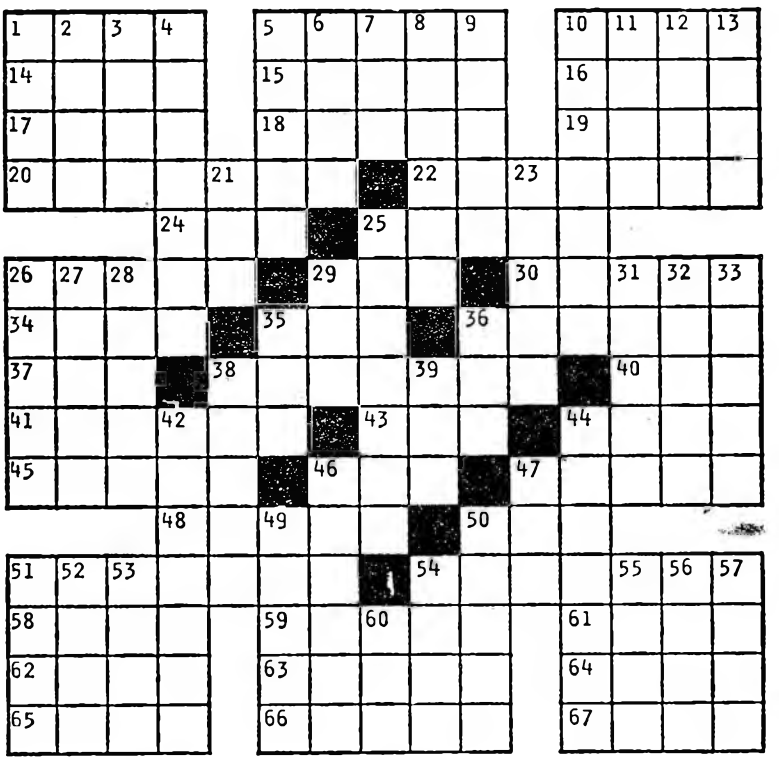
ACROSS

1. Tuft
5. Merchant needs
10. Small mixed-up bug
14. Underwear without top or bottom
15. Edible girl's name
16. Scoundrel who got beheaded
17. Gangster's face
18. Half red US city
19. Hair cut
20. Displays
22. Split at 38th parallel
24. Part of 19
25. Eva's widower
26. Ranked
29. Droop backwards
30. David's specialty
34. Son of Hera
35. Worst on road
36. Hiawatha's pad
37. Kind of man Saint loved to take
38. Far from lovely
40. Holm
41. Most of what Simon was to the Ungodly
43. 14 cut down still more
44. Girl I took out
45. Armchairs are meant to be
46. Bearing
47. Knight's transport
48. An English 9
50. Bishop's bailiwick
51. Pain
54. Short name with guns
58. Down wind
59. Jewelled beanie
61. Turn 56 upside down
62. Make sweet flowers
63. French brilliance
64. On summit
65. Mad or messy if running
66. Mouthpieces for sax
67. Aftermath of carnival

DOWN

1. Member of Hymenoptera
2. First Peruvian
3. Hitch for wagon
4. A predatory 19
5. Not loaded
6. Wings in Cuba
7. Parisian bed
8. Plays wrong card and gets head chopped off
9. Spanish gentleman
10. Enrage
11. Lord of well-sung halls
12. Fair chance
13. Saint's home in old books
21. Father almost defunct
23. Sailor's lines
25. Spectacle
26. Fast kinds of people
27. May come across with 29
28. Numbered belief
29. Greeks called 34 one
31. Made William Tell
32. Property use
33. Measured
35. Cut-off disapprobation
36. Shortened pharaoh
38. To turn on
39. Number
42. Thais
44. Classic hymn father

46. Two-thirds of a student
47. There is a dead one
49. Record in accounts
50. Ribs
51. Last call
52. Greasy part of a yodel
53. Bring up
54. Rumanian city
55. Speck
56. School
57. Brief section
60. End of a story



(Please turn to page 105 for the solution.)

NOTE by the SUPERVISING EDITOR:

THESE are perhaps the worst and most misleading clues we have come out with yet. But don't worry. Next month we shall try to do worse. **L C**

pirates

by W. O. G. Lofts

WHEN a leading theatre critic, in one of his novels, made a passing reference to a pirate story he had read in his youth, such was the response from men of his own age who also remembered this series (many of them even more clearly than he did) that he confessed to a friend of mine that he could easily have formed an Old Boys Pirate Club! I relate this incident as an indication of the vivid impression made by such stories in the days of one's youth.

Several times in these pages Leslie Charteris has mentioned his own boyhood reading of pirate stories in the boys' magazine, *Chums*, saying what thrilling yarns they were. Samuel Walkey, who wrote most of them for over 40 years, was in real life the Staff Controller of a bank in Cornwall, and he penned these thrilling and bloodthirsty tales only in his spare time.

Swashbuckling tales of Buccaneers were his speciality and his pulse-stirring yarns of pirates on the Spanish Main are still re-

W.O.G. Lofts, whose article on Robin Hood appeared in our July 1965 issue, returns with the present article — the first of a series dealing with the truth about Piracy! Here are the facts about these men! Why did they become pirates or privateers? Who were they? And what was their code?

membered and collected by old readers throughout the world. How easily they still recall such thrilling titles as: Rogues of the Fiery Cross, Yo Ho for the Spanish Main, Under the Pirate Flag, Flame-Beard's Treasure, and The Pirates of Skeleton Island.

His villains bore the blood-curdling names of Captain Cripple, Sharkteeth, The Terrible Blind Judas, the Treacherous Salvation Meek, the Murderous Cheat-the-Gallows; not to mention Solomon Snake of the 'Moonlight' and his villainous henchman, Maroon.

His heroes were also aptly named, such as Dr. Primrose, Tallifer True-Blade and Captain Angel who, although depicted as a 'scented dandy', could be a deadly fighter with the rapier when it came to combat. There were stories of treasure buried at midnight on Coffin Island; of Spanish galleons, full of doubloons, wrecked and stuck on treacherous reefs and guarded sometimes by weird, gigantic monsters of the unknown deep. There were stories of the ferocious Brotherhood of the Spanish Main, led by Admiral Rob, whose cruelty and black-hearted villainy would have put some of the present-day criminals of the world to shame; of Buccaneers fighting against the cruel overseers of the slave plantations in the West Indies; of pirates captured and tortured by the dreaded black-robed, hooded fiends of the Spanish Inquisition.

Other tales told of noble, blue-blooded Englishmen forced to walk the plank to the jeers and taunts of the pirates because they refused to join their crew; with cutlasses pointed at their backs they walked to certain death and the hungry sharks below (at least until the commencement of next week's thrilling installment)!

We read of the quest of a band of English adventurers in search of the loot of a certain Captain Crossbones — buried treasure chests filled with gold and the traditional 'pieces of eight' (silver); the only clue being a faded parchment containing doggerel verse. An old reader living in New Zealand today can remember perfectly, after 40 years, how this verse went:

'On Crossbones Isle, near Spanish Key,
There is a ruby, hidden by me.
Seek it, and let the Pirate's Skull become your guide
To the vast treasures of the mountainside.'

One actually felt one was there, with the brave and daring adventurers.

As well as thrills and chills, these stories contained such vivid descriptive prose as "flaming

tropical skies of abysmal blue," "Wonderful seas of sapphire and emerald, creaming to white upon coral beaches", "desert islands fringed with coconut palms, deep blue lagoons and white, shimmering sands." There was the crash of broadsides as the ships clashed in combat: the crack of firelocks and pistols and the rattle of musket shots; clouds of pungent gunpowder smoke and the flash of cutlasses in the turmoil of battle.

But did these things really happen like this in history? Undoubtedly writers of romantic fiction have taken liberties with many true facts relating to real-life pirates; but my own investigations—although unfortunately destroying many popular beliefs—prove beyond doubt that pirates were at least the most colourful adventurers that ever lived.

The first book on piracy was published by A. O. Exquemelin, a Dutchman, in Amsterdam in 1679. As at that time piracy was at its height, plus the fact that Exquemelin was a surgeon to the Buccaneers sailing under the great Sir Henry Morgan, most of its contents have been proved by official records to be correct in detail. The second book, written by a mysterious Englishman named 'Captain Charles Johnson' and entitled "A General History and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates" in 1724, has likewise been proved to be most reliable; and practically all the hundreds of books and articles—as well as other material published since those dates—have been based mainly on the above two works.

Many pirate writers unfortunately disagree with one another regarding details, and it has been no easy task to sort out truth from fiction, although the British Museum and Public Record Office in London is a Godsend in enabling one to sift the true facts from the false. Their official records, preserved for all time, are available to all interested researchers such as myself.

Piracy can claim to be one of the oldest professions in the world. There is no authentic record of who was the first pirate; quite possibly piracy started way back in the Prehistoric Age, when one of our cavemen ancestors, paddling a canoe and living near the sea-shore, spotted a similar savage in a hollowed-out tree-trunk loaded with wild fruit and animal skins. Seeing that the second savage had more than himself, the first caveman was swayed by greed—and so the first act of piracy was committed.

Pirates have been recorded since the earliest days of history under a great variety of names: Sea-wolves, Sea-Rovers, Marooners, Corsairs, Picaroons, Gentle-

men of Fortune; Freebooters, Buccaneers, Filibusters and Privateers. One can trace them right back to the days of the Ancient Greeks in the Aegean Seas. The Vikings of the North Sea and the Norsemen were pirates pure and simple. The Barbary Corsairs of Algiers were Masters of the Mediterranean, and levied blackmail on the world's commerce. Pirates even took the mighty Julius Caesar to ransom, though their kidnapping was short-lived and afterwards they were caught and crucified.

The point has also been argued by historians for hundreds of years as to whether Sir Francis Drake was actually a pirate—or Sir Walter Raleigh. It all depends, I suppose, on what country you belong to. Spain, and particularly General Franco, have no doubt at all about this; and being an Englishman I must, in my turn, contend that Paul Jones was also a pirate; whilst no doubt my friends in the U.S.A. would state that he was a true patriot and a brilliant seaman.

The Arabs in the Red Sea practiced piracy for hundreds of years, whilst the Chinese and Malays, with their junks, still operate today. But none of these really equalled for colourful activities the pirates and buccaneers who operated in the 16th and 17th centuries; and it is most interesting to record that, strangely enough, the original 'Buccaneer' was not a seafaring man at all, but a hunter of cattle.

These Buccaneers lived in the savannahs of Hispaniola (now known as Haiti) and were recorded as early as 1630. They derived this name from 'boucan', an old word which their luckless predecessors—the Caribs — gave to the hut in which they smoked the flesh of the oxen killed in the hunt, or not infrequently the limbs of their persecutors, the Spanish. They applied the same term, from the poverty of an undeveloped language, to the barbaque or square wooden frame upon which the meat was dried. In the course of time this food became known as *'viande boucanée'* and the hunters themselves gradually assumed the name of Buccaneers.

The French settlers did use the second title of 'Flibustiers', which was a mere corruption of the other name for a Pirate—Freebooters, originally a German term imported into England during the low Country wars of Queen Elizabeth. This derivation can easily be seen when the 's' in Flibustier becomes lost in pronunciation.

Buccaneers differed mainly from Pirates in that they waged war only on Spanish ships and property and only in American waters, whilst the ordinary pirate made no distinction but was

ready to attack a ship of any nationality, his own included, in any part of the world. Buccaneers also frequently engaged in land operations, whereas pirates confined themselves to robbery on the high seas.

The nickname of Marooners is fairly easy to explain. The word derives from the Maroons, a West Indian community founded by escaped Negro slaves who mated with Amerindian women, and is a corruption of Cimaroons —meaning dwellers of or in the mountains. A further extension means fugitives or lost people. By way of punishing an offender the pirates could cast him ashore on a small desert island, where he had no chance of survival, giving him a pistol, powder and shot to kill himself when he could no longer stand hunger and thirst. Hence the nickname of 'Marooners' by some.

A privateer, is however, far from easy to explain. Personally I think the only difference between a privateer and an ordinary pirate is that a privateer was simply a pirate ship, carrying legal authority by corrupt Government officials to plunder the shipping of hostile countries, even when they were not at war. Profits went mainly to the powers concerned, and in many cases into a country's coffers, as already mentioned in the case of Sir Francis Drake. Historians have been arguing for hundreds of years on this subject—as to what was actually a privateer or a pirate. The most controversial case on record concerns Captain William Kidd — about whom more will be written in my next article.

Rules and duties aboard a privateer were exactly the same as on a pirate ship, including the share-out; and more often than not it was commanded by a man with piratical experience. Pirates, as a rule, called themselves Privateers or Freebooters, the first name usually the more popular, as it gave them some sort of security if it was known they were acting with 'legal authority.'

What main reason prompted so many men to become pirates in the first place? The answer (and I must confess that if I had been born in that age and in poor circumstances, I would probably have become one myself) is that England in the 16th to 18th centuries was an abominably brutal age. Towns and villages were generally filthy, filled with slums, workhouses, plagues, starvation and slave condition where work was concerned, the workers performing the most back-breaking tasks for a mere pittance a week. Terrible punishments awaited the guilty or any unfortunate culprit caught for the slightest crime, as all felonies were considered capital offences.

Fantastic as it may seem, even children were hanged for stealing. Minor thieves who were fortunate enough to escape hanging were branded with a red-hot iron —a capital 'T' on the left cheek, and maybe transported to Australia for life, into the bargain. Begging and vagrancy were also considered serious crimes. Prisoners were tortured by having heavy weights pressed on to their bodies, this being in order to force them to plead guilty to various crimes, so that when they were hanged their property went to the Crown. Thumbscrews were also used to extort confessions; and nailing a prisoner by his ears to a pillory, where he was blinded by having stones thrown at him, was a common form of punishment, together with other atrocities too horrible to mention.

Titus Oates (mentioned in the Saint story, The Unfortunate Financier) after being twice pilloried, was whipped from Aldgate, and then from Newgate to Tyburn, receiving no less than two thousand lashes, until his body was simply a mass of raw, bleeding flesh. It was probably the most drastic public punishment of all time; and if they had hanged him they would have shown more mercy. To be hanged, drawn and quartered was one of the most horrible deaths imaginable, with details too gruesome to print, but in those days it was regarded as a public spectacle.

If a man was loyal and liked the sea, he could of course join the Royal Navy (unless he was unfortunate enough to be shanghaied in the first place). But a sailor's life in those days was little better than that of a slave —in fact, it was often worse. Ships' captains had the power of life and death, and ordered severe punishment for the slightest offence. It was known for a culprit to receive no less than six hundred lashes for a minor offence—and with a tarred rope, to boot. The shocking punishment of keel-hauling—that is, dragging a man right under the keel of the ship so that he was almost cut to pieces by the encrusted shells, was quite legal. Complaints about the bad food, which was often rotten and crawling with maggots (in many cases supplied by corrupt officials in high places) merely resulted in the complainant being forced by his Captain to swallow cockroaches alive. Once considered a skilled seaman, a member of the crew was regarded as too valuable to be allowed ashore, as he most certainly would never return to his ship. Many were kept prisoners aboard ship for years on end. paid only a miserable few shillings a month—so who could blame an honest seaman who, at the slightest opportunity,

joined a pirate crew?

Incentives to piracy were the prospects of gaining riches in a very short space of time, easy conditions, good food and wine, and regular excursions ashore—usually after capturing a rich prize. Ashore there were plenty of women anxious to entertain them, and above all there was freedom from the harsh discipline of the so-called honest and patriotic Service. With very little risk a pirate could probably gain far more in a single voyage than he could hope to earn during a lifetime of honest labour.

Once joining a pirate ship, the new member first insisted on a written agreement, and this was usually sworn over a Bible or a bowl of punch. This was to ensure that the new pirate would get his proper share of the plunder looted from captured ships. The first and foremost Article spoke for itself—it stated simply: 'No Prey; No Pay.'

The pirate ship was owned by the crew and the captain was elected by popular vote, usually because he was a better seaman and fighter than the rest. Contrary to popular fiction that he was a tyrannical despot, nothing could have been further from the truth, as he simply could not afford to be. His tenure of office was precarious, to say the least, as he could be deposed at any time by a show of hands voting in favour of someone else as captain. Indeed, it is worth recording that one pirate ship had thirteen different captains in two months! But usually the main reason for a change of captains was the general failure of the particular man in command to find sufficient plunder to keep his crew happy.

The Captain, of course, received a larger share of the loot than anyone else, but otherwise he had no privileges. He had a cabin of his own, true, but through some clause in the Articles of the ship, anyone was entitled to intrude into his private apartments. They could swear at him, drink his wine and use the cabin as if it were their own. The Captain also had exactly the same meals as the rest of the crew, which was certainly vastly different from the Royal Navy. Probably the reason for this is easily explained; pirates, having suffered so much at the hands of officers, carefully guarded against such evil happenings amongst themselves. Easily the next important person aboard ship was the Quartermaster, who decided what plunder should be taken from a looted vessel and supervised the share-out. He also settled any differences amongst the crew which might arise from time to time.

When I was a boy I often wondered why pirates always flew

the traditional Black Flag with the skull and crossbones, called The Jolly Roger. I reasoned that if a merchant ship was fortunate enough to sight the pirate ship first she would depart as far away from it as possible at full speed! But it is a fact that pirates flew all sorts of flags, and in a well-ordered ship the practice was that when a potential victim was sighted, the appropriate flag would be sent aloft—depending on what nationality the pirates thought the ship would be. If she was English, the Union Jack would be hoisted; if a Frenchman the *Tricouleur* was shown. The obvious reason for this was to fool the captain of the merchant ship into believing that he was hailing a fellow-captain of the same nationality.

Captain Bartholomew Roberts flew an elaborate flag carrying a full-length picture of himself, a skeleton with a spear and hourglass. Another captain used a long pointed banner with three skulls and three pairs of crossed bones. The most popular of all was the ordinary red flag dipped in blood—which the French Buccaneers called the *'Joli Rouge.'* This, according to some, was the origin of the Jolly Roger, but whatever the design, the pirate flag was used as a kind of psychological warfare. The skull and crossbones, however, seems much the oldest emblem of the symbol of death, and it was used as a cap badge by armies in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Once the pirate captain was certain his victim was a defenceless merchantman, and could not escape, down would come the false flag and the real ensign would be hoist in its place. Contrary to the general belief that pirates were a bloodthirsty crowd, and loved fighting, they had a strong sense of self-preservation and were only after easy plunder which, naturally, they wanted to live and enjoy. Consequently they very rarely killed their prisoners.

One of the first questions pirates used to ask the captured crew was whether their officers, and especially the Captain, had treated them properly. If the answer was unsatisfactory — and more often than not it was—then they gave the offender a taste of his own medicine with a tarred rope's end. However, if a merchant ship put up any kind of resistance after capture the pirates would show no quarter and usually killed the crew, throwing their bodies over the side. They deliberately gave the fullest publicity to this policy, which was so effective that they hardly ever had any reason to kill. After all, why should the captain of a merchant ship risk his life in defence of cargo that was not his own? Generous pirates had been

known to give the 'unfortunate' captain of the captured ship presents for being so co-operative during their encounters on the high seas!

Probably the most baffling point I have encountered in years of research has been the well-known practice of pirates making their victims "walk the plank." Being of a methodical mind I have often pondered over why pirates bothered with this practice (unless they were sadists), as it would obviously have been much quicker to run a cutlass through their victim and drop him over the side.

All historians writing on the history of piracy have stated that there is no authentic record of any pirate making his victim walk the plank. On this point I could not agree more, basing my agreement on the research I have done in the British Museum and Record Office, where I read through innumerable documents and reports of trials during the 15th to 19th centuries. But I would not agree that such events never took place in history as there are certainly facts to show that pirates in the days of Ancient Greece, during the time of Caesar, indulged in this unpleasant practice. On taking a ship they would push out a ladder and, telling each prisoner that he had his liberty, "desired him to walk out of the ship, and this in the middle of the sea, all with mighty shouts of laughter, so wanton were they in their cruelty." (The exact quotation has been translated from ancient Greek.)

As a boy, one of the most fascinating pictures I recall was that of the Pirate Captain burying his treasure on a barren island, with palm-trees and grass in the foreground and two pirates digging the hole. Usually in the background was the ship's boat and further out to sea was the pirate ship, with the Jolly Roger flying aloft. The treasure chest was big, bound with iron and secured with a great lock. Sometimes it even had the traditional skull and crossbones design on its sides.

Once the hole was deep enough and the chest safely lowered down into it, the pirate captain would then disprove the saying 'Honour amongst thieves' by calmly raising his musket and shooting the two pirates dead. They would obligingly fall down on to the chest, when the captain would cover them up with sand and row himself back to his ship, certain in his mind that 'dead men tell no tales' was one of the best quotations ever invented.

Unfortunately, the buried treasure seems yet another myth, for if all the money spent during the last three hundred years in seeking reputed lost hoards could be assessed, it would undoubtedly

exceed all the pirate treasure ever buried. Pirates spent the proceeds of their hauls as fast as they could get it, in the nearest port. The ale-house keepers in Jamaica made fortunes out of their irregular visits ashore, whilst the merchants who fitted out the pirates with clothes and provisions charged them fantastic prices. Those prostitutes who played their cards right with the love-starved Buccaneers could, after only one season, go home to Europe and retire in luxury on what they had earned (or stolen).

Corruption was everywhere, and often most Governors were in the pay of the pirates and buccaneers, taking large shares of the loot. Probably the stories of vast amounts of hidden treasure were started by pirates caught and sentenced to be hanged, who hoped that such 'confessions' would result in a free pardon in order that a search could be made.

Pirates' nests flourished everywhere, especially in the Caribbean, where nearly every island served as a lurking place. Coral reefs and sandbars provided ideal protection from pursuing men-o'-war, for if ever God made any place on this earth for certain privileged people, he made the Caribbean for pirates and buccaneers!

(In the next installment of this serious study of the facts of Piracy, W. O. G. Lofts uncovers the facts about some of the most romanticized Pirates — and also discovers some that you probably never heard of.)

THE SOLUTION
to the
PUZZLE
on page 95

death in the sun

by Mel Dinelli

THERE'S no way of knowing for sure, I suppose, but I'm almost certain that if I hadn't gone away that summer, Phil Vernon would be alive today. Or if I had insisted my sister go along with me, she wouldn't have met him at all. But I couldn't insist, because the boy she was in love with, was coming back from a trip after a year of being gone, and she wanted to be there when he got back. That's the only reason I gave in.

But it's all water under the bridge now, and I know that everyone looks back on some period of their lives when they've made bad decisions. But that was the worst I ever made, and it was to be only the beginning of what was to become the worst of night mares.

Although I left with a feeling of foreboding, I figured I'd only be gone a month, and that we'd write often, as it was the first time my sister and I had been separated in the years since our folks died and we were kids.

All the time I was gone, I had

In Life magazine, some weeks ago, there was a photograph of rows and rows of sunbathing bodies, still and immobile under the Florida sun. It's more than likely that nobody had thought of looking closer, to see if any of those bodies was both still and immobile — and very cold . . . The author is an MWA Edgar winner and Academy Award nominee.

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an uneasy feeling that something was wrong. I'd wake in the middle of the night, and there was a hollow, leaden feeling in the pit of my stomach; but there was nothing concrete to which I could trace it. As I look back now, I realize the truth in the saying that blood is thicker than water, and that it was all a premonition of the dire events which were ahead.

At first Helen wrote often, but her letters said less and less about herself, and more and more about general things, as if she were avoiding real issues. I didn't get it at first. I thought she was having the common trouble of finding enough things to write about when you force yourself to write too often, and you're writing under a sense of obligation.

Then the letters took on an unnatural quality. I don't know what I mean exactly, and it's hard to explain. But there was a nervous, hesitant quality about them. If it's possible to discern such a thing, it was as if someone stood over her shoulder watching her every word as she wrote.

If I'd been wise, I would have rushed home then, instead of waiting like I did. But when I'd taken my job, I'd promised to stay the whole season, and I didn't want to go back on my word.

Then a letter came telling me she was moving to a town in the upper part of the state. The letter was the briefest I'd received so far. It was like a stranger writing. She said she'd gotten a job, and that she didn't feel we should share a place any longer. Just like that! Abrupt, asking no advice, nothing, and yet we'd never been apart since we'd been babies!

That's all I needed, and without waiting for the season to end, I was on the next train. The crumpled letter in my pocket, the trip seemed endless, but we finally pulled into the town where my sister had moved.

It was dusk, and judging from what I saw through the train window, it could hardly be called a town at all. I figured it must have been a damned good job that could have lured Helen to such a dismal place.

There was an unimpressive row of buildings facing the main street. Although it was not yet raining, the sky was heavy with dark, ominous clouds. The lights were beginning to be turned on in the small shop windows, and the effect was a gloomy one. That time of day has always been depressing for me anyway; when lights are turned on when it's late afternoon, no longer day, and not yet night. Even the trees seemed dismal and foresaken as they cast their dry shadows on

the cracked, ancient sidewalks.

The rain was coming down in torrents by the time I found the small, dingy apartment house with the row of mail boxes in the front hallway. But her name wasn't on any of the boxes! I looked at the letter again for the number of the apartment, then I rang the bell under the name of "Philip Vernon". As I picked up the house receiver, I had the impression that someone had answered, but before I could say anything, there was a soft click at the other end. I rang several times more, but getting no results, I tried the inner front door. It was locked. I was on the verge of ringing again, when I saw someone coming through the lobby toward the front door. I waited for them to come out, and before the door could close, I stepped quickly inside.

The lobby was deserted. The elevator was one of those heavy, fancy, open-grill work types, but it was self-operating. I pushed the button, and it started up with a jerk.

The corridor was dark and dank, and I finally reached the door marked "3 B". I knocked. Even though there wasn't the slightest sound, I *knew* there was someone inside; sometimes you can just feel those things. I knocked again, and then I called out.

"Helen . . ." I could hear someone move. "Helen?" I called louder.

Then after a moment, I heard her voice speaking cautiously through the door. "Who is it?"

"Jimmy!"

There was a brief pause, and when she spoke, her voice was flooded with relief and emotion. "Jimmy!" and then she sobbed, "Oh, my God, Jimmy!" The door was quickly unlocked, and she stood there in the darkened room. There were no lights on, and even the blinds were drawn. She was crying as she pulled me into the room, and closed and locked the door behind us.

"Helen! What's this all about? What're you doing here in the dark, not answering the door . . . let's get some lights on . . ."

"No!" she sounded violent.

"Why not?"

"Let's talk a minute, Jimmy!"

"Who's Philip Vernon?"

"How do you know about him?"

"His name's on the mail box . . ." Without waiting for permission, I turned on the light.

She gasped as she turned away from me, and the room was flooded with light. Taking her by the shoulders, I forced her to turn fully toward me.

"Helen!' Her face had been beaten to a pulp. "Good God!"

She broke away from me and threw herself on the couch. I could hardly make out what she

said, "Jimmy . . . oh, Jimmy, I'm in terrible trouble . . ."

Quickly I put my arms around her, attempting to stop the hysteria. "Haven't I always helped you . . . that's why I've come. What is it? What happened to your face?"

She stopped sobbing for a moment. "I got married while you were gone . . ."

"Steve?"

"Oh, no! After waiting a whole year . . . when he finally came back, I found out that he'd been married while he was gone . . . I was heart broken . . . oh, if only you'd been here . . . and that's when I met Phil . . ."

"But who's Phil?"

"I thought I knew him . . . even though it was only a few weeks . . ."

"But Helen," I interrupted, "you just don't go off and marry someone you've just met . . ."

"But I did! And now I've got to get out of here! I wasn't going to tell anyone about what he did . . . not even you . . . I didn't want you in trouble on my account . . ." She was sobbing again, and I couldn't understand a word she said.

"He's mad . . . crazy mad. He likes to hurt people . . . to beat them . . ."

"I'll kill him . . ." The moment I said it, I know I shouldn't have. I said it without thinking, and now she was even more frightened than before. She studied me for a moment, and her face was as drained and stern as I'd ever seen it. "Or he'll kill you," there was no trace of emotion in her voicee. "That's why you should never have come here."

"All right," I said, in order to pacify her. "I won't do anything drastic. But you're going to get a divorce."

"You should hear what he's threatened, if I even try to get one."

"There's the law," I said impatiently. "You can get him locked up . . ."

"You don't know him," she said hopelessly. "You're good, and clean and decent. You can't imagine what he's like . . ."

My hand went up impulsively to her face. "Yes, I can."

Her voice was calm and quiet now, as if she's thought out everything in advance. "He'd kill one of us first before we could get him locked up. There's only one thing left to do."

"What's that?"

"We've got to run . . . run as fast and as far as we can . . ."

"We can't run forever."

"No. But someone can't get away with what he's doing forever . . . this terrible, black, insane need within him . . . it's not only me that he takes it out on . . . someone's bound to catch up with him soon . . ."

"But . . ." I protested.

"Please, Jimmy." She was pleading again. "He's done us enough damage . . ." And as she talked, I began to listen. The way the light hit her face now, she looked tired and hurt and old. It was a shock seeing her like that. Helen, my kid sister, was suddenly old.

It's always a mistake running away. I know that. But I couldn't reason with her. Anymore than you can reason with a dog that's been run over and badly hurt, and you just stand there on the highway looking down helplessly praying that you can think of some little thing to end its misery.

New York to Los Angeles is a long hop. We drove in an old jalopy we'd bought, and by some miracle it held together. Helen made an attempt to be a good travelling companion, but I knew it was an effort. Not only had she developed a nervous habit of looking back over her shoulder as she walked, but one night, by accident, I got a good look at her arms and legs as she prepared for bed. It was all I could do to keep from dropping everything and starting back after the son of a bitch. But if ever she needed me, it was now. Revenge, hard as it was to subdue, would have to wait.

When we reached Los Angeles, we followed Wilshire Boulevard straight down to the ocean where it ended at Pacific Palisades in Santa Monica.

There's something about the air and the blue of the ocean that makes things look better than they really are. For a moment the lines seemed to disappear from around Helen's eyes, and as she closed them and breathed deeply, for a moment I could forget the anger and the rage that had simmered within me at various times during the trip.

We drove down the ramp which led to the ocean. For the first time, Helen began to take an interest in things.

"If we could find someplace right on the ocean . . ." she said hopefully. "Even if it's just for a few days, then we could find something more reasonable later . . ."

Lucky for us, it wasn't the peak of the season, and after making a few inquiries, we finally settled on a place called Seaside Motor Cabins. The landlady was a Mrs. Gordon, and sometimes as I look back on it all, I think she gave us a special rate just so that she'd have someone to talk to. And that certain lady could talk faster and longer in one breath than anyone I've ever met in my life. But she was a nice, if nosey old gal, and I knew it would be nice for Helen to have someone to be with during

the day when I was out working.

It's never been too hard for me to find jobs, I guess it's because I'm not proud, and I'm willing to do most anything. After making the rounds, I managed to get a part time job in one of the shooting concessions down on the pier. The money wasn't much, but it was close to the Motel, where I could keep my eye on Helen.

So for a few days, I was foolish enough to believe that everything was going to be all right. Helen was rapidly getting back to normal, and we were beginning to have our little private jokes again like when we'd been kids. Little did we know that there was a big sharp axe poised right over our heads . . . it was the calm before the storm.

I'd only been working a few weeks, when my boss asked me to stay very late in his place as he had to take off. After closing up, I thought of going for something to eat, but then decided against it and started for the Motel. I quickly noticed that none of the bungalows were lighted, excepting ours, and as I drew closer, I could hear angry, muffled voices.

I went up the steps, but the shades were drawn. A man's figure was silhouetted against the doorway, and he appeared to be holding a gun. I didn't have to be told who it was, and from what Helen had told me about him, I knew he wouldn't think a thing of taking a shot at me, and then picking things up from there. It would be foolish to go in unarmed, so I ran back as fast as I could to the shooting gallery and I grabbed the first rifle I could lay hands on.

When I got back to our bungalow, it was dark, and the sound of voices was gone. I turned the door knob, and I was surprised to find it unlocked. As the door swung slowly open, I reached out and flicked on the light switch. There was no one in the room, and it was in complete disorder as though there'd been a drunken party of some kind. A draft caused the front door to close slowly behind me. As it did so, it revealed something which had been shielded by the half-open door until now.

Lying face downward was a man's body. Blood trickled from his temple, and it formed a pool on the rug beneath him.

Funny, how in the big, important moments of your life, some incongruous things stand out. The blood from his head trickled out into a pattern of a rose in the rug. The colors matched beautifully, and it was as if his head lay next to a big wet rose on the rug. The gas heater lay over turned beside him. I put my rifle down, and I turned him face up. Although I'd never seen him in

life, I knew who he was, and the horrible realization of what had happened swept over me.

Dazed, I called out, almost to myself, "Helen?" I ran to the bedroom door. "Helen . . ." There was no one there. I pulled the kitchen door open. The room was deserted, and there were some over-turned ice cube trays in the sink. I moved to the back service door and opened it, looking out. Just as I did so, I heard the sound of the front door opening. I turned and ran into the living room.

Helen stood in the doorway. "Jimmy!" she started sobbing hysterically, but I could see that she was not bruised.

"Close the door!" I said frantically. She continued to sob, not hearing. "Close it! Do you hear me?" I rushed over and pulled her to one side. Closing the door, I locked it behind her. "Be quiet!" I turned out the lights.

We stood there silhouetted against the door as the light from the court shone through. We were quiet for a moment, but then Helen started to sob hysterically again.

"Jimmy, what have I let you in for?" she said almost unintelligibly.

"Sh!" I crossed quickly to the radio and turned it off. We started to talk at the same time, but then we heard footsteps approaching along the court. "Someone's coming!" I whispered. Helen stopped crying abruptly, and the room was ominously ly quiet. We stood there rigidly in the dark with him at our feet.

"Don't move," I said softly.

"Who is it?" Helen asked, terrified.

We saw a woman's figure as it came up the steps and toward the front door. I quickly picked up my rifle which lay next to the body, and I threw it back of an arm chair.

"She's coming in *here!*" Helen said frantically.

The figure hesitated a moment, and then she knocked.

"What'll we do?" Helen whispered.

"She'll go away," I tried to reassure her.

There was a knock, and then the woman stood quietly outside.

We stood there motionless during a long tense silence. After a moment, the figure outside reached down and tried the knob of the door. The sound of the knob rattling seemed very loud.

I moved to the window and looked out. It was Mrs. Gordon, the owner of the Hotel. She knocked again.

"She'll think we're out . . . she'll go away," I whispered.

Mrs. Gordon came closer to the door as if attempting to look inside. Then making a decision, she reached into her pocket and

she took out a large key ring and she began to select a key; her eyes squinting at the numbers on them.

Helen turned swiftly to me. "She's going to open the door!"

I made a sudden decision, and called out in a loud voice. "Just a minute, Mrs. Gordon . . . I've . . . I've nothing on! Let me get something on!"

"What's going on in there, Jimmy? One of the tenants has been complaining . . ."

"Nothing, Mrs. Gordon . . . some friends of mine were drinking . . . they're gone now . . ."

"Jimmy Barton!" she said, scandalized. "You open this door! I want to talk to you . . ."

"I . . . I can't . . . I'm not dressed!"

"Well, you just put something on. I want to talk to you, and I'm not taking no for an answer . . ."

I knew she meant business. "I was . . . I was just going to to take a shower . . ."

"You can take a shower later. I said I wanted to talk to you, and I'm going to . . ." There was a threat to her voice now. "You open this door, Jimmy . . . or dressed or not. I'm coming in there . . ."

Paralyzed, Helen and I looked at one another and then at the figure on the floor.

"She has a pass key," Helen whispered.

"All right, all right, Mrs. Gordon," I called out quickly. "Just let me get some clothes on."

"I'll give you exactly two minutes . . ."

"What are we going to do?" Helen said in a muffled sob.

"We'll have to carry him into the bedroom . . ." I moved quickly to the body.

"No!" Helen gasped.

"Take his arm," I said sternly. "I can't do it alone."

She moved beside me and we started dragging him across the room. The feet dragged along the floor, pulling the rug as it did so. We were near the bath room when we heard her calling outside. "Your time's up, Jimmy, I'm coming inside . . ." We heard the front door opening.

"Quick! In the bathroom," I said.

"Jimmy, where are you?" she called out.

We were in the bath room now and I called out over my shoulder. "I'll be right out, Mrs. Gordon . . . just a minute . . ."

"She might come in here, Jimmy!"

"We'll put him in the shower . . ."

"Jimmy, we can't . . ."

"Pull back the curtains, and don't argue!"

Mrs. Gordon's voice was drawing closer. "Getting me up at this hour of the morning! Really!"

We stood there by the shower trying to put his body in. I realized how tall he was, and how difficult it was going to be.

"Jimmy, I . . . I can't get his legs in . . ." Helen cried softly.

"Here . . . let me do it . . ." By doubling them up, and struggling and pushing, I finally managed. Then I pulled the curtains together quickly.

Strangely enough, Mrs. Gordon had been quiet for a few seconds, but when she spoke again, it sounded like she was having a fit, "Jimmy! What's been going on in here? These rugs . . . has there been a fight?"

"Just a minute!" I called.

"And Jimmy . . ." she continued, her voice taking on a tense quality. "What's this on the floor . . . and on this gas heater . . . why . . . why, it's *blood!*" She was really alarmed now.

Stunned, Helen and I stood there looking at one another, wondering what to do.

"Jimmy . . ." Helen whimpered, on the verge of hysteria.

"Be quiet!" I warned, then I straightened the shower curtains. Going to the medicine chest, I quickly took a razor out.

"What are you going to do?"

Although I had intended to make a small wound to explain the blood in the living room to Mrs. Gordon, in the confusion of all that was going on, my hand slipped, and before I knew it, I found I'd made a real gash in my hand. I was amazed that I felt no pain.

"Why, Jimmy, why?"

"Don't ask question!" I snapped. I grabbed a towel and wrapped it around my hand, speaking rapidly to Helen as I did so. "Now, you stay here, do you understand? I don't want Mrs. Gordon to know you're here. Leave everything to me, and don't make a sound. She won't come in here . . ."

"But, Jimmy . . ."

"You do as I say," I commanded. Then I called out, "Coming, Mrs. Gordon . . ."

As I entered the living room, Mrs. Gordon stood there with an angry, shocked expression on her face. Then she saw the towel on my hand and the blood which had begun to seep through.

"The blood on the rug . . ." I indicated my hand.

"Just as I suspected! You've been fighting! You've hurt yourself . . ." She moved toward me, "Here, let me see . . ."

"It isn't bad," I said lamely, trying to avoid her.

"You were taking a shower, indeed! she said contemptuously. "Drinking and fighting! That's what you were doing! No wonder you didn't want me to come in . . ." She moved closer. "Let me see that hand . . ."

"It's nothing . . ."

"You let me see that hand!"

she said vehemently, and she lifted the towel. "Jimmy! This is a bad cut . . . how in the world did you do it? Have you disinfected it?"

"Yes . . . yes, I have!"

"Then I'll bandage it for you."

"This towel's all right."

"It's *not* all right! Where are your bandages and things . . . in the bath room?"

"No . . . no . . . I don't have any in the house."

"You're just saying that, Jimmy Barton, because you don't want me fussing over you . . . you're not fooling me, and I'm going right into the bath room for some bandages . . . or some adhesive" . . . she started off.

"Mrs. Gordon!" I called. She paid no attention to me. She was already in the bedroom, near the bathroom door. "Mrs Gordon!"

"What is it?" She stopped, alarmed at the tone of my voice.

"I'm . . . I'm not feeling very well . . ." I sat on a chair near the door.

"Well, no wonder!' she said angrily. "What do you expect? Fighting, drinking, and heaven knows what . . ."

I was in a panic. If I could just keep her out of the bathroom, I thought! Helen was in there with *him!*

I was thinking fast. "Would you make me some coffee . . . I feel dizzy . . ."

She hesitated a moment. "Well, all right . . ." she said, giving in. "But you sit there quietly and keep this towel over your hand. I'll bandage it later . . ."

"I will . . . I'll just sit here," I said gratefully.

She disappeared into the living room. "What a mess this place is in! Good thing Helen isn't here to see it!" As I heard her go into the kitchen, I moved quickly into the bathroom. "Quick, Helen! Sneak out the front door. I don't want her to see you here!"

"But, Jimmy, I should be the one to take the blame . . ."

"Helen, do as I say . . ." I started to take her by the arm and push her out, but then I heard Mrs. Gordon calling, and it was too late. "Jimmy! Where are you!"

I dropped Helen's arm. "Wait here," I whispered. "I'll get rid of her somehow . . . I've got to . . ." I rushed out just in time. Mrs. Gordon had returned to the bedroom again.

"There's coffee on the stove, Jimmy . . . what's the meaning of all this?"

I closed the bathroom door behind me. "I guess I . . . I forgot there was coffee . . . things are pretty hectic . . ."

"I should say they are, and now I'm going to fix up that hand . . ."

"No! I can do it myself!"

"How can you bandage yourself with one hand?"

"I can . . . really, I can . . . but first, can I have some coffee, *please,* Mrs. Gordon."

"All right, all right, come with me and have your coffee . . . we'll see about the bandaging later."

I watched her nervously as she poured the coffee.

"Really, Jimmy, you should be ashamed . . . carrying on like this. What will Helen think?"

"Please don't let her in on this . . . she isn't well, and . . ."

"By the way, where is she?"

"She . . . she's staying at a girl friend's tonight . . ."

"Lucky for you. Now you have your coffee, and I'll be right back . . ."

Before I could stop her, she was out of the room.

"Where are you going?" I called.

"Never you mind. I'll be right back." I caught up with her as she was about to open the bathroom door, determined to get the bandages.

"No, Mrs. Gordon!" I must have sounded really hysterical now, for she stopped and turned. "What's come over you?" She seemed suspicious and concerned. "Are you trying to hide something?"

"No, I . . ." I stopped, at a loss for something to say.

"Well, then, stop acting like that!" She pushed open the bathroom door.

I knew there was nothing I could do now. I stood there, waiting hopelessly. "Jimmy . . ." she said as she entered, and there was a pause. I couldn't move, I couldn't talk. I couldn't do anything. After an eternity, she spoke again. "Jimmy, come in here . . ."

By the time I'd forced myself to enter the room, she had all the bandages and tape out on the wash basin. She was working over them with deep concentration. *Helen was not in sight.*

"Take the towel off your hand . . ."

I moved over to the wash basin, looking back uneasily over my shoulder as I tried to see back of the open door. *Where was Helen?*

Mrs. Gordon lifted down a bottle and poured it over my hand. "Good heavens, Jimmy, doesn't that sting?" she asked, surprised. She continued to fuss with my hand.

The door was moving slightly. Agonized, I started to reach out in order to push it back against the wall.

"Hold still, Jimmy!"

"The door . . . I . . ."

She turned to look at it. "What about it?"

"It's . . . it's going to bang shut . . ."

"Well, let it!" she said irri-

tably.

I watched it with terrified eyes as it swung on its hinges. It swung slowly away from the wall, but there was no one behind it. Obviously a draft from the bedroom had caused it to move.

"Jimmy, will you relax, please . . ." She continued to busy herself with the gauze and bandages.

Puzzled, I looked about the room. Where was Helen? The only window was a small one, too small for anyone to get through. I turned to look at the shower. At first the curtains were very still, but then they moved slighly. The realization that Helen had been forced to hide in the small shower with *him* swept over me.

"It's not very neat, but I suppose you'll have it off you in no time, the way you keep hopping around . . ." She had finished bandaging my hand.

I knew I had to get her out of the bathroom as quickly as possible now, before Helen's nerves snapped.

"That's swell! Perfect!" I tried to sound enthusiastic. "Now come on, Mrs. Gordon, let's have some coffee now . . ."

She picked up the towel which she'd taken from around my hand. "First I'll clean up a bit. We don't want Helen seeing any of this blood you've splattered about!"

"No . . . no, I'll do it later, Mrs. Gordon."

She continued to mop up, taking no notice of me. "You're not going to be able to do much with that hand for a while . . ." She leaned down and she began to wipe up the floor. I could see that the base of the shower curtains were stained with *his* blood. I stood there watching her and not knowing what to do.

"The shower curtains!" she said disgustedly. "Blood on them, too!" She seemed annoyed. "How could you have gotten so messy about everything?" She picked up the bottom of one of the curtains and she wiped it off vigorously.

"Mrs. Gordon . . . I . . . I feel dizzy again . . ." My hand went to my head, and clutching the wash basin, I pretended that I was on the verge of fainting.

She rose quickly to her feet, dropping the curtain. She took me by the arm, holding me firmly. "You've lost more blood than you thought . . . you'd better lie down . . ." She was solicitious now as she led me out of the bath room. As I glanced back over my shoulder, the shower curtains moved again, almost as if they were shuddering.

In the kitchen we had coffee, and she made me sit quietly for a while she sat there making small talk and eating dough nuts which she'd found someplace in

the kitchen.

"Sure you wouldn't like one?" she asked as she dunked. "Might give you a little strength."

"No, thank you."

"Feeling better?"

"Yes. I'd be all right if I could get a little sleep." I tried not to be too rude, as the old girl meant well.

She popped the last of her doughnut into her mouth. "I can take a hint, Jimmy . . . and anyway, I've a million things to do myself." She rose to her feet. "Sure there's nothing else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you. You've done enough." I meant that in more ways than one.

"All right. I'll be on my way now . . . and what about Helen?"

"What about her?',

"I suppose you don't want me to say anything about this to her."

"I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't, Mrs. Gordon. You know how nervous she is, and I don't want to worry her."

"I won't say a word to her, if you promise you won't go in for any more of this sort of thing . . . drinking and fighting . . ."

"I won't, I promise . . ."

"All right. I hope you've learned a lesson," she paused. "What are you going to tell her about your hand . . . just so I'll know what to say in case she asks me . . ."

"I hurt it down at the shooting gallery . . ."

"Okay, good night . . ."

"Good night," she was finally gone. The door closed behind her. I ran quickly into the bedroom. Pale and exhausted, Helen was leaning against the doorway of the bathroom as I entered. There was no light in the room; only that which shone in from the living room. She was crying, she wasn't able to hold back anymore.

"Sh . . . Helen . . ." I said as I crossed to her.

"Oh, Jimmy . . ." she sobbed. "When I heard her say she was coming into the bathroom, I didn't want her to see me . . . you said I wasn't here . . . I didn't want her to catch us in a lie . . ." She stopped, unable to go on.

"Please don't, Helen . . ."

There was no stopping her now. "That shower . . . so cramped . . . and *him* . . . all cramped like he was . . . it looked like he actually *moved* . . ."

"Please, Helen . . . calm down . . . we've got to think . . ."

"It was terrible . . ."

"Try not to think about it . . ."

We both looked up startled as he heard Mrs. Gordon's shrill voice outside, "Jimmy!"

"Good God!" I whispered. Then I raised my voice, "Be right out, Mrs. Gordon." I moved quickly to the front door, opened it, and stood in the doorway.

"Jimmy, I just noticed the time! I forgot to tell you, I'm having some painting done tomorrow . . ." she corrected herself, "I mean *today* . . . here in your apartment. They'll be here before you know it . . . so you better get your things covered up, or out of the way . . . you'll just have to do without sleep now, and it's all your own fault, so don't expect sympathy from me!"

"But Mrs. Gordon, couldn't you put them off . . . I . . ."

"Put them off!" she snapped. "I should say not! I had trouble enough getting them to come in the first place . . . you're just lucky Helen stayed at her girl friend's . . . at least she'll get some sleep, even if *we* won't! Now don't you go to sleep in there, or you'll have a devil of a time waking up when they get here . . . understand?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gordon . . ." There was no arguing with her, and I closed the door and went back inside. Helen spoke to me from the doorway of the bedroom. "I heard what she said about the painters, Jimmy." I could see she was making an effort to control her voice. Now we have to get him out of here . . . soon . . . what'll we do?"

"I don't know." I said frankly. "I really don't know." I was overcome with a terrible weariness. "And we haven't got much time . . ." I knew we had to act fast, for it would be light outside very soon, and then we'd never be able to get him out, without anyone seeing us.

"Let me go to the police and tell them I did it!" Helen said suddenly.

"Don't talk like that!" I said, angrier than I intended. What we have to do is get him out of here, and fast!" My mind was beginning to race in desperation. "I know what we'll do!" I looked at her to see how she'd react. "We'll carry him into the car . . . while it's still dark, we'll put him in the back of the jalopy . . ."

"Then what?" she asked hopelessly.

"I don't know. But first things first . . . we'll get him out before the painters get here . . ."

"I suppose you're right."

I made a sudden decision. "And I'm going to do it alone . . . I mean, once I get in the car."

At first she didn't reply, then she spoke solemnly. "Listen, Jimmy, we're in this mess because of me . . . and I'm going to help you . . ."

I didn't bother to argue. I went to the bathroom door; my hand on the knob, I hesitated. It took all I had to make myself open that door.

The light over the wash basin was still burning. I looked down. His legs had slipped from the cramped position in which they'd

been placed, and they protruded from beneath the shower curtains into the room. Even in death the bastard wouldn't stay put. I felt sick and I wanted to turn and run, but I knew what I had to do. I pulled the shower curtains apart and I made myself look down at him.

He was slumped against the shower wall in a grotesque position; his head twisted down, his chin digging into his chest. The trickle of dry blood which ran from his temple was highlighted by the light which hit it from above. Maybe it was my imagination, but he seemed to be smiling, as if the son of a bitch was thinking, "Now, what are you going to do with me, eh?"

As I stood looking down, Helen appeared in the doorway. I turned to her, speaking almost to myself, "If someone did see me carrying him out, they might think he was drunk or sick . . ." She waited for me to go on. "They might think that if it weren't for the blood on his face . . ." I added lamely.

I turned and went reluctantly to the wash basin. I let water run on a wash rag, and then I wrung it out. I caught Helen's reflection in the mirror as she watched me, horrified. As I fell to my knees beside the shower, she turned away. It was awful . . . the feel of that wash cloth on the hard, marble-like texture of his cold, dead face, and the blood had congealed stubbornly on the side of his cheek, matted in the stubble of his beard. When I finished, I tried to lift him, but I slipped, and his head made a hollow sound as it thumped down on the shower floor. And somehow there was still a smile on his face, as if he seemed to defy me.

I had no choice but to let Helen help me. God knows how we did it, but we managed to get him out of the back door and into the luggage compartment of the car, with no lights on at all.

The car shelter was a shed between the bungalows, and there was no tenant next door, which was lucky for us.

Helen watched me in the shadows as I stood at the rear of the car, covering the body with a beach blanket. Once covered, I started to let down the top of the luggage compartment. But it stuck about six inches before it was completely shut. *He* was giving me trouble again; he was too big for the cramped quarters. Making it a personal contest, I pushed him with all my strength, and I forced the top down. I couldn't help smiling ironically at my victory as I made my way to the front of the car. Helen looked as if she were going to get in. "You're not going with me," I said flatly. Without an-

swering, she was in the seat beside me, and I knew it would be useless to argue.

The two lines of bungalows were dark, and there was a heavy fog over the court. I drove cautiously down the drive with the lights out. When I reached the street, I turned the lights on, and they reflected gloomily on the glistening pavement.

"Where are we going?" Helen asked quietly.

"I don't know exactly yet . . ."

There was no one in sight as we crept along. The heavy, wet fog made the visibility poor. I turned on the windshield wipers, and if ever I'd imagined that windshield wipers sounded dismal as they clicked back and forth, this was it.

"The fog'll clear when the sun comes up," I said finally. "It'll be harder to get rid of him then."

"I know."

"Helen!" I said suddenly, as I had an idea.

"Yes?"

"Why didn't I think of it before! We can drive clear out to the end of the pier . . . then we can dump him off there!"

"Whatever you think, Jimmy."

I stepped on the gas. The fog was still dense but it was beginning to be day light. As we turned onto the ramp leading to the pier, we could see some fishermen casting their lines over the rail. Silently, oblivious to one another as fishermen usually are.

"We can't here . . . with the fishermen . . ." Helen said.

"Maybe there won't be anyone out farther . . ."

I drove out as far as I could, then I pulled to one side, and turned the lights out. "Do you see anyone?"

"No."

I got out, figuring I'd have to act fast. "Keep your eyes open, Helen . . ."

"I will. Hurry," she said.

I fumbled with the handle of the luggage compartment a moment, and then I raised it, dreading what I had to do.

"Do you need any help?"

"No! Just keep your eyes open, and warn me if you see anyone!" I braced the top open, and for a moment I didn't know where I'd get the strength to lift him out.

"Jimmy!" Helen called out suddenly.

At the sound of her startled voice, I dropped down the lid of the luggage compartment, not taking the time to push it completely closed. I rushed to the front of the car.

Speechless, Helen indicated a spot a short distance from the car. A fisherman, with his back to us, stood struggling with his line as he rose to his feet. We hadn't seen him before because he'd been sitting back of a barrel screened from sight.

"Did he see us??"

"I don't think so." Helen was shaking, losing her nerve. What'll we do?"

"We'll just have to look for another place."

Suddenly we heard heavy footsteps approaching, on the wooden boards of the pier. We tried to peer through the heavy fog which surrounded the car.

Helen saw him first. "It's a policeman!" she gasped.

"Sh!" As he came closer, I recognized him. It was Red Davis, the policeman on the beat at the shooting concession. and I'd give him a few free rounds of ammunition now and then. He flicked on a flash light.

"Well!" he said pleasantly. "Thought I recognized the old jalopy . . ."

"Hello, Red . . ." I couldn't think of anything to say.

As he came closer, he saw Helen. "Well, Jimmy," he said good-humoredly, "I didn't think you were out *fishing*." When do you get your sleep? Or haven't you been to bed yet?"

I laughed uneasily. "Oh, I've been to bed all right. My sister and I thought we'd get breakfast out and spend the day on the beach . . . Helen, this is Red Davis . . . he's patrolman on the pier . . ."

"How do you do . . ." Helen said.

"Hello . . ." Red said. "Only place to get breakfast this early is up in town . . ."

"Yeah. I guess so . . ."

Red looked around, flashing his light through the fog. "Fog's clearing up . . . looks like we might get some sun today . . ."

"Yeah . . . well, Helen, I suppose we'd better be on our way."

"So long . . . nice meeting you," Red said to Helen.

"Thank you." Helen got quickly back into the car, and I went around to the other side. Before I could get started, however, Red came around to my side.

"Say, Jimmy . . ."

"Yes?"

Red put his foot up on the car as he spoke. "I have to drive out to a nursery today . . . pick up some plants and stuff for my wife . . . my car's in the garage, and I was wondering if you'd let me use yours for a couple of hours sometime today . . ."

It took me a minute to find my voice. "I'd like to, Red . . . but I've got to drive out to Malibu later on . . ."

"I could drive out with you. And I'd certainly appreciate it if you'd give me a hand at the nursery . . ." He wasn't asking any more, he was taking the use of the jalopy for granted. People in uniform have a way of doing that.

"Gee, I don't know, Red . . ."

He smiled over at Helen. "Your brother's afraid I'll wreck this beautiful car of his . . ."

"It isn't that, Red, but . . ."

"Okay, then," he interrupted. "I'll meet you around nine o'clock . . . front of the shooting gallery . . ."

"All right," I'd have agreed to anything to get away. I raced the motor, and put the car into gear. But as I started to swerve the car around, he called out again.

"Jimmy! Wait!"

I put on the brake and Helen and I sat there hypnotized, waiting. Then we heard him move to the back of the car, in the rear vision mirror I could see the glow of his flash light as he cast it over the luggage compartment. After what seemed an eternity, we heard him bang down the top of the luggage compartment. "Didn't want you to lose your beach blanket," he said as he waved us off.

"Why'd you say you'd let him have the car, Jimmy?"

"What else could I do? I couldn't have a policeman coming around the bungalow. Mrs. Gordon's suspicious enough already."

"I know."

"Now we'll have to get *him* out of the car while it's still fairly dark and the fog lasts. It'll be light before we know it."

Even as I spoke, the sun was beginning to break through the fog bank in places. A few cars were puttering up along the beach filled with early sunbathers and picknickers.

Helen leaned forward to look at the gas gauge. "Your gas is getting low."

"I noticed that a while ago."

"Have you any money?"

"No. Didn't you bring your purse?" I asked anxiously.

"I forgot."

"But I thought you would. I counted on it."

"I forgot everything in all the excitement. Can't we go back to the bungalow?"

"No. The one thing we've got to do is keep away from there." I looked down at the gas gauge again. "Now we *will* have to do something soon . . ."

"But what?"

"Red's not the type to take "no" for an answer, so I'm going to have to lend him the car at some time or other today, or he'll get suspicious and come looking for me." I glanced over my shoulder uneasily at the luggage compartment. "That means we'll have to get *him* out as soon as possible . . ."I shook my head hopelessly. "If there were only someplace we could hide him until tonight. Then after dark I'd get the car back, and I could drive him someplace miles from here . . . I'd get rid of him then, somehow, for sure."

I pulled up before a cross walk which led from the street to the beach. A group of people with beach robes, hampers and fishing equipment crossed in front of us.

I noticed the windshield of the car was slightly foggy with mist.

"Have you anything to wipe the windshield with, Helen?"

She opened the glove compartmnt, but it was empty.

-"There's a pair of my old swimming trunks in the back here." I indicated a ridge back of us between the seat and the rear windshield.

As I watched Helen wiping the windshield with my trunks, I suddenly got an idea. "Helen!"

"Yes?"

"Give me those trunks!"

"Why?" she asked, puzzled.

"Never mind." I took the trunks and I put them on the seat beside me. The pedestrians had passed through the cross walk now and I swung the car around in a U turn and started back in the direction we'd come.

"What are you going to do, Jimmy?"

"Like I said. There's only one thing left to do . . . hide him until tonight . . ."

"But where?"

I spoke rapidly. "Listen, Helen . . . I'm taking you back to the bungalow . . ."

"But I thought you said . . ."

"Never mind," I interrupted. "We haven't enough gas to get away from here now . . ."

"I'm staying with you," she said stubbornly.

"You listen to me! You're going to the bungalow and get some money, and wait for me there. I'll be back this evening. You can't help me with what I've got to do now."

"I'm not leaving you," she insisted.

I began to get angry. "Don't argue, Helen!"

"I'm not going to let you do this alone!" I pulled the car to a sudden stop. I reached across her and opened the door on her side. "Now go on . . . go back to the bungalow and wait . . . do you hear me?"

"I won't do it, Jimmy . . . you're going to try and do this all alone . . . whatever it is . . ." She began to cry. I took her firmly by the arm and tried to force her out of the car. "You're hurting me!" she sobbed.

With a great effort, I succeeded in pushing her out. I slammed the door shut after her. But before I knew it, she was on the running board, trying to get in the car again. "I can't let you do this alone! What happened is *my* fault, and now I've got to help you!"

As I tried to pry her hands from the side of the car, I spoke rapidly. "Helen, I don't blame you for what you did . . . you *had* to kill him, I know that! But the only way you can help me now is to let me do this alone . . ."

For some reason she suddenly stopped crying, and her face was blank with amazement. "What

did you say, Jimmy? What did you say?"

"I said I don't blame you for having killed him," I shouted impatiently, "but now you've got to let me handle things!" Before she could answer, I wrenched her hands off the side of the car and pushed her off. "I'll meet you tonight at the bungalow. Wait for me there, and have as much money as you can lay hands on!" The car lurched forward abruptly.

"Jimmy!" I could hear her calling desperately as she stood there in the middle of the street. "Jimmy! Listen to me! You don't know what you're saying . . ." her voice trailed off. I looked up in the rear vision mirror. She ran after the car a little ways, and then she stood there staring after me.

The hand on the gas gauge was fluttering dangerously on the empty mark. I knew I wouldn't be able to go far. The road was approaching a sharp incline which led down to the beach. I heard the car sputter a little for the lack of gas. What if I stalled in the middle of the highway with *him* in the luggage compartment? In my mind's eyes, I could see him smiling; I knew he'd like that!

I clutched the steering wheel, the car sputtered a little again, and I started praying. If only I could make the top of the incline! Then I could roll down to the beach, and at least I'd be off the highway. After a last few sputters, the car made the top of the grade, and I reached down and turned off the ignition key to save gas. The car began to roll silently down the grade.

I was relieved, but only for a few minutes, for it wasn't much of a grade, and the car began to slow up again, I let the old jalopy roll just as long as I could, then I turned on the ignition again, and I put it in gear. The damned thing backfired several times, and the noise was loud and startling. I stepped on the gas, and there was a last spurt of life, and the car picked up a little speed. Not far ahead, I could see the old brick bathhouse, where most of the sun bathers gathered on that section of the beach.

I came to an abrupt stop before the bath house. Fortunately for me, there were no other cars in sight. I got out and looked about cautiously, then I walked over to the corner of the building and I looked out at the beach. It was still very early, and there was no one in sight.

Walking back to the car, I opened the door on the side toward the bath house, then I put on my swimming trunks and a towel, and I hung them on the car door. When I was satisfied that there was no one about, I moved to the back of the car and that damned luggage compartment.

As I looked down at that face with the half-defiant smile on it, it was as if *he* knew that what I intended to do was crazy.

Crazy or not, I had no other choice . . . if I could keep his body from being discovered this one day, then I could dispose of it when it was dark again. Grim and determined, I secured the brace which held the lid of the compartment up.

In spite of a great deal of resistance from his stiff body, I managed to get my old trunks onto him. I was lucky that we were the same size, as I had enough problems as it was. When I'd finished, I closed the lid, and went out onto the beach, which was still deserted. I spread my blanket carefully on the sand, and then I went back for him.

I waited until there were no cars in sight, then I half-dragged, half-carried him over to where I'd spread my blanket on the sand. I don't know what I'd have said if anyone had seen us. I placed him on the blanket face-downward, with his hands folded over his head, in the position of someone sun bathing. I pushed his face down a little harder than necessary, so that I wouldn't have to look at that defiant smile any more than necessary. Then I spread my towel out a short distance from him . . . and I laid down on it. I tried to look relaxed. I figured that if I stayed there with him, I could keep my eyes on him, and there'd be less chance of his being discovered. When night came, I could dispose of him.

And believe it or not, I dozed. I suppose it takes one hell of a lot to interfere with my sleeping. When I woke with a start, little groups of sun-bathers started to form. And as far as I knew, no one had paid any attention to us. We looked no different from the others, and things were working out as I'd planned. I was beginning to feel that everything was going to be easy, once it was dark again. And I guess it would have been all right if Mrs. Gordon hadn't come along. Mrs. Gordon, and her big, big mouth!

I saw her approaching in the distance, looking to the right and left as if she were searching for someone. She carried a towel and beach equipment. The moment I could see she was coming in my direction, I turned away and pretended that I was asleep. With my face close to the sand, I watched her approaching, but she was the type who would have spotted me, even if I'd buried my head in the sand. Shading her eyes, she was looking directly at me. She called out in her loud, piercing voice, "Jimmy!"

I had no choice but to look up, waving my hand feebly as I did so. Grunting with exertion, she began to make her way through

the heavy sand. As she came closer, I took one last look at *him!* He appeared to be sun bathing, quite peacefully. How a big bastard like that could look peaceful even in death was beyond me, and as Mrs. Gordon approached, I edged away from him so that she'd think there was no connection between us.

"Jimmy, where have you been? I was worried about your not getting any sleep, and the painters told me you'd already left when they got there . . ."

"I left the door open for them . . ."

"I know. And how's your hand?"

For a moment I didn't know what she was talking about. So much had happened. "What? . . . Oh, yes, my hand!" I looked down at it. The bandage was badly soiled, but I'd forgotten all about it. "My hand's all right, Mrs. Gordon."

"Do you want me to look at it?"

"No!" I was sharper than I intended to be. "Please, Mrs. Gordon, let's relax and get some sun . . ." The moment I said that, I knew I shouldn't have, as she took it as an invitation to sit with me. And before I could protest, she had put her towel and blanket down and it appeared as if she was going to settle down. I couldn't think of any legitimate way of getting rid of her.

"What with painters around, everything's a mess . . . so I think I will stay here with you a while . . ." Then as an afterthought, she added, "You're not expecting anyone, are you?"

"No . . . no, I'm not . . ."

"Good." She looked up at the sky, which was clear and blue. "I wish I'd brought along some oil . . . it looks like it's going to be a hot day . . . these days that start off foggy're deceiving, you know . . ."

"Yes . . . yes, they are . . ."

"I just had an idea," she said suddenly.

What now, I wondered?

"This is a real treat for me. I never get a chance to get out on the beach during the week . . . so I'm going to have a nice day of rest for a change . . . we'll have our lunch here!" She was carried away with the thought. "Treat's on me!"

"But Mrs. Gordon . . ." I tried not to appear frantic, but I couldn't bear the thought of her chattering away all day, and having to keep an eye on *him* at the same time. "I . . . I hadn't planned on spending the day at the beach . . ."

"Oh, Jimmy," she seemed disappointed. "It'll be good for you . . . it's healthy to get a little sunshine once in a while . . ." Suddenly she was looking *past* me. Her interest was centered directly on *him*. She paused a

moment before speaking, "Jimmy, do you know that man over there?"

"Which one?" my voice was tense and hoarse.

"Right over there . . . sunbathing, with his face turned away from us . . ."

I forced myself to turn. "I don't know him . . . why?"

She lowered her voice. "He's lying so still . . . he's going to get an awful burn . . ."

"Now, Mrs. Gordon, we can't go butting in . . ."

"Do you suppose he's asleep . . ." she whispered. "It's bad to sleep in the sun . . ."

I tried to change the subject. "Will the painters be finished by this afternoon?"

"I hope so."

"Painters do make a mess, don't they?" If only I could divert her attention.

"I should say they do! The way they splatter everything, takes me weeks to get the windows clean." But even as she spoke, she was staring over at *him* again. "Someone ought to speak to that man!"

"Please, Mrs. Gordon . . . if you don't mind my saying so, it's really none of our business."

"Well, I like that!" she said irritably. "This would be a better world if we all took more interest in our fellow men."

"It isn't that. It's just that people come to the beach to relax, and they might not like it if . . ."

"Yes," she interrupted, "and they relax to the point where they get a third degree burn . . ."

"Please don't bother him, Mrs. Gordon."

For a moment she was quiet. I could see another idea forming, however. "Jimmy," she said quietly.

"Yes?"

"Maybe you're right, maybe he would resent my interfering . . ." "Certainly he would," I said with deep conviction.

"Maybe if we were more subtle about it," she said confidentially.

"What do you mean?"

"We can carry on a conversation loud enough so that he'll overhear us . . ." She raised her voice obviously, pitching it in his direction. "A person can get an awful burn on a day like this!" Her voice must have carried at least a block.

"Mrs. Gordon," I started, but there was no stopping her. She was really "on" now.

Her voice was even louder than before. "Especially someone who's as white as certain people are . . . people who haven't been in the sun for a long time . . . they should take it gradually . . ." Pleased with herself, she looked over to see if she was getting any results.

I rose to my feet abruptly. "What do you say we take a

walk up on the beach?"

"I'm not one for walking. You go ahead, if you want."

"Come on," I insisted. "It'll be nice to walk a while . . ."

"Why. are you hungry?"

"No, but . . ."

"Well, *I* am, this ocean air always gives me an appetite."

"Good." I said eagerly, "then let's go over and get some sandwiches!"

"All right," she said to my surprise. It was the first suggestion she'd agreed to.

I moved to help her to her feet. "Better take your towels and things." I guess I figured if I could get her away from this spot, I'd see to it that we settled in another part of the beach after we got our sandwiches.

"Why take our things? We're coming back, aren't we?"

"Someone might take them while we're gone."

"You're right. So you go get the sandwiches, and I'll stay here and watch our things . . ."

"But Mrs. Gordon . . ."

"Jimmy, why are you being so contrary," she said, annoyed. "Now here's the money, and do me a favor, and stop arguing, will you?" She took some money and shoved it at me. "Treat's on me."

I knew she was in a mood where she couldn't be talked out of anything, so I took the money and started off the beach, figuring that the quicker that I got back, the better it would be.

When I came back with the hamburgers and the bottles of pop, I was relieved to find that two young boys who were playing ball near by, had Mrs. Gordon's attention. One of the boys stood almost between Mrs. Gordon and *him*, and the other was up the beach a ways. The latter threw the ball, and the other was preparing to catch it.

Mrs. Gordon watched them with an irritated expression on her face. As the boy scrambled to catch the ball, he kicked up some sand near her. "You stop that!" she said angrily. "You're getting sand all over me!"

"Sorry, lady," the boy answered casually as he threw the ball again.

"Why don't you two go and play someplace else?" I could see Mrs. Gordon was reaching the exploding point.

"Don't pay no attention to her," one of the boys said. "She don't own the beach."

"There's a playground over by the pier. Why don't you go and play over there?" she said.

"It's no skin off you, lady . . ."

"Really, children, nowadays!" Mrs. Gordon mumbled as I approached.

I handed her a sandwich and a bottle of pop. Then I noticed the boy back of us; his arms held high as he prepared to catch the

ball; but it was thrown too high, and he missed it.

The ball sailed through the air and it landed with a thud on *him,* lodging itself in the crook of the arm between the neck and the shoulder.

"There!" Mrs. Gordon said triumphantly as she bit into her sandwich. "'Now see what they've done!" They've hit that man. Now they'll get what's coming to them!"

I began to panic. "Mrs. Gordon," I said. "Don't you think we'd better go up the beach a way? These kids . . ." But before I could say anything further, I saw one of the boys walk over and stand self-consciously over the body. Obviously afraid to pick up the ball, he stood there hoping it would be handed to him.

"Now those two hoodlums will get what they deserve," Mrs. Gordon whispered contentedly, "See, Jimmy, the man's pretending that the ball's lodged in the crook of his arm . . ." she giggled, "He wants them to think he's asleep."

The boy hesitated a moment, wondering what to do. "Sorry, Mister, but could we have our ball?"

Beaming, Mrs. Gordon whispered to me, as if it were all a game. "Oh, he's not going to hand it to them! But wait till the boy reaches down for it . . . just you wait! "He'll give them their ball all right," she said vindictively, "and something else for their trouble . . . like a nice swat which they deserve . . . now if they'd listened to me."

The other boy walked up. "What're we waiting for? It's *our* ball . . ." he attempted to sound brave. "Just take it!"

"No, you take it," the smaller one said.

Mrs. Gordon called out spitefully. "You're not so smart alecky now, are you, boys?"

"Aw, be quiet," the boy shouted back defiantly, "It didn't hit you, did it?" He turned bravely to the other. "I'll get it. I'm not afraid . . ."

"Now, watch this!" Mrs. Gordon said to me. "Just you watch that smart alec!"

Paralyzed, I saw the boy reach down with a quick swoop for the ball. "I got it!" he said happily, but then almost as if in an after thought, the triumphant expression on his face was replaced by one of bewilderment. "Gee . . ." he said, almost to himself. "His arm was cold . . ."

We were all quiet as we looked at one another. Puzzled, Mrs. Gordon turned to me. "Jimmy, did you hear what that boy said? And did you see when the boy picked up that ball?" I sat without speaking. "Why that man didn't even move . . ." she turned to the boy. What did you say

about that man's arm, boy?"

"It's . . . it's like ice, lady . . ." he replied frightened. "When I . . . I touched it, it was hard and cold . . . like ice . ."

"You've probably hurt him!" Mrs. Gordon said.

"Aw, a little ball like this couldn't hurt anybody," the other boy said.

"I think we'd better keep out of this . . ." It was all I could get out as I turned to Mrs. Gordon.

She rose to her feet. "You're just like everybody else, Jimmy," she said disgustedly, "if you see trouble, your only thought is to keep away from it!" She was quite close now, looking down at the still body. "What's wrong?" she said.

I made one last attempt to stop her. "No, Mrs. Gordon . . . don't . . ." she paid no attention to me.

"Are you ill?" she asked. She waited a moment, and when there was no reply, I watched her as if in a nightmare, she started to do what I knew she'd do, and yet there was no way to stop her. She put her hand on his back, and then she was screaming.

"This man . . ." she said, unable to believe what she was saying, "This man's cold . . . he's . . . dead!"

There was a commotion. Everyone along the beach seemed to hear her piercing voice. For a moment I thought of running, but I knew it would be the wrong thing to do. So I stayed there, numb-like, watching things. Before I knew it, there was a swarming crowd, and the police were called.

No one moved the body. The crowd was held back by several policemen. I sat feeling nothing, wondering what would happen next, how soon I'd be associated with *him,* and wondering what to do if I was.

Mrs. Gordon was in the middle of everything, basking in her sense of importance. A plain clothes man had appeared from someplace and was taking notes as she rattled off all she knew about the events leading to the discovery of the body. To me it all seemed like a dream, in which I was no participant, and I seemed to hear snatches of conversation which were unrelated to me.

". . . why, he'd been lying there from the moment I arrived." Mrs. Gordon said. "I came down early, and he was already here . . . with his face down, just like he was sunbathing, just like that . . . and I mentioned to Jimmy here that the poor man might get a terrible sun burn . . ."

"Oh, so you were here too?" the man interrupted as he looked over at me.

I didn't reply, but Mrs. Gordon did. "Yes! Jimmy was here . . . he was here all alone with him . . . weren't you, Jimmy?"

I finally found my voice. "Yes,

. . . yes, I was . . ."

"Do you know this man?"

As I was about to answer, he noticed the two small boys who'd been playing ball getting very close to the body, whispering and gesturing as they did so. "I told you kids to keep away from there! Do you hear? Now, go on! The cops will be here soon, and you're going to get in trouble!"

"Well, I discovered him, didn't I?" the boy said belligerently. "If it hadn't been for me picking up the ball, you'd never known he'd been knocked off . . ."

"Yeah!" the other boy chimed in. "And besides, you don't even know a clue when you see one!"

"What do you mean, a clue?" the plain clothes man said, in spite of himself.

"Look at his hands . . ." The boy commanded . . .

"His hands?"

"Yeah! His fingernails!"

As usual, Mrs. Gordon moved in on things and took a closer look. "The child's right, officer! The hands and fingers are all scratched and bloody . . . and all the nails are broken . . . looks like some kind of white powder under them . . . flakey-like . . ." Mrs. Gordon now enjoyed her role of lady detective. All she needed was a magnifying glass, and the picture would have been complete. Now that she had the center of attention, she was fussing about *him*, and to my surprise, not the least bit squeamish! "Look right here," she said, as she tugged the dead man's arm, "This blanket! Why, this blanket he's lying on!"

"What about it?"

"It's from *my* motel! See . . . it's stamped right under where you can see plain as anything . . . Seaside Motor Cabins!"

He picked up the corner of the blanket. "Yeah . . ." he rose to his feet, jotting things on his pad. "You're sure he wasn't registered at your place?"

"I'm positive. I know everyone in my place," Mrs. Gordon said firmly.

The man looked around, taking us all in as he spoke. "Is there anyone around here from your motel, Mrs. Gordon?"

I stood there transfixed, knowing the jig was up for me. And suddenly I heard someone calling my name hysterically in the distance as she pushed her way roughly through the crowd. "Jimmy! Jimmy!" It was Helen running toward us, stumbling in the sand as she did so. "Jimmy!" she called, out of breath.

The plain clothesman seemed to ignore Helen's approach as he spoke impatiently to Mrs. Gordon.

"I asked if there was anybody around here from your motel?"

"Yes! Jimmy, here . . . Jimmy Barton's from my motel!"

Suddenly everyone was look-

ing at me, and like a fool in a panic, I started to run. In Helen's direction, to ward her off, and to keep her from saying something to incriminate herself. I didn't get far, however. Someone caught me by the arm.

"Jimmy!" Helen was oblivious to everyone as she rushed up. "Jimmy! I've been looking all over for you!"

"Don't say anything!" I warned frantically. "Don't say anything . . . let me do the talking!"

But there was no stopping her torrent of words. "You thought . . . you thought *I* killed him . . ."

"Helen . . . be still, don't!"

"Jimmy, I didn't kill him . . ." her words poured out in a flood of relief. "'I thought *you* killed him, and I was helping you get rid of him because I thought you killed him!"

"Young lady," the plain clothesman interrupted. "Can you identify this man?"

Relieved to be rid of the burden she'd been carrying, Helen stared down at the body.

"Did you know him?" the man repeated.

"Yes . . . yes . . ." she said finally. "He was my husband . . ."

"Tell me what you know about him."

She had her bearings now, and her calm voice left no doubt that she was telling the truth.

"My husband arrived here last night after tracing me from New York to California. How he did it, I suppose we'll never know, but when he finally found me, he was livid. He forced himself into the bungalow, and he threatened to beat me, or even kill me, for having run away." She looked over at me. "I was terrified, and I knew there'd be serious trouble when my brother got back from work, so I sneaked out the back door, and I went looking for Jimmy on the pier, to warn him . . . when I couldn't find him, I went back to the motel, but when I got back, I found my husband on the floor . . . he was dead . . . the rifle which I recognized from the shooting gallery was beside him . . . so I thought my brother had killed him . . ."

"'But Helen . . . why didn't you say anything?"

"You didn't give me a chance! In all that panic and confusion, you just took it for granted that I had done it . . . just as I took it for granted that you had . .."

"Then who did?" I inerrupted.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you . . . *nobody* killed him!"

"What are you talking about?"

"This morning when you forced me out of the car, I went to the bungalow. I was going to wait there for you, like you told me to do. While I waited, I noticed the gas heater, Jimmy. There was a sharp edge on the top of it . . . with blood all over it. He must have fallen, Jimmy!

He was very drunk, and he must have fallen and hit his temple . . ."

"We've no way of proving that . . ."

"But one of the painters found scratched places and blood all over the wall above the heater . . . he commented about it . . . then I began to think. Phil had been staggering about . . . he must have slipped, then clutched the wall to keep from falling . . . there might be finger prints on the wall . . . *his* finger prints . . . maybe they'll find when they examine him, that he didn't die from a bullet wound . . . but from the blow when he fell . . ."

Mrs. Gordon, the detective, was back into things. She was actually touching his hands, examining his nails curiously, before anyone could stop her. "This stuff *does* look like plaster . . . it *must* be plaster, because I know that Jimmy and Helen couldn't kill anyone . . ."

And Mrs. Gordon was right. The flakey stuff under his finger nails, *did* prove to be plaster; there was no bullet wound, and the autopsy showed that he'd died from a blow he'd received on the temple when he fell on the gas heater.

Well, that's about all of my story. Helen's beginning to forget, and looking like her old self again. And we're going on living here at the beach in California, in spite of all the nightmare memories.

Yes, everybody's happy, and everybody's forgetting. Everyone excepting Mrs. Gordon who's making quite a nuisance of herself these days on the beach. Fancying herself as a lady detective, she goes along poking anyone who's lying face downwards sun bathing. She asks if they're *sure* they're all right, before moving on to disturb the next sunbather.

FOOTNOTE TO "MURDER AT THE CURTAIN"

Note: *Only three names are fictional. The constable at Shoreditch was probably not named Summers. Neither was there an actor by the name of Burton Williams. Gabriel Stevens is also a fictional character. The player who actually performed in* Romeo and Juliet *was very probably a man by the name of Gabriel Spencer. Spencer was slain in 1598 in a duel with Ben Johnson. Convicted of murder, Johnson pleaded 'benefit of clergy' and, asking for a Bible, accurately read in Latin the fifty-first psalm. This secured him his freedom, but to the end of his days old Ben bore the imprint of a 'T' branded on his thumb.*

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

It's difficult to be objective about Vincent Starrett's BORN IN A BOOKSHIP (University of Oklahoma Press, $5.95), because books have been so much a part of my own life—and of my own memories—that I found myself, notwithstanding my not having personally known the period about which he writes, responding to this book with the warmth with which you greet an old friend whose dreams and whose unhappiness you have shared in the past.

As I sit here, I am surrounded by books—books which in some instances I have had for perhaps thirty years or more. And even longer than that; there are several books by Alexandre Dumas, all gifts from my uncle, which I've had since the early twenties. And there are the old classics, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's THE MARBLE FAUN (1850, Ticknor and Fields, Boston), Nathaniel Hawthorne's THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE (1852, Ticknor, Reed and Fields, Boston), and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's THE GOLDEN

The writer, editor of THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, an anthology of spy stories just published by Award Books, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the 1963 Critic's Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.

LEGEND (1852, Ticknor, Reed and Fields, Boston), to mention only a few, which you could find in the Thirties, often in almost mint condition.

Like Vincent, books have been a part of my life—all my life. (I can still remember the horror of a Brooklyn school teacher, more than forty years ago, when she discovered that I was both reading—and liked—Balzac! It was what you could expect of foreigners, she no doubt felt . . .) As I grew older, I discovered the old bookstores in New York, in those halcyon days when prices were so different. Still in my teens, I became more and more interested in the East, and was for years, as I have said on other occasions, active in the fight for India's freedom. And read and studied and read and studied . . .

Those dreams of the Thirties are possibly the bitter sweet memories of the Sixties. And yet, in retrospect, you realize they were happy times—times when the disillusioned of these days could still laugh, could still exult, and could still dream of an almost golden Tomorrow. I am as a matter of fact thinking of some of the people whom Vincent Starrett knew when I say that, and of still others, and of how the heartaches and the hunger (a reality in the Depression, after all) and the misery and the injustice around you, could still not destroy your faith in those dreams, and in the future.

Books, then as now, could be the doorway through which you'd walk and in so doing discover a world, and this is of course true of much of the writing in our field. I have said so often.

This is also particularly true if your own field of interest, as is mine, is history. There is a very special pleasure in the experience, one which I've had again very recently, when you are able to piece together a connected story from perhaps a dozen or two dozen or perhaps a hundred scattered references (here again is justification for the building up, over the years, of a reference library in some fields . . .), and you realize you have a new view of what happened—particularly when it concerns people whom you have once known.

Perhaps one reason I liked Vincent Starrett's BORN IN A BOOKSHOP so much, is the reality that I have always, over the years, not only liked but been at home in bookstores, here in New York during the past thirty-five years, in Chicago on infrequent visits there in the Forties and early Fifties, in Washington since the Forties, and this past fall in both London and in Stockholm. Particularly in Stockholm! I am afraid I saw very little of the more exotic side of that city . . .

Therefore, Vincent Starrett's memories are to some extent my own memories. The names are sometimes different, but the same laughter is there, the same dreams are there. And the same heartaches are there. This is why, as I said earlier, I can't be objective about the book. I can only recommend it to all of you who would like to know what the men were like whose writings still live today, and about those others whom over the years, succumbing to the idiot-box and to the sins of creeping illiteracy, we have allowed ourselves to forget. . . . Our times will however be judged in the future, if there be a future, by the work of many of those about whom Vincent Starrett writes in this warm and enduring tribute to that past. I cannot too strongly recommend therefore that you buy and read his BORN IN A BOOKSHOP!

By way of contrast, there is Mary Elgin's HIGHLAND MASQUERADE (Mill-Morrow, $3.95), a thoroughly delightful —though perhaps not memorable —romance set against a Highland background. Ailie Rannoch, who had left Glenshael in despair and fury ten years earlier, returns to her childhood home—and finds she cannot deny the past.

Kyle Hunt's new Dr. Emmanuel Cellini story, WICKED AS THE DEVIL (Macmillan, $3.95), introduces us to one of the most interesting detective personalities we've across in many years. In this particular novel the psychiatrist-detective helps to defeat a compulsive killer who underlines the truth of what the author (John Creasey) is quoted as saying: "I think that evil is born in certain people in the same way that genius, or a mechanical or artistic bent, is born in others. Just as a certain individual can come into the world with a physical malformation, so another can come into it with an innate prelidiction for corruption and depravity."

And for cruelty . . . Is there anyone among you who would challenge that? I certainly wouldn't! I can think of one man for instance, a beautiful man in his youth, a fantastically intelligent man, "a charming man" even in his last days, who was so sick, so cruel, so complex, that to call him amoral would be an understatement. . . . Here was an example, similar to those known of in the eighteenth century, where you could truly say that evil was born in him, and that this mastered him throughout his life. The man who is described here, and who is equally much an illustration of the truth of John Creasey's observation, is however the kinder of the two. He kills . . . What I am thinking of are those

damned souls who have the compulsion not to kill but to corrode and to destroy the minds and morals of those around them. And they exist.

Dorothy Gilman's delightful THE UNEXPECTED MRS. POLLIFAX (Doubleday, $3.95), introduces us to the most unorthodox secret agent we've met in recent years. Mrs. Emily Pollifax of New Brunswick, New Jersey, wants to do something for her country, and she does something about it at a time when the C.I.A. needs a completely unknown person for a job which is felt to be safe.

But it isn't, and here is where Mrs. Pollifax confounds both Iron Curtain and American operatives as she survives situation after situation wih the aplomb of a veteran agent. Do read this!

the fall of charles gorham

by Joan Anderson

CHARLES GORHAM was going to kill Claudi Miller. He knew he must do so as he entered the building that Friday and saw her selling cigarettes and candy to the other girls. How he detested them, all of them. They were so stupid, so insensitive, so dreadfully unnecessary. They should never have been permitted to work in offices. How unlike his Elaine; she had never been like them, not even when they were first married fourteen years ago. And next Wednesday, in celebration of their anniversary, one of these girls was going to die.

He had chosen Claudi because she arrived early, almost an hour before the other girls. Stepping into the elevator and listening to their chatter, he thought how frightened they would be. A few might even leave and he looked forward to the quiet fear that would settle over the building. The police would probably think that the murder had been committed by a maniac, the kind who prowl office buildings killing without purpose. They would

Joan V. Anderson, while a newcomer to these pages, is a long time reader of this magazine and, years earlier, of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club. She is at present at work on a novel which I hope to review in SM *one of these days. But let us now meet Mr. Gorham. And if he reminds you of anyone . . .*

never suspect him, of that he was certain.

How he wished that he could tell Elaine. But, of course, he could not! It would be difficult enough for her to accept that such a thing could occur at his place of business, let alone that it was he who had killed the girl. No, she must not know! It would disturb her and she tried so hard to please him. He had never kept a picture of Elaine on his desk. He remembered how amused he had been at their reaction when they learned that he was married. He never discussed his personal affairs with anyone in the office and had often thought that these intimate exchanges was one of the causes for the breakdown in discipline; this lack of respect for those in authority. It was these girls who induced this familiarity with their inane laughter and coy conversation. One of them had gotten married some months ago. He could not remember which one it was but he did remember the turmoil it threw the office into. He should, Charles thought bitterly, it lasted several weeks. First, there was a luncheon, then the shower and then the wedding. These insignificant people. The thought that they could cause such a disruption made him ill. Well, he thought, there would be no more of that, at least not for a while. And Charles Gorham continued into his offices that Friday morning.

Although the day had been a good one. Charles was glad to be on his way home where he could think without interruption; without the smirks and the sulks that he had to endure from the office girls. Home to Elaine. He was a fortunate man to have found her. They had met at a dance he had been obliged to attend. He had noticed her sitting outside so quietly that he often teased her by saying that she must have been waiting for him. They were married very soon after. He smiled as he brought the car into the driveway. Was he getting sentimental?

After dinner, sitting before one of the last few fires of early spring, Charles Gorham began to put his plan into focus. Occasionally glancing over to smile at Elaine, he thought of the simplest way to kill the girl. He knew that she arrived downstairs a little before eight o'clock. She spent the time sorting the newspapers and replenishing her stock. She opened her counter at eight-fifteen and at eight-thirty her assistant arrived which permitted her to make personal deliveries to the heads of the departments. A little after eight would be the best time, Charles thought. He usually arrived around eight-thirty and had often

been amazed to find the building so filled with those early arrivals; the girls with their hair in rollers, sipping coffee in each other's offices, totally indifferent to their superiors because it wasn't yet nine o'clock. Yes the morning was the best time. It was a chaotic time. No one knew who was going where or why.

He decided that he would arrive about eight-ten, entering the building from the service entrance. There he would be able to observe her stand from the rear, by the service phone. He would call her and request that she bring him some aspirins immediately. From his position he would be able to see if she left any indication as to where she was going. If she did he would simply dispose of it. Charles thought this highly unlikely and it was even more improbable that there would be anyone around to tell just where the girl would be going at that time of the morning. He had thought to take the stairs but as he stared into the fire, he decided that the service elevator would be easier. He reminded himself that the simplest way was often the best. He would call her to the stairs on some pretext. He was sure that she would come. He would kill her and leave the building the same way he had entered. Then he would wait until eight-thirty and, as he had always done, enter and go up to his offices. Once there, he might order his paper. Charles told himself that he must remember to take the aspirins and dispose of them before returning to the building. He knew that the body would be discovered before nine o'clock as the girls frequently used the service stairs rather than wait for the elevator. And as the week was to be a busy one, for several days would be lost while the police made their investigation, he concluded that he would have to push his personnel a little harder so that he might be able to enjoy the results of his work with the least amount of interference and with a free mind.

He was aware that he would be questioned by the police and one of the questions would be at what time had he arrived at the office. He would give his usual time saying that he had arrived somewhere around the half hour but that he was not certain. But there were two things of which Charles was sure. One, that there would be a great deal of confusion and two, that the reputation of Charles Gorham was above suspicion. He didn't even believe that they would question Elaine. But even if they did, it would be to no avail for Elaine never fixed breakfast for him. He had insisted on that early in the marriage. She would just as-

sume that he had left his usual time and be extremely indignant that they would question his statement. No, Charles thought, there isn't going to be any problem. And covering the embers of the fire, he went to bed.

The staff, he knew, was angry. He had given them a considerable amount of work to do. He had begun this on Monday using as a pretext their usual chatter about the past weekend. And now it was Tuesday evening and he was putting the car into the garage. The car! He had forgotten about the car. He always parked it in the company lot. But no, he thought, there is no problem. Tomorrow is our fourteenth wedding anniversary. He would leave the car for his wife. He moved the vehicle into the garage.

After dinner Charles sat with his wife and thought about how they would celebrate their anniversary. He decided that two bottles of wine would be a nice surprise for Elaine. Again he wished that he could tell her. In a way he was doing it for her, a sort of tribute. Yes, Charles thought, two bottles of champagne. He would buy them tomorrow after work. After work! But there would be no work tomorrow. He wondered how long they would be held for questioning; whether anyone in the building would be suspected. He began to feel excited. His heart was beating very fast. This would never do, Charles thought. He must remain calm until it was all over. He went into the bathroom took one of his pills and told Elaine that he was going to bed.

The following morning Claudi Miller was found strangled to death by one of the girls. When the police arrived, she told them hysterically how she had almost fallen over the body. She was certain of the time because she had looked at her watch before leaving her office. She was going to the Ladies' Room to put on her makeup and comb out her hair. She was taken home in a police car. Charles Gorham was right. He was not suspected and the office was in chaos. After being questioned by the police, stating that he left his home the usual time and that he didn't think his wife, Elaine, could verify it as she always slept late—that no, he had seen no strangers in the hall as he went to the elevators—he was advised that he was free to go.

Charles was almost lightheaded. He told them that it was his fourteenth wedding anniversary, one that he would never forget and that he must hurry home to tell Elaine before she heard the dreadful news from someone else. As he was leaving he heard

one of the officers say that there had been no answer and the lieutenant reply that they had better send someone out anyway and check with the neighbors. It looked as if they had a maniac on their hands; they had better get the routine stuff out of the way. He felt giddy as he rode down in the elevator. He had to remind himself that he hadn't brought the car and entering a restaurant he ordered coffee and took one of his pills.

He was telling Elaine as he opened the second bottle how it had taken him well over an hour to choose the champagne when the doorbell rang. It was the police lieutenant and a man he had never seen before. They asked him if they could enter. He felt himself being backed into the living room and heard the strange man say "go easy". He felt confused. How could they have found out.

He turned towards Elaine. There was the fire, the wine-glasses but Elaine wasn't there. He heard someone call her name.

Was it he? They were putting his coat on him. What were they saying to him. They were talking about Elaine. She was waiting for him and they were going to take him to her. He must thank them, he thought. Elaine had the car. . . .

The company has never forgotten Charles Gorham. The girls have not forgotten him either. They arrive at their offices a little before nine o'clock; their neat hair becomes neater as they make themselves more comfortable before their desks. You can see them working quietly and efficiently so as not to antagonize another of their superiors. . . .

murder at the curtain —II

by A. Frederick Haas

III

Just as the constable was about to go out of the door he felt a restraining hand upon his arm.

"I pray you, Constable," said Shakespeare, who had moved to halt the official, "do not go yet."

"I have found out all I can, Master Shakespeare. To tarry longer would only delay my report to the Justice."

"But have you discovered all the facts?" asked the Bard.

"I feel sure I have missed nothing of importance here," replied Summers.

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

It is a bright and sunny day, early in October, 1595. Notices had been posted all over London announcing in bold black letters the performance at the Curtain playhouse, outside town, by William Shakespeare's acting company, of a new play entitled Romeo and Juliet. *The playhouse is crowded and still, the audience no longer aware of the theatre in which they stand or sit, until—half-way through the play—there is a dramatic interruption. A figure appears at the window overlooking the stage from which, it seemed only moments earlier, Juliet had bid farewell to Romeo, and calls out, "Master Shakespeare! Master Shakespeare! There is a dead man up here. One of the actors. He's been murdered!"*

The Constable of Shoreditch is sent for and begins to question the other members of the company of actors. He is finally about to leave. He feels he has all the facts he needs for his report to the Justice of the Peace, who will decide "what further steps should be taken. Meanwhile," announces the Constable, "this playhouse is closed down and all of you are being held in custody."

Now continue . . .

"I beg you, sir," pleaded Shakespeare, "come upstairs with me for a minute. I would show you something."

"Do you think you have something of value to add to the evidence in this case?"

"I do, Constable."

"If that be true I am very willing to listen."

"Then you will come with me to the music room?"

"Very well, Master Shakespeare. Lead the way."

The two men climbed the stairs to the upper chamber and Shakespeare went at once to the window in the rear wall of the room.

"What of this window, Constable?" inquired Shakespeare.

"What of it, my friend?" countered Summers, going over to join the Bard.

Shakespeare pushed open the window, which was some seventeen feet above the ground. As both men leaned out the Bard indicated a large hook firmly fastened into the outer side of the frame.

"Did you notice this?" asked Shakespeare.

"What are you suggesting?" inquired the constable.

"Does it not occur to you, Constable, that perhaps the reason no one saw the murderer go back downstairs is because, after killing Williams, he left by this window?"

"You think so?" commented Summers.

Shakespeare now drew the constable's attention to a pile of lumber, cloth, old furniture and miscellaneous articles.

"We use this room to store a few things. I am certain there was a coil of rope up here. It is gone."

"So you believe, Master Shakespeare, that the murderer used that rope to descend from this window to the ground behind the playhouse?"

"I do. Once down, he unhooked the rope and hid it somewhere before departing."

"My dear Will," said Summers, after giving the Bard a long thoughtful look, "do you think I would be so remiss in my duties as not to take note of this window?"

"But you never studied it," said a confused Shakespeare.

"I did, after I sent you, Master Burbage and the boy downstairs."

"But I thought you wished to examine the body again."

"No, my friend. I had finished with that. I wanted to examine the window. I drew the same conclusions you just did."

"Yet you never checked it further," protested the Bard.

"On the contrary. After I came down I sent one of my men

to the rear of the playhouse to look for a rope. He came back and reported to me that he had found one hidden under a bush. No doubt the same rope you just mentioned."

"Then the murderer did indeed go out through the window," said Shakespeare. "That is important."

"It seems quite certain," remarked Summers. "See here, Will, I rarely tell people involved in a case precisely what I know or what I believe. But in this instance I will make an exception. Here, as I see it, is what happened. While Cowley was out behind the playhouse an unidentified thin darkish man slipped through the rear door, took a dagger from the chest at the foot of the stairs and came to this room. He waited for Williams. Evidently they had arranged to meet in this chamber, why I do not know as yet. While Williams had his back turned, the dark man clapped a hand over his mouth. The actor struggled but the stranger drove the dagger into his back. Throwing a cloth over the body to hide it from notice, the killer escaped by a rope from the back window."

"And by now is doubtless many miles from here," added Shakespeare ruefully.

"Very likely."

"But Constable," protested Shakespeare, "if you know that some stranger broke into the theatre, killed Williams and escaped, why penalize the players? Why place them in custody and shut down their playhouse? Is that justice?"

"My friend," said Summers gently. "Since the case does stand this way I must do it. For, look you, I do not know who the killer is, nor can I swear that one of the actors is not involved in some degree. So I must close down the theatre and hold the players until my superiors determine what steps shall be taken."

Shakespeare turned away and began to pace the floor. His dark eyes mirrored his concern and he stroked his neatly clipped black beard with a restless hand. "There must be something we can do," he murmured. "This affair can ruin our company."

"I am sorry, Will. I wish I could help. But you see how it is." The constable now started to walk towards the stairs, but his eye was caught by an object on the floor. He stooped to pick it up and turned it over idly in his hand.

"Hmm. A fan. Part of Williams' costume as Lady Montague, no doubt."

The Bard was deep in his own thoughts and he answered in a vague sort of way. "Yes, he could have carried it. It was not . . ." Suddenly Shakespeare stopped, looked up sharply and came

quickly to the constable. "Wait. That fan!" Taking it from Summers, he studied it. "Of course. That is the fan and Williams did carry it! Yet, faith, I overlooked it. Perhaps there is something else I overlooked in the rush and flurry of putting on this new play."

Seeing the dramatist fall into a spell of deep concentration, Constable Summers waited in silent curiosity. Finally Shakespeare began to voice his thoughts.

"Of course that is the way it was . . . and naturally no one noticed it because the play was a new one and they would merely think it a last-minute change. One person did notice it. But of course he would . . . But if that was so could it be because . . .? Nay, 'tis not certain . . . but there seems no other explanation."

"My good fellow," broke in the constable, "do you think you have found something?"

"Yes, Constable," said an excited Shakespeare. "It could be a solution. But I must needs check it further. Wait but a moment, Constable, I pray you."

He went rapidly to the stairwell and called down.

"Cowley!"

"Aye, sir?" came the actor's voice from below.

"Fetch the playbook of *Romeo and Juliet* and bring it up here."

There was a stir downstairs and shortly thereafter the lank figure of Cowley appeared in the music room, the prompt book clutched in long lean fingers. As he took the book the Bard asked Cowley a question, to which the actor replied in the negative.

"Very good, Richie," said Shakespeare. " 'Twas an accident and I'm sure it won't happen again. We'll make no further mention of it. Join the others, Richie. The constable and I will be down shortly."

After Cowley had departed, Summers and the Bard huddled for a time over the playbook. Shakespeare talked and indicated various passages in the play, while the constable listened and asked questions now and again. Finally he closed the book and looked at Summers.

"You see, Constable, how, taking the one point I overlooked, one thing leads to an explanation of another until an entirely new solution of this case is constructed."

"Aye," said the constable, "opening up that avenue of approach does logically lead to the conclusion you make. But, faith, 'tis really all circumstantial."

"Do you not have enough to reopen the case?"

" 'Tis certain I cannot arrest a man purely on what we have here. Should I accuse him directly he would merely deny everything. We could, of course, ques-

tion everyone again, jogging their memories a bit. But 'twould still come down to being one man's word against another's. That sort of thing can lead to complete confusion all around. Examination of Williams' past may well give us a motive, but that could take days or even weeks."

"The killer seems to have tricked us, Constable," said Shakespeare. "Can't we perhaps trick him in return?"

"You mean put him on a spot? Place him in a position where we can catch him off-guard and cause him to give himself away?"

"That's right."

" 'Tis not an uncommon ruse used by officers of the law. But in this instance I cannot see how . . ."

"Suppose we re-enact the thing?"

"Re-enact Williams' murder? I don't understand. . . ."

"No, Constable, not the murder," said Shakespeare. "Suppose we re-enact the scene in the play."

"The scene in the play?"

"Aye. We'll have the actors play it out. Then, when they are deep into it, a few sudden questions from you, Constable, may well catch the killer unawares. He is likely to do or say something that will clearly point out his guilt."

"We could trap him that way."

"Shall we try it, then? 'Twould not take long, and it well may clear up this case today."

"Indeed," admitted the constable, " 'twould be to everyone's gain, except the killer's of course, if I could make my arrest and close this affair before evening. Having the murderer in jail, I would not need to hold the actors or close down the playhouse."

"Then I beg you, Constable, to let us play out the scene."

"Very well. In truth, we have nothing to lose and quite a bit to gain."

The two men discussed for a while the precise way their plan would be carried out. Then, together they descended the stairs to the actors below.

IV

When the constable and Shakespeare came down to the lower room they found a very disconsolate group of players. Some had taken off their costumes and removed their make-up, but others had made no effort in that direction. All were sitting about in attitudes of dejection, conversing intermittently in low voices that sounded their feeling of dismay and exasperation. Occasionally a resentful glance was directed at one of the three deputies guarding the entrances to the tiring house. The actors knew they were being held captive in this room and they definitely did not

like it. The strain of simply sitting around waiting for something to happen caused them to feel a sense of relief when Shakespeare and the constable appeared. At least it heralded some possible change in the situation.

"My friends," said the Bard, "Constable Summers has decided to continue his investigation here a bit further. There are some details of the case he would like to clear up before he leaves. In order to do this it has been decided that we should go through a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* on the stage."

The actors at first protested. They complained that this was scarcely the time to put on a show and they were in no mood to give their attention to performing stage rôles. However, the men gradually shifted to a mood of grumbling acceptance of the obviously inevitable.

"What scene are we going to play?" someone asked.

"The duelling scene," replied the Bard.

"Must we don our costumes?" inquired another actor, who had taken his off.

"Nay, 'twill not be necessary. Let's hop to it, lads. Come on, Dick. You too. Richie. Places everyone."

There was a general chatter and milling about as the actors made the effort of recalling their parts in that particular scene and scrambled to the proper door from which to make their entrance. Shakespeare, meanwhile, picked up two stools and placed them on the forward edge of the stage. Here he and Constable Summers seated themselves, facing upstage. The stir and murmur backstage died down.

"Are you ready?" called Shakepeare.

"All set," someone answered.

"Then let the scene begin."

Action opened with the entrance of Phillips and Cundell through the left door, Mercutio made his jests about Benvolio's quickness to pick a quarrel and then William Sly, as Tybalt, entered from the right.* A few lines later Burbage entered left to be challenged by Tybalt. Enraged by Romeo's submission to Tybalt's taunts, Mercutio drew on Tybalt. Romeo leaped forward to halt the fight, but Tybalt stabbed Mercutio under his arm. As Sly rushed off right Phillips sank to the ground. Mercutio summoned his page, and Goffe ran on the stage to leave in the next instant to fetch a surgeon. Requesting to be taken to a near by house, Mercutio was half-led,

*Sly came on alone. This is in accordance with the First Quarto of 1597, which also omits the line: "Follow me close, for I will speak with them."

half-carried through the centre curtains. Cundell reappeared shortly to inform Romeo of Mercutio's death. Now Sly returned from the right, and it was at this point that Romeo hurled his challenge at Tybalt and the duel began.

Richard Burbage and William Sly put on a truly magnificent display of swordsmanship. Each man held a long epee in one hand and a dagger in the other, and the thrust and parrying was breath-taking. Both actors were expert duellists and, in their mid-twenties, were at the peak of their physical power and agility. Finally Burbage caught the blade of Sly's sword near the hilt, wrenching it from his hand. Following up his advantage, Dick used his epee to slash Sly's dagger aside while he drove his own short blade into the breast of his opponent. With a cry Tybalt fell to the stage while Romeo stood over him, breathing hard, dazed for the moment by the realization that he had killed a man. It was truly an inspired performance and the constable had to make a deliberate effort to restrain his impulse to applaud.

Now Cundell was catching at Romeo's arm, urging him to fly before the aroused citizenry should descent on them. Romeo made a hasty exit at the left. Richard Cowley, playing a citizen, now entered right, followed by Stevens as another citizen. Cowley spoke to Cundell.

"Which way ran he that killed Mercutio?
Tybalt, that murderer,
which way ran he?"

Cundell pointed to the figure of Sly upon the floor.

"There lies that Tybalt."

Cowley went over to Sly and shook his shoulder.

"Up, sir, go with me,
I charge thee, in the Prince's name, obey."

Shakespeare had already risen to take his place, as the Prince, beside George Bryane at the right entrance. These two now advanced to centre stage as Cowley, realizing that Tybalt was dead, shrank back from the prostrate figure.

"Where are the vile beginners of this fray?" demanded Shakespeare, playing the Prince.

Many actors now came thronging through the right door, John Heming and Willie Eccleston, as Lord and Lady Capulet, entered, followed by Kemp as Peter. Seeing the inert form of Tybalt, Lady Capulet threw herself upon it in anguish. Thomas Pope, entering as Lord Montague, should

have been accompanied by Lady Montague, but Burton Williams would appear no more upon the stage. The play continued for a few lines when suddenly the constable interrupted the ten actors.

"I'm sorry," said Summers, "but let us pause for a bit. There is something I would like to clear up."

The actors remained in their places, wondering what was coming next.

"Master Phillips!" called the constable, "come out on the stage, please."

"Aye, Constable, what is your pleasure?" asked the sardonic Phillips, as he appeared through the centre curtains.

"You stated that after leaving the duelling scene his afternoon you were sitting backstage by the right entrance . . . polishing your boots, I believe you said."

"That I did, sir," said Phillips in his faintly ironic tone.

"But, Master Phillips, we really have no way of proving your statement, have we?"

Phillips looked rather scornfully at the constable. Then he turned to the Bard.

"Master Shakespeare, pray tell this poor misguided official that . . ."

"Tell him what, Augustine?" asked Shakespeare.

For a second Phillips was taken aback. He studied Shakespeare through narrowed eyes. But anon the old wry smile came back, twisting his thin lips. However, Constable Summers was prepared to drive home his point.

"Is it not true, Master Phillips, that since there was no one else backstage on the right, there is no one to say that you were, in fact, sitting there?"

Phillips made no reply.

"Robbie was backstage," suggested Shakespeare. "Mayhap he saw Phillips."

"But, sir," said Goffe, "after I came off as the page I was in the rear of the tiring house changing into Juliet's costume. I could not see the right entrance from there."

"Dick Burbage," continued the Bard, "you were offstage for the latter part of the duelling scene."

"I stayed near the left entrance," was Dick's rejoiner. "I saw no one on that side of the tiring house except Goffe at the rear. Yet, I can't say Augustine wasn't where he says he was. The enclosure blocked my view of the right entrance."

"You see how the matter stands, Master Phillips," said the constable harshly. "We have only your word that you were sitting where you claim."

"Are you implying, Constable, that I was, in truth, somewhere else?" asked Phillips tautly.

"I am, sir!" shot back Constable Summers. "I think that after you came offstage as Mer-

cutio you went up to the music room. I think it was you who waited up there for Williams, waited for him with a dagger in your hand!"

There was a cry of surprise and shock from the assembled actors. But Augustine Phillips stood motionless, the only sign of a reaction being the humourous twitching of his lips.

"I deny everything, of course, Constable," said Phillips.

"Constable, sir," said Goffe at this point.

"Yes, Robert, what is it?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I don't think what you say, about Master Phillips I mean, is quite right."

"Why not, lad?" asked the constable.

"After I came off as the page I went to the back of the tiring house to dress as Juliet. I saw Master Cowley there, sitting on the stairs near the door."

"That's right enough," said Cowley. "I spoke to Master Kemp just before the jesting scene and then I went back and sat on the stairs. I was sort of waiting for Robbie."

"Why?" queried the constable.

"Because I knew that when he came back it would be time for me to get ready to go on as the citizen. When he came I left."

"But that is not what I wanted to tell you about, Constable," said Goffe. "The thing is my dressing-booth is in clear view of the stairs and the rear door. If Master Phillips came from the duelling scene and went up to the music room, as you say, I would certainly have seen him."

"And you didn't, did you, Robbie boy?" said Phillips.

"No, Master Phillips. I saw no one," answered Goffe.

"Are you sure of that, lad?" inquired the constable sharply.

"Oh, quite sure. Master Phillips did not go up there."

"I rest my case, Constable," said Phillips.

The constable appeared perplexed and looked back and forth from Goffe to Phillips.

"Perhaps Gabriel Stevens can help us here," remarked Shakespeare unexpectedly.

Stevens, who had been standing in the background, gave a start.

"Me, sir?"

"You didn't play the rôle of the second citizen this afternoon, Gabriel," said Shakespeare. "You didn't appear for it in the duelling scene."

There was a gasp of surprise from Richard Cowley.

"But, Master Shakespeare, you said that we wouldn't mention that."

"I know, Richie," said the Bard. "But Gabriel may have seen something while he was offstage."

"Is it true, Master Stevens," asked Summers, "that you did

not appear for the duelling scene?"

Gabriel hesitated and looked about nervously. But the actors, who before had given little, if any, thought to Stevens' playing of the minor walk-on part, were now murmuring their general agreement that Gabriel had indeed failed to appear in it this afternoon.

"Aye, I missed my cue," said Stevens at last. "I am sorry, Master Shakespeare. I though of going on anyway, but then I feared it might throw the actors off. The second citizen doesn't say or do anything and the scene could be played without him.

"So you remained backstage?" remarked Shakespeare.

"Aye, sir. I am sorry. It won't happen again."

"But that is very odd. Master Stevens," exclaimed the constable. "We have just established clearly the fact that only three actors were backstage during the latter part of the duelling scene. And you, Gabriel, were not one of them."

"I was not up in the music room, if that is what you think," said Stevens quickly. "Robbie told us no one went up the stairs."

"Then where were you, sir?" asked the constable harshly.

Again Stevens paused before answering.

"Everything was confused at the time. I think . . . yes, I think I was outside by the side of the stage."

"You must be mistaken, Gabriel," remarked Shakespeare. "I was there until I made my entrance as the Prince. You were nowheres about."

"But I . . . I . . . it could have been . . ."

"Come, Master Stevens," said the constable, "why don't you tell us the truth?"

For a moment or two Gabriel stood motionless. Then his shoulders sagged in resignation.

"I guess I must. Well, Constable, the truth is that after I saw my girl in the audience I . . . well, I wrote her a note. I went out to the stables to find the stable-master. I wanted him to give the note to her when she came for her horse."

"Why, Gabriel," someone chuckled, "you must really be in love with this sweet young thing!"

"Well, we can check this with the stable-master . . ." began Constable Summers.

"Oh, but I couldn't find him, Constable. No one was around. I spent some time looking for him, and that is why I did not get back to the theatre until after the duelling scene."

"I don't know, Stevens. This story you tell about going to the stables . . ." began Summers.

"Just a moment, Constable,"

interrupted Shakespeare. "Gabriel, if you were in the area back of the playhouse after the duelling scene you must have seen something."

"No, I didn't see anything," said Stevens. "I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do, sir," the constable stated firmly. "Come, Stevens, you have withheld valuable evidence long enough. It is time to tell us everything!"

Gabriel ran a nervous hand through his hair. Then he looked sharply at Shakespeare and the constable. A sudden twitch of his head indicated he had made some sort of decision.

"I didn't want to say anything about this, Constable, for reasons which . . . well, for personal reasons. But as I came around the rear corner of the playhouse, on my way back from the stables, I . . . I saw a man sliding down a rope from the rear window of the music room. I was startled and darted back out of sight to watch him. Having reached the ground, the man flipped the rope off the hook at the window, coiled it up and hid it under a bush. I can show you where. But what you should know, Constable, is that when the man stood up and looked about, I recognized him. I know who it was, Constable. It was . . ."

All the actors were listening with intense interest to Gabriel's story, and when Constable Summers chose to interrupt him just as he was about to reveal the name of the murderer there was a cry of surprise and disappointment. Nevertheless, the constable did break in sharply.

"Master Stevens, just a moment, please. I am a methodical man and I like to go step by step. Now, you say you went out to the stable."

Gabriel was clearly irritated and he answered in an angry tone.

"I believe I just finished saying that, Constable."

"When did you go there?"

"I don't know. I don't see where that's important."

"I think it is. Since you were speaking to Master Bryane and Master Burbage at the beginning of the marriage scene, it would have been after that, would it not?"

"I suppose so."

The familiar slow drawling voice of Richard Cowley meandered its way into the discussion.

"Now, Gabriel, you know that can't be! Seems to me I just finished saying that I was at the stairs near the door from the jesting scene until Goffe came off in the duelling scene. 'Tis certain you did not go through the rear door as you say, Gabriel. What is the matter with you? I do believe you are making up stories."

"Aye, Stevens," said the con-

stable. "Tell us. Are you making up stories?"

Gabriel flushed with rage.

"Are you all crazy? According to you, I wasn't anywhere!"

"Oh, but you were," said the constable in a hard cold voice. "You were in the only place you could be. You were on the stage."

"You are mad. Everyone knows I didn't appear as the second citizen."

"That is correct. You appeared as Lady Montague."

"But Williams played Lady Montague. It was his part. He was . . ."

"No he wasn't, Gabriel," snapped the constable. "Williams was already lying dead in the music room. You had already killed him."

"It's a lie! It's a lie, I tell you!" shouted Gabriel wildly.

But Constable Summers was like an iceberg, a towering terribly cold iceberg.

"It's the truth. You did go up to the music room after the love scene, as you said. But you weren't looking for any girl in the audience. You waited for Williams to come up there, and Williams did come shortly afterward. Williams was the thin dark man Cowley saw climb the stairs."

"Why, faith," broke in Cowley, "now that you mention it, why of course 'twas Williams. I'm sure of it."

"So you killed him, Gabriel," continued Summers, "you stabbed him and then you came downstairs again. You knew you were due on stage as a citizen in the duelling scene. But then you realized that Williams was also supposed to appear as Lady Montague. Since there were only two women in the scene, Williams' absence would be noticed at once. A search would be made and the body found. You didn't want that. Since you couldn't appear in both rôles you decided not to go on as the citizen, hoping it would not be particularly noted. Instead you put on the Lady Montague costume and wig, and carried a fan to hide your face. No one could tell it was you instead of Williams. Nor did you have to worry about the speeches, because in the duelling scene Lady Montague doesn't speak a line."

"No, no. I deny it," cried a frantic Gabriel.

"It's no use, Stevens," said the constable frigidly. "We found your glove, the one that got smeared with Williams' make-up when you held your hand over his mouth as you stabbed him."

"A lie! You couldn't have! I kept it . . . I cleaned it. . . ."

Gabriel stiffened in a sudden awful realization of what he had said. Uttering a hoarse guttural sound, he dashed through the

centre curtains, knocking aside several actors in his path. Behind the stage there was the noise of a furious but brief struggle, and a subdued Gabriel was led back upon the stage, a deputy on each side holding him in a grip of steel.

It all happened so quickly that the actors had barely moved from their places, stunned by the sudden turn of events. Now George Bryane came over to Gabriel.

"Why did you do it, Gabriel? I agreed to sell you my share in the company and I know you had almost all the money needed to buy it. Things were going so well for you. Why this?"

Tears welled up in Gabriel's eyes and he seemed pitifully young, a mere youth trapped in the grim jaws of a situation he had been unable to control.

"That is why I had to do it, Master Bryane. Williams was going to take all the money I had saved. I wouldn't have been able to buy that share."

"How could Williams force you to give him money?" asked Constable Summers, his hardness gone now that the crisis was over.

"Two weeks ago Williams and I had a beer together in Shoreditch," explained Stevens. "Then we walked down the street, which was deserted because of the late hour. Unexpectedly we met John Reynolds."

"The goldsmith's son?" asked the constable.

"Aye."

"I know him. Go on, Gabriel," said Summers.

"He had been drinking. I was seeing a girl he used to go with, and now he accused me of stealing her from him. He . . . he was crazy, Constable. He picked up a heavy stick and came at me. I tried to parry the blow with my sword and somehow I caught him over the left eye. He dropped and there was quite a bit of blood. I . . . I was afraid I had pierced his skull and didn't know what to do. Williams grabbed my arm and said we should run for it or it would be the gallows. So that is what we did."

"I see," said the constable. "Then what happened?"

"Just before the performance today Williams said he had to talk with me. He told me to meet him up in the music room after the love scene, when no one would be there. So I did. Williams then told me that Reynolds had died and that he would report me to the authorities and I would hang unless I paid him to keep quiet. I pleaded with him, Constable, but he only laughed. He said that if I didn't give him all the money I had saved I was finished, that he would report me tomorrow. Then he turned to go. I . . . I guess I went out of my mind. I had noticed a dagger in Williams' belt. When he turned

I came up behind, clapped my one hand over his mouth, and with the other seized the dagger and . . . and stabbed him. It all happened so quickly, Constable. I didn't want to kill him. But I was frantic. My whole life was breaking into little pieces."

"Then you came down and went on as Lady Montague in Williams' place," remarked Summers.

"Aye. After the scene I ran back upstairs. I was desperately trying to think of some way to get rid of the body. I started to put the Lady Montague costume on Williams, but I was so nervous I tore it. Then I thought I heard someone coming up to the music room. All I could think of was that I had to get out of there. So I grabbed a coil of rope and used it to descend to the ground from the rear window. I hid the rope and returned to the tiring house through the back door."

As Gabriel finished talking a silence fell upon the room. Then Constable Summers sighed heavily.

"You didn't have to kill Williams, Gabriel," said the constable. "He lied to you. Reynolds isn't dead. One of my deputies found him in the street that night. He had a nasty gash on his forehead, but he recovered. He confessed to me that the fight was his own fault, and he refused to give your name. He only wished to forget the entire incident. If you had come to me, Gabriel, I could have told you all this."

Gabriel's laugh was one of tragic self-mockery. He turned to Richard Burbage.

"What is that line you have in the duelling scene, Master Burbage? Oh yes. 'I am fortune's fool!' "

Gabriel Stevens had been taken away by the deputies and everyone drifted somewhat listlessly back into the tiring house. After the past few hours of excitement the actors needed time to adjust again to normal circumstances. Constable Summers was conversing with Shakespeare.

"I'm glad 'tis over. I like not this baiting of a suspect to gain the truth and regret the need to do so."

"It had to be done. 'Twas the only way. What will happen to Gabriel now, Constable?"

"He will be turned over to the Lieutenant of the Tower and held for trial. I doubt he can avoid conviction. Yet he could escape the noose through the 'benefit of clergy' clause. Can he read Latin?"

"He went to the university for a time. I should think he can."

"The law allows a convicted murderer to regain his freedom by proving he can read Latin. 'Tis an old law and goes back to

the days when books were written in Latin by scribes, usually monks. Scribes were so few that the loss of one was a matter of concern. Hence the term of grace. Printing has altered things, but the rule still stands. 'Benefit of clergy' can be used but once by a man. If he passes the test a 'T' for Tyburn prison is branded on his thumb. Should he again be charged with murder, it will be known he has already used the clause."

"We can only trust that Gabriel knows his Latin," said Shakespeare.

Augustine Phillips approached.

"Zounds, Constable," remarked Phillips, " 'twas a rough time you gave me there!"

"I crave your pardon for that, good Master Phillips," said the constable. "But we had to do it to cast Stevens off his guard."

"I gathered you were up to some sort of game when Will here pretended not to recall that he had spoken to me just before he went onstage as the Prince."

"Did he compliment you for polishing your boots?" asked Summers.

"On the contrary. He pointed out that when Balthazar appears in the play he has been riding between Verona and Mantua, and hence his boots would be dusty, not bright and shining. Our Shakespeare is becoming a stickler for realism."

With a laugh Phillips went over to rejoin the other actors.

"Gentlemen," called the constable to attract the attention of the troupe. "The case here is closed and you are all free to go. I am also happy to say that the playhouse will not be shut down. You can continue your season of performances as planned."

All strain was now dissipated and good humour broke out on every side. The actors hurried to remove and store away their costumes. Any last traces of make-up were removed from their faces. Then, in groups of twos and threes, they shouted a farewell and left the theatre. It is no secret that their destination, in most cases, was the tavern in Shoreditch.

Richard Burbage and Robert Goffe came over to where the constable and Shakespeare were standing.

"Constable, I am glad you reopened the case," said Burbage. "What made you decide to do so?"

"The truth is," said Summers, "my questioning of the actors seemed to clearly indicate that a stranger had broken into the playhouse during the performance and killed Williams. However, I must confess I could not understand why an outsider should run the risks involved, when there would have been many other times and places

when he could have done the deed with far less danger to himself. Then, while Master Shakespeare and I were talking upstairs, we found . . ."

"This," said the Bard, taking a fan, really a pretty little thing, from his pocket.

"Why, sir," exclaimed Goffe, "that's mine. Juliet uses it in the banquet scene."

"I know, Robbie. That's what set me thinking. I recalled that Lady Montague had, in fact, carried it in the duelling scene. That seemed odd, until a line from the play came to my mind. You remember, Dick, in the jesting scene. The Nurse says, 'My fan, Peter,' and Mercutio remarks, 'Good, Peter, to hide her face.' "

"Very early in the case," observed Constable Summers, "I asked Will if anyone could have substituted for Williams as Lady Montague."

"And I said no," rejoined the Bard, "because every actor had a part in the scene. But on attempting to remember every detail of it as it was played this afternoon, I simply could not recall Gabriel Stevens being on stage in that minor walk-on. Further, during the questioning of the actors, Richard Cowley referred to himself as the 'lone citizen.' We called Richie upstairs and he of course confirmed the fact that Gabriel had not gone on with him as he was supposed to. So it was clear that one actor, at least, could have substituted for Williams."

"But why Gabriel?" asked Dick Burbage. "Why not Goffe or Phillips or myself?"

"True, you three were backstage. But you, Dick, did not have the time to make the costume change. Robbie is too small for Lady Montague's dress. Augustine could have managed it, but I saw him myself sitting backstage just before I went on as the Prince."

"Couldn't some outsider have appeared as Lady Montague?" asked Goffe.

"Nay, lad. *Romeo and Juliet* was a new play. An outsider could not have played the scene. It had to be one of the actors of the troupe."

"But even if Gabriel did play Lady Montague," remarked Dick Burbage, "that scarcely proved he was a murderer."

"Quite right," said the constable. "But it put him under suspicion. Then too, it gave rise to the consideration that Williams might have been killed before the duelling scene."

"And," added Shakespeare, "if Williams had, in truth, been slain earlier, the finger of guilt was again directed at Stevens. He admitted he had gone to the music room. The only other person known to have gone there after Goffe had played his scene

was a dark thin man. Since Williams was slender and had black hair it was probably that it was he Cowley saw."

"Yet," interposed Burbage, "this was all mere theory, without a shred of evidence."

"Aye, true enough," said Summers. "But it gave us two possible solutions to the crime. If a stranger had killed Williams the case promised to be a long tedious one, for there was little we had to go on. But if one of the actors had done it there was a chance we could bring matters to a head in short order."

"So you set a trap for Gabriel," remarked Burbage.

"That we did," agreed the constable.

"You were lucky, sir, to find Master Stevens' glove," piped up Goffe, who had come up and was standing by Shakespeare. "That is what made him confess."

"I am afraid, my young friend," replied Constable Summers, "that there was no glove."

"No glove?"

"There are tricks to my trade, lad, as well as to that of an actor's."

"Oh," was all Goffe could say.

"Well, Will," said Burbage, "it's been a long hard afternoon. But come along now, you and Robbie. We'll all have dinner at my place."

"That would be the fine house on Holywell Street in Shoreditch, would it not?" asked the constable.

"The same. Why don't you join us for dinner, Constable?"

"Thank you, Master Burbage," said Summers, "but I must make my report on this case and then arrange for the watch tonight. But I will ride along with you to the village."

The quartet left the Curtain, Burbage locking the door of the now silent and deserted playhouse. To the south the last rays of the setting sun were painting in filmy gold the towers, turrets and gables of old London town.

Unexpectedly, Richard Burbage chuckled.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Shakespeare.

"I was just thinking how surprised my father will be when he learns what happened here today."

"Aye," said the constable. "I daresay he will be taken aback to hear that his son was taken into custody by the law."

"Nay," answered Burbage. "He holds that I am of age and must needs look out for my own hide. But, in truth, he will sputter when I tell him you were going to close down the Curtain."

"Why?" asked the constable.

"My dear sir, he owns the playhouse."

(Continued from other side)

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